Inclusive Education in Lagos State: Leveraging SDG 4 to Address Educational and Social Inequalities among Adults in Vulnerable Urban Communities

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Abstract.

The development of educational programmes such as Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ (Lagos is Learning) as a strategic tool for ensuring quality, inclusive, and equitable education is the focus of this study. A qualitative approach with in-depth interviews of 16 adult learners and 4 facilitators from 4 Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ learning centres in vulnerable urban communities of Lagos, Nigeria was used. The study examines how the programme addresses educational inequalities and social vulnerabilities among adults, and how the integration of social work principles supports access to education alongside psychosocial support, counselling, and advocacy for adults facing barriers to learning. The study further explores social welfare outcomes associated with the programme, including learner engagement, retention, and community partnerships, and their role in mitigating social risks that undermine educational outcomes. Findings show that Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ has expanded access to literacy, fostered psychosocial well-being, and strengthened social welfare outcomes among participants, but that Its transformative potential is limited by implementation obstacles such as inadequate funding, lack of psychosocial training of facilitators and weak vocational linkages. The findings underscore that initiatives such as Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ can serve as a model for addressing systemic educational inequalities, enhancing learner well-being, and advancing social justice, provided they are strengthened through social work-informed practice. The article concludes with recommendations for policy enhancement, capacity building for educators and social workers, and community-driven strategies to sustain inclusive education and advance SDG 4 in urban Nigerian contexts.

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1. Introduction

This study is based on the broad concept of inclusive education. This study is embedded in the inclusive education concept. The concept of inclusive education, according to UNESCO (2009), is about identifying and addressing the barriers to participation and learning, particularly those faced by individuals who are most likely to be excluded or marginalised and about changing the system of education to make it more responsive to the learner. This rationale is important from a social work perspective as it reflects the social work principles and values of social justice, human rights and empowerment of vulnerable populations (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014). Therefore, adult literacy provision (as explored in the study) is more accurately viewed as part of the wider agenda of inclusive education, as another practical manifestation of principles of access, participation, and equity, which were extended to adults who were previously denied access to formal schooling. When viewed in this manner, adult education is a part of inclusive education, and the social work issues of overcoming the psychosocial and structural barriers that prevent adults from joining in with education become issues in its own right.

In Nigeria, adult education refers to systematic and ongoing self-education activities intended to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values to adults and youths, regardless of content or location, and to address socioeconomic, cultural, political, and environmental issues (Ayantunji, 2023). Although this sector is essential to the development and transformation of the country, it faces numerous obstacles that limit its potential (Muhammed, 2015).

While Christian missions such as the Methodist Mission and the Church Missionary Society pioneered modern literacy efforts, adult education in Nigeria dates back to the 14th century, with travelling Islamic scholars and traders (Olojede, 2017). The acceptance of Western education in the south, and its rejection in the north, marked a significant historical divide. Despite this long history and its acknowledged importance for national development, adult education has frequently been neglected by government (Okello, 2023).

Adult education in Nigeria today encompasses a wide range of programmes designed to equip adults with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for personal and societal advancement (Ayantunji, 2023; Taylor et al., 2023; Festus et al., 2015; Uzoagu, 2023). It extends beyond formal schooling to include lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, vocational training, and community development (Edoho et al., 2023; Okello, 2023). Despite the difficulties confronting the sector, it remains an indispensable tool for socio-economic development (Festus et al., 2015), much as adult education policy was central to national transformation in Tanzania under Julius Nyerere (Mwaikokesya, 2024). Continuous evaluation and monitoring of adult education programmes are essential for correcting weaknesses and ensuring their efficiency and sustainability, and curricula need to be widened to include guidance and counselling services that draw on both Western and traditional Nigerian practices (Sarumi, 1998; Adugbo, 1979), alongside stronger integration of entrepreneurship education to support Nigeria's youthful, technology-driven economy (Nnaemeka-Okeke et al., 2019).

Literacy is widely recognised as central to human capital formation and national productivity. Low literacy constrains access to information and technological innovation (Benavot, 2015) and is strongly linked to national economic performance through enrolment in secondary and tertiary education (Sulaiman et al., 2015). Adult education, in particular, improves worker skills, productivity, and employment opportunities (Festus, 2015); without it, individuals are more likely

to remain in the informal economy, working in unsafe conditions without social protection, which reinforces cycles of poverty and exclusion (Meagher, 2015). Literacy skills also extend beyond reading and writing to the capacity to communicate and negotiate across time, distance, and workplace conditions (Benavot, 2015), yet the development of skilled labour in Nigeria continues to be constrained by inefficient learning systems, heavy reliance on traditional teaching techniques, and weak international partnerships (Ike & Okechukwu, 2015).

Beyond economic outcomes, illiteracy is closely tied to poor health and civic outcomes. Poor health literacy – the ability to access, understand, and act on health information – has been linked to higher infant and child mortality and to conditions such as cardio-metabolic syndrome in Nigeria (Anyamele et al., 2015; Oguoma et al., 2015), and literacy skills, more than years of schooling, are consistently associated with young adults' health status (Smith-Greenaway, 2015). Illiteracy also constrains civic participation: literacy campaigns have empowered women to become more politically involved (Olomukoro & Adelore, 2015), while an illiterate population undermines informed decision-making, democratic accountability, and citizens' ability to engage with corruption and governance issues (Williams-Elegbe, 2015; Dike, 2015; Akanle et al., 2015), a challenge compounded by the digital divide.

Adult illiteracy also heightens social vulnerability. Without access to information, resources, and protective mechanisms, uneducated adults are more susceptible to manipulation and are less able to bargain economically, socially, and politically (Egharevba et al., 2015), a vulnerability compounded for rural women by cultural barriers to entrepreneurship (Akinbami & Aransiola, 2016). Illiteracy further excludes individuals from complex financial systems, deepening inequality and constraining social mobility (Koku, 2015), and low educational attainment remains among the strongest determinants of health inequality (Flanagan & McCartney, 2015).

Against this backdrop, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) affirms the importance of inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, positioning literacy as a central transformative tool (United Nations, 2015). In Nigeria, adult illiteracy continues to undermine employment, civic engagement, health awareness, and social vulnerability outcomes (Ekwelibe, 2025). In response, the Lagos State Government launched Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ ("Lagos is Learning") in October 2016 as a free adult literacy intervention targeting the approximately three million adults – about 13% of the state's population – who lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills (Sanusi et al., 2021). The programme combines basic literacy instruction with vocational training in areas such as fashion design, soap production, and hairdressing, delivered through decentralised centres in markets, mechanic villages, and community and faith-based organisations (PM News, 2016), supported by facilitator capacity-building initiatives covering adult pedagogy, motivation, and instructional methods (ThisDayLive, 2017).

Adult education in Nigeria faces further structural obstacles that limit its effectiveness and sustainability. Chief among these is a lack of conceptual understanding of, and low public regard for, adult education relative to formal education, despite its breadth, which spans lifelong education, nomadic education, distance learning, and adult literacy (Edoho et al., 2023). This low regard is reflected in chronic underfunding, which limits infrastructure, teaching tools, and the adoption of modern instructional techniques such as e-learning (Olateju, 2024), and reinforces continued reliance on traditional teaching methods in more than 80% of training delivered in Nigeria (Ike & Okechukwu, 2015). Socio-political challenges – including corruption, insurgency,

and civil unrest – further disrupt programme delivery and participation (Olateju, 2024; Ogundele, 2014), while socio-cultural barriers, including gender stereotypes and urban-rural inequalities, continue to constrain women's access to education in particular (Osuala, 1990; Olomola & Olumide-Ajibola, 2021; Mkpa et al., 2023; Usman, 2011).

Previous studies on Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ and similar adult literacy programmes in Nigeria have mainly investigated the design of programmes, enrolment rates, and broader challenges in implementing programmes, including funding constraints, the capacity of facilitators, and inter-agency coordination issues (Sanusi et al., 2021; Ekwelibe, 2025; Passey et al., 2018). Less studied is how such programmes are used as social welfare and social work practice tools – how they respond to the psychosocial aspects of the vulnerable populations' retention, engagement, and literacy, and not only to the literacy outcomes. Although psychosocial support, advocacy and empowerment is a key component of social work practice with vulnerable groups, few if any studies have explored these programmes from a social work perspective in Nigeria. This gap is important because when adults live in informal settlements in the city they may have multiple vulnerabilities, such as poverty, gender-based limits, disability and social isolation, which may not be addressed by literacy teaching and learning, but which are within the professional scope of social workers to address through counselling, case management and community advocacy. The present study aims to fill this void by exploring the views of adult learners and facilitators on Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́, focusing on the social work aspects of access, psychosocial support, retention, community engagement and implications for social welfare outcomes and access to SDG 4 in vulnerable urban communities in Lagos.

The study is based on Social Vulnerability Theory, which demonstrates how social disadvantage or vulnerability can be the result of a combination of social, economic, and structural factors that impact individuals' risk of exposure and ability to access and benefit from social programs like adult literacy programmes (Cutter et al., 2003). This is supported by the capability approach (Sen, 1999) that frames education as more than just skills but as widening people's actual freedoms and opportunities in how they live out their lives. These views can be combined to appreciate the need to go beyond access to Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ to achieve equitable outcomes and the importance of psychosocial support and structural interventions as social work concerns, which are required to bring about social and economic empowerment in practice.

Social work is a key player in this context. In addition to providing access to literacy education, social workers are trained to reduce the psychosocial barriers such as stigma, low self-esteem, domestic stress and social isolation which make it difficult vulnerable adults to participate fully in literacy programmes, and to incorporate educational interventions into counselling, advocacy and referral to welfare services (Egharevba et al., 2015). From a social work perspective, literacy promotion is not just an educational initiative but a solution to the problem of structural inequity, social cohesion and social vulnerability. The use of social work principles in adult literacy programmes like Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ can help in ensuring that not only do learners learn to read and write but also gain confidence, psychosocial support and sense of agency to develop their lives and meaningfully contribute to their communities.

In this context, the present study explores Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ as a case of inclusive adult education and its implications for social welfare and social work practice in vulnerable urban communities in Lagos State, Nigeria. In particular, the study seeks to address the following three research questions: (a) What is the level of access to inclusive and equitable education among adults in vulnerable urban

communities in the context of Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́? (b) What is the sense of the effectiveness of Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ in addressing educational and social vulnerabilities such as psychosocial support, retention, community engagement and social welfare outcomes by adult learners and facilitators in Lagos and (c) What implementation challenges impact SDG 4 through Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ in Lagos?

2. Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative descriptive research design was employed in this study and in-depth interviews were used to gain insights into the experiences and perceptions of adult learners and facilitators of the Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ programme. A qualitative approach was deemed suitable as it would provide an in-depth and contextualised understanding of the experiences of access, psychosocial support, and implementation challenges for participants which would not be easily understood using quantitative methods alone.

Population

The participants of this study were adult learners and facilitators involved in the Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ programme in vulnerable urban communities of Lagos State namely Adekunle, Yaba, Abule-Oja and Bariga learning centres. These communities are usually low income, high density, urban or peri-urban, and have weak access to formal adult schooling, where literacy centres are typically being set up in markets, community halls, places of worship, and local associations, to engage adults that would otherwise not be able to access education**.**

Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on two main criteria: (a) adult learners aged 30 years and above who were actively enrolled in the programme, and (b) facilitators who were willing to participate in the interviews and could provide rich, relevant information on the research problem. Using this technique, 16 adult learners and 4 facilitators were purposively sampled and interviewed. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1 *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Category	Subcategory	Adult Learners (n = 16)	Facilitators (n = 4)
Gender	Male	12	4
	Female	4	N/A
Age (years)	30–39	2	N/A
	40–49	3	N/A
	50–59	9	4
	60–69	1	N/A
	70–79	1	N/A
Marital Status	Married	7	3
	Divorced	1	N/A
	Widowed	7	1
	Other	1	N/A
Living Arrangement	Alone	8	N/A

Category	Subcategory	Adult Learners (n = 16)	Facilitators (n = 4)
	With spouse only	6	N/A
	With children	1	N/A
	With grandchildren	1	N/A
Employment Status	Employed	5	4
	Self-employed	8	N/A
	Unemployed	3	N/A
Source of Income	Wages/salary/stipend	13	4
	Pension	2	N/A
	Child support	1	N/A
Assistance with Daily Living	Sometimes	2	N/A
	Often	1	N/A
	Never	13	N/A

Field Survey, 2026

Methods of Data Collection

In-depth interviews, guided by a semi-structured interview schedule, served as the main data collection instrument. Interviews were conducted with 16 adult learners aged 30 years and above and 4 facilitators drawn from Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ learning centres in the selected vulnerable urban communities. Each interview lasted at least one hour and was conducted at the learning centres or at locations preferred by participants, including their homes and community activity centres. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Member checking was used to test the credibility of the interview guide by presenting the preliminary findings back to selected participants who were asked to check the consistency of the interpretation with their accounts and expert review was also used by presenting the preliminary interpretations to experts in the field to evaluate whether the findings were accurate in reflecting the participants' responses.

3. Data Analysis

The verbatim transcripts were analysed thematically using open, axial, and selective coding. Data were systematically broken down, compared, and integrated to generate concepts and themes, which were then interpreted in relation to the study's research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent and confidentiality were adhered to during the study. Participants were told the aims of the study and that their participation was voluntary, they could withdraw at any time and their responses were confidential before each interview. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudo-codes, which were based on the gender, age, interview type and role encountered by the participants (e.g., Female IDI/51 Years/Adult Learner) instead of real names. Debriefing and thanking of participants were also conducted at the end of each interview session.

3.1 Results

Qualitative data drawn from interviews with 16 adult learners and 4 facilitators are presented below as three themes. The three research questions were directly answered, and their findings are translated into three research questions**:** learners' access to inclusive and equitable education; perceived effectiveness of Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ in addressing educational and social vulnerabilities; and implementation challenges and their implications for SDG 4.

Learners' Access to Inclusive and Equitable Education

Findings indicate that Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ has significantly expanded access to literacy and continuing education opportunities for adults who were previously excluded from formal schooling due to poverty, early marriage, migration, disability, or informal employment demands. Geographical accessibility of the programme was noted, with community-based learning centres minimising transport cost and time challenges, and flexible scheduling – especially evening and weekend classes – facilitated participation among market traders, artisans, and domestic workers. Financial constraints nonetheless made learning materials unavailable to some learners and rendered attendance inconsistent. Women found it difficult to participate consistently due to domestic roles and cultural expectations, and facilitators observed that people living with disabilities faced infrastructural challenges, such as the unavailability of assistive learning materials. Notwithstanding the programme's theoretical alignment with SDG 4 on equitable access, structural inequality in urban areas clearly mediates who can access and sustain participation in the programme. One adult learner stated:

> *"Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́o really helped those of us who had no other chance before. Before we did not get an opportunity to attend schools because of financial constraints in our families, but this initiative helped me learn reading and writing. But things have not been easy for us. We still find it difficult to attend regularly and learning materials are not always available to us. Sometimes I miss classes due to work and domestic problems so attendance is not always consistent."* ***(Female IDI/51 Years/Adult Learner/2026).***

Perceived Effectiveness of Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ in Addressing Educational and Social Vulnerabilities

The theme encompasses learners' and facilitators' beliefs about the programme's overall effectiveness with the psychosocial, retention, community engagement, social welfare aspects presented in the previous response to the research question, two. Overall, the programme received a positive assessment of its educational value. Many learners reported that they were able to cope better with practical aspects of life, such as reading formal documentation, managing finances, and contributing to their children's education, alongside increased literacy and numeracy. Learners linked these gains to greater self-respect and participation in economic and community affairs. However, some participants doubted whether the curriculum was comprehensive enough, describing it as too elementary or insufficiently oriented toward career advancement, and facilitators noted that the weak link between literacy and vocational or entrepreneurial skills made it difficult for learners to progress into employment.

> *"It has been of great help in my day-to-day activities. Previously, it was hard for me to even comprehend legal documents or even handle my money, but now, I am*

> *able to do that without any assistance. However, at times, it may be very elementary, especially when one wishes to move ahead with their career or development."* ***(Male IDI/38 Years/Adult Learner/2026).***

> *"Even though there have been some noticeable gains in literacy levels, there is inadequate linkage to vocations and/or entrepreneurship. This hinders learners from progressing into employment or acquiring skills at a higher level."* ***(Male IDI/55 Years/Facilitator/2026).***

The psychosocial dimension of Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ emerged strongly from the interviews. Learners described classrooms as safe spaces that reduced social isolation, and facilitators played a critical role in counselling learners on domestic problems, unemployment-related stress, and the stigma associated with adult illiteracy. This relationship appeared linked to retention, as learners who felt emotionally supported were more likely to continue attending despite financial challenges. Enrolment through community leaders and peer advocacy were additional forms of community involvement. However, facilitators reported a lack of institutional support and formal training in psychosocial support, meaning that most of this emotional labour depended on personal commitment rather than structured provision.

> *"Being in this class also helped me feel less alone. The environment is safe and we respect and support each other. I can speak freely without feeling judged and it has encouraged me to keep coming."* ***(Male IDI/48 Years/Adult Learner/2026).***

> *"We try our best to support the learners emotionally, but many of us have not received formal training in psychosocial support. We are dealing with complex social and personal issues and there is very little institutional support or counselling resources available. A lot of the emotional support we provide comes from our personal commitment, not from any structured system. While the learning environment is positive, sustaining that level of support can be difficult without professional backing."* ***(Male IDI/52 Years/Facilitator/2026).***

Participation in Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ was also positively associated with improved social welfare outcomes, including better health-seeking behaviour, such as reading prescriptions and understanding public health messages, and increased civic participation. Women in particular emphasised increased household decision-making authority. However, these welfare improvements were incremental rather than transformative: participants' long-term economic mobility remained constrained by structural poverty, unemployment, and limited access to credit, and facilitators emphasised that education and social protection policy alone cannot eliminate deeply rooted urban vulnerabilities. Inclusive adult education thus functions as a catalyst rather than a stand-alone remedy for social welfare challenges.

> *"I can now read prescription and better understand health information. I now have a voice at home. I can now contribute to decisions and manage responsibilities better than before. Although with these changes, life is still a little difficult. Jobs are not easy to find and we don't always have money or support to move forward."* ***(Male IDI/60 Years/Adult Learner/2026).***

> *"We see positive changes in learners' lives, but they are gradual. Education alone cannot overcome structural challenges like poverty, unemployment or lack of access to credit. Inclusive adult education like this acts as a catalyst to help improve awareness and confidence, but without stronger social protection systems, it cannot fully address deeper urban vulnerabilities."* ***(Male IDI/56 Years/Facilitator/2026).***

Implementation Challenges and Implications for SDG 4

Several implementation barriers emerged that inhibit the attainment of SDG 4 goals. Insufficient teaching materials, late disbursement of facilitator stipends, inadequate funding, and weak monitoring structures were the most frequently reported challenges. Poor remuneration and limited training left facilitators concerned about burnout and reduced attentiveness, while the rapidly growing population of Lagos placed additional pressure on the education system. Although Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ is philosophically aligned with SDG 4's emphasis on lifelong learning and inclusivity, these implementation bottlenecks put continued progress on access and equity at risk without increased investment.

> *"This program has benefited many of us who were never lucky enough to attend any school and seems to be in keeping with the principle of education for all, though it is sometimes hard to benefit from the program due to some difficulties. There may not be adequate learning resources, and class can be disrupted. Despite our eagerness to learn, these problems hinder us and make it hard for us to realize the full potential of the program."* ***(Male IDI/55 Years/Adult Learner/2026).***

> *"We remain committed to supporting the learners; however, we have some serious challenges with implementation. The teaching materials available are limited, stipends are often late, and funding is inconsistent. This impacts our motivation and the quality of service delivery. Additionally, there is minimal supervision and professional development which may contribute to burning out. Meanwhile, the population of Lagos continues to grow, and the demand for educational services remains high."* ***(Male IDI/57 Years/Facilitator/2026).***

4. Discussion of Findings

This study confirms that Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ has substantially contributed to improving access to literacy for adults in vulnerable communities in the city of Lagos, which aligns with its mission to increase adult literacy among the over three million non-literate adults in Lagos state (Sanusi et al., 2021). But viewed from the perspective of Social Vulnerability Theory (Cutter et al., 2003) and the capability approach (Sen, 1999), the results indicate that literacy instruction alone does not necessarily lead to increased capability and decreased vulnerability. The programme's impact on learners depended on the interplay of multiple structural disadvantages (gender roles, disability, informal employment and poverty) which affected who could attend regularly, and who could translate literacy achievements into real social and economic mobility. This is consistent with the theory that interventions addressing only part of a disadvantage – in this case literacy – are not enough when vulnerability is compounded by multiple interacting structural constraints (Cutter et al., 2003).

The findings align with previous studies on the impact of adult literacy programmes in Nigeria which also found that under-funding, capacity of facilitators, and poor linkages to livelihood systems are barriers to programme effectiveness (Ekwelibe, 2025; Passey et al., 2018). This study, however, brings the psychosocial dimension of adult literacy provision to the fore; much of the previous work on evaluating Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ (Sanusi et al., 2021) did not address this dimension, and by highlighting that facilitators are already providing informal psychosocial services, which play key roles in learner retention, it extends this scholarship. This is in line with the general literature on social vulnerability, which suggests that changes in the behavior and attitudes of vulnerable people and vulnerable communities require provision of psychosocial support in addition to skills training (Egharevba et al., 2015).

The implications of all these findings are huge for social work training and practice. In fact, adult literacy interventions as Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ can be seen as being in the mandate of social work once their psychosocial and structural aspects are recognised, which is consistent with the global definition of social work as a profession based on principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised people (IFSW, 2014). First, they argue that social workers must be actively engaged in the adult literacy programme, not as an afterthought but as a core programme facilitator who can offer structured psychosocial support, case management and referral to learners who face domestic stress, stigma and isolation. Second, facilitators who are currently doing much of this emotional labor without formal training should be provided with basic psychosocial first aid and referral training, preferably in co-construction with schools of social work. Third, there should be integrated content on community-based adult literacy and non-formal education into social work education and training programmes, as this is a relevant practice to social work practice in terms of empowerment and advocacy, and has a strong connection to structural social justice concerns, which are integral to social work. Lastly, the results underscore the importance of a community-based, advocacy-focused approach to social work practice, in which social workers collaborate with the educator to address literacy instruction and the structural inequities that poverty, gender norms, and disability-related exclusion pose.

This study has certain limitations. This is because the findings are not statistically generalizable to all adult literacy programmes in Nigeria and beyond as it is only collected from a small purposively sampled population of 16 adult learners and 4 facilitators in four communities in Lagos. Although the qualitative design was suitable for a depth and breadth of investigation of the lived experience, it was not possible to measure programme outcomes over time, and because the interviews had a cross-sectional design, changes in the learners' literacy, psychosocial well-being and/or economic situation was not possible to follow up over time. Longitudinal or mixed methods designs, larger and more diverse samples across states would enhance the generalisability of these findings. The methodological literature on qualitative inquiry generally agrees that the trustworthiness of the results of small, purposively sampled studies depends on transferability, that is, the applicability of the results to similar studies, and not on statistical generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

From these findings, there are some recommendations, In line with the concept of inclusive education, which centres on changing the system to make room for people, rather than people changing their system, students with disabilities are a part of the system and it is the system that needs to change to make room for them (UNESCO, 2009). To reinforce institutional support for Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ and other similar programmes, policy makers should increase and time the funding of these programmes, provide adequate learning materials and establish monitoring structures. The

adult education system should be more community-based, context-sensitive and gender-sensitive, and have governance, environmental literacy and livelihood training included in the basic literacy education to enhance community sustainability. An investment in mobile and technology-assisted learning must be done on purpose to ensure accessibility, and also to deal with the infrastructural and funding hurdles that are inhibiting its use. Structured training in adult pedagogy and basic psychosocial support skills for facilitators, preferably in collaboration with social work training institutions, and formal psychosocial support mechanisms, such as trained social workers or counsellors, must be established in learning centres, not on a voluntary basis by the facilitators. Finally, regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of adult literacy programs should be considered, with the participation of adult learners in policy-making, critical to maintaining the momentum towards SDG 4 in urban settings such as Lagos.

Recommendations. Based on this, several recommendations for policy, practice, and future programming are made.

The policy makers should give more adequate and timely funding to the Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ and similar programmes, provide more comprehensive learning materials to them and have a more robust monitoring mechanism in place. Governance, environmental literacy and livelihood training should be included in the context of basic literacy to build the resilience of communities and ensure more participatory, context-sensitive and gender-balanced adult education programmes.

Investments need to be invested in mobile and technology-assisted learning, to enhance access and to tackle the challenges of the present with regards to infrastructure and funding.

Structured adult pedagogy training, preferably delivered in collaboration with social work training institutions, and basic psychosocial support skills training should be provided to facilitators, and formal psychosocial support structures (trained social workers or counsellors) should be integrated into learning centres, not dependent on the willingness and time of facilitators.

Lastly, in order to keep the progress achieved towards SDG 4, it is necessary to continuously monitor and evaluate adult literacy programmes, in which the voices of adult learners are included in the design and development of policies.

Conclusion

Èkó Nkẹ́kọ́ plays an important role in reducing adult educational disparities in vulnerable urban communities in Lagos, combining basic literacy, psychosocial inclusion, and incremental socioeconomic improvement in ways that advance the goals of SDG 4 at the local level. At the same time, the programme's transformative potential remains constrained by underfunding, weak facilitator support, cultural barriers, and limited integration with the broader social welfare system. The results highlight the complex nexus of education, poverty and urban marginality and identify a potential for the social work–inspired approach to building local, community-based interventions focused on utilising literacy acquisition as an entry point for empowerment and socio-economic improvement for disadvantaged adults in urban Lagos.

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