

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Human Resource Development for Sustainable Development: Perspective for Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of human resource development for sustainable development: perspective for youth empowerment in Nigeria. It states that Nigerian youth empowerment and development is pivotal to economic growth and national development. Developing countries like Nigerian that desires to develop coupled with cooperation of her citizens commit a sizeable proportion of resources to empowering and developing the citizens most especially the youth if developmental objectives must be attained. It also examines the conceptual analysis of development and challenges of youth empowerment within the context of the Nigerian environment. The paper concluded that if Nigeria must join the league of developed nations by 2020 as projected by the world bank in recent years, it must pursue youth empowerment and development programmes aggressively, ensure constant power supply and human capital development (skills acquisition) while the entrepreneurial developmental studies should be introduced at all levels of our educational sector in order to enable youth be responsible and become managers of their own development rather than searching for the not-available white collar jobs.

Keywords: *Development, Empowerment, Youth, Youth Empowerment, Youth Development.*

Introduction

Youths constitute a large percentage of Nigeria's population but despite their critical role in nation building, it is often observed that the country has not invested seriously in them, thereby making them an army involved in unprofitable activities. The youth form the engine room of the labour force and represent the future of any nation. A vision of prosperous, peaceful and technologically-advanced society is therefore unrealizable in an environment where youths are not properly groomed and positioned. This is because the energy, skills and aspirations of youths are invaluable assets that no country can afford to squander. However, the youth in Nigeria have been ignored by various administrations. This, over the years, has given politicians the opportunity to engage youths in negative political activities [1].

Between the 1950's and early 1960's, economic theory of development was based on having the right quality and mixture of savings, investment and foreign aids in order to proceed along an economic growth path that historically had been followed by the most developed economics. Development was seen as synonymous with

economic growth. But in the 1970's two competing economic schools of thought with the content of dependence theories replaced the linear stages of growth model. The first school of thought stressed the internal process of structural change that a "typical" developing country must undergo if it is to succeed in generating and sustaining a process of rapid economic growth. The second school of thought stressed the external and internal institutional and political constraints on economic development. It emphasized the need to put in place major and new policies to eradicate poverty to provide more diversified employment opportunities and to reduce income inequalities [2].

Empowerment is at the centre of this aforementioned paradigm shift and attempt to reconceptualize. It concerns development strategies aimed at poverty alleviation too. Therefore according to UNDP "The 1990's paradigm shift in development thinking gave rise to a frame work that has an in-built understanding that development must be woven around people not people around development and it should power individuals rather than

disempower them. This paper therefore attempts to examine the conceptual meaning of empowerment and development linked to the Nigeria's economic environment development programmes, and challenges of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria.

Globally, there is a realization that the involvement of youths is the key to achieving growth and development, and therefore there is a need to discuss how development actors can engage with youth and translate priority areas into development programming and policies. What are some of the persistent challenges and positive experiences and lessons that can be learned from countries that have empowered and engaged youth in finding sustainable development solutions? Should we be pursuing a sectoral approach to addressing youth exclusion or invest more in a cross-cutting and capacity development approach so that youths are equipped with the technical skills and leadership qualities to respond effectively to the development challenges in their communities?

Conceptual Framework and Principles

Attempts are made (here) to trace the link between the Nigerian economic environment and the youth activity on the one hand and empowerment on the other.

Empowerment

The new Webster's dictionary says to "empower" implies 'to give power to' or 'to enable' someone. Also, in the view of the BBC dictionary, 'when someone is empowered to do something, he or she has the authority or power to do it. Empowerment is linked to concept of self help, participation, networking and equity within the context of community development.

Whereas its respectability within the vocabulary of development is not in doubt, its content is yet to acquire social agreement [2]. Within an organization, empowerment is viewed as critical in the process of change. This is because rather than forcing or pushing people to change, empowerment provides a way of attracting them to change since they own the change process. People are empowered the moment they feel an enhancement of their abilities to control, influence or cope with their social economic roles [3].

The motivational dimension of empowerment involves various factors:

- People will not be empowered if they do not want to be. They have to believe in the merits and prospects of empowerment.
- Empowerment is about creating the condition conducive to enhancing motivation to perform. This implies developing the person's sense of self determination and enhancing his or her belief in self efficacy.

Generally, there are two categories of power holders in any socioeconomic system:

- The power of wealth or property
- The power of knowledge (the intellectuals).

Particularly in developing countries, the elite appropriate wealth to themselves by monopolizing power of the political level and through corruption at the administrative level. There is therefore, the need for empower people at the grassroots so as to create enabling conditions for a more equitable distribution of wealth and productive assets among citizens.

Economic empowerment of citizens implies that disempowered people take responsibility for their own material gains on an on-going basis and become managers of their own development. Government cannot (and should not) impose empowerment from above [2]. Government should/can (and should) ensure equal access to economic opportunities. It is however up to each citizen to take advantage of them or ignore them.

The principle objectives of citizen economic empowerment should be expansion of income and employment, generating activities for as many people as possible, without sacrificing efficiency.

Therefore, economic empowerment and development strategies should generally include:

- Financial intervention; in order to assist local business activities.
- Enterprise development for citizens (increased access to skills, business and management training and improved production technologies).
- Marketing strategies for locally produced goods and services
- Bargaining strategies (for higher wages, better working conditions etc) for citizen employers
- Training and education consistent with skill requirements in the economy [3, 4].

Who are the Nigerian Youth

The class of Nigerian youths addressed in this paper is the people that fall within the age brackets of (10-15) years, they are the junior youths so to speak and those within the age bracket of (16-30) years are often referred to as the senior youth. It is important to note that the youths are very important, veritable and indispensable agents of development. It is interesting to note, that whether in a developed or developing country, the youth are indispensable because it is the youth that assures or guarantee a secured future for the country. The period of the youth is one of the developmental stages in human life span development.

The Nigerian Economic Environment

Nigeria going by the aspiration and huge investment of successive governments should by now moved forwards a stage of progress developmentally. The persistence of the indices of underdevelopment in the country has cost a big question mark on the country's planning and execution techniques usually employed by planner. Nigeria is adjusted as the "giant of Africa" and it is abundantly blessing with natural and human resources, but in the first four decades of its independence, the potentials remained largely untapped and even mismanaged [5]. With a population estimated at about 140 million, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa and one-sixth of the black population in the world. It is the 8th largest deposit of natural gas in the world [6].

Currently, barely 40% of its arable land is under cultivation. With over 100 tertiary institution producing more than 2,000,000 graduate per annum [6] Startling as it may be about two-thirds of Nigerian people is poor, yet Nigeria is a country with vast potential wealth. Although revenues from crude oil have been increasing over the past decades, the people of Nigeria have been falling deeper into poverty. In 1980 an estimated 27% of Nigerians lived in poverty [5]. By 1999, about 70% of the population had income of less than \$1 a day- and the figure has risen since then Poverty levels vary across the country, with the highest proportion of people in the northwest and the lowest in the southeast. A classical example underscore the scope of misfortune is to compare Nigeria with Indonesia and even Malaysia. By 1972, before Nigeria and Indonesia had the first oil boom contents [6], both countries were comparable in almost all shares; agrarian

societies, multi-ethnic and religious societies, with comparable size of GDP etc.

Both experience oil boom in 1973 and thereafter, both took differences policy choices. The outcomes of the differences in policy regimes are such that today, while manufactures as a percentages of total exports is about 40% in Indonesia, it is less than 1% in Nigerian where she was in the 1970 it would be recalled even Malaysia that has overtake Nigerian got her first palm seedling from Nigeria in the early 1960s, when oil palm produce was already a major export of Nigeria. In the 1990s, Malaysia export of palm produce earned it more than Nigeria earned from oil export [6]. Poverty in Nigeria has many causes, all of which reinforce one another. One source of poverty is the lack of basic services. Such as clean water, education, and health care. Another is lack of asserts, such as land, tools credit and supportive network of friends and family. The other is lack of employment income, including food, shelter, clothing and empowerment above all lack of power. Some of these factors directly affect poverty while others contribute indirectly by producing inequality by stifling the political power of certain sector of the population [5].

Youth Empowerment and Developmental Programmes in Nigeria

Beginning with the Harare declaration on the plan of action for youth empowerment in 1995 through the world youth ministers meeting in Portugal in 1998 to the youth ministers meeting in Solomon Island in 2000. The relevance of youth in contemporary development has received increased recognition in official circles. In Nigeria for example, the national youth development policy of 2001 and its accompanying implementation strategy are palpable testimonies to the renewed interest in the youth and development process.

The democratization process which started since 1991 to date has expanded the political space and provided ample opportunity for actors within the civil society to make their impact in the political process. The youth has been acknowledged as a formidable social force in this process, thus;... youth are the most active segment of any society Imbued with relentless energy vigor and drive, the youth are the major catalyst for development in any given society. As future leaders and key determiners of the peace and stability of society, youth are indeed the greatest assets of any nation.

This explains why the Nigerian government decided to embark on such rural development initiatives programmes aimed at empowering the youth in the country over the years.

Government at all levels in Nigeria has introduced many Youth Empowerment and Development Programmes, example of such laudable programmes is that of Osun State Government of Nigeria that introduced Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) in order to reduce the teeming number of unemployed youth in the state to a minimal level where youth are engaged for various developmental and empowerment programme like farming, traffic officers, road sweepers, etc and placed them on monthly stipend. This programme develop the youth for the future challenges and it afford them the opportunity of transforming into the full fledge civil servant when vacancies exist in the civil service of the state.

Challenges of Youth Empowerment and Developmental Programmes in Nigeria

Nigeria as a developing country is seriously challenged by hunger and poverty. Out of every 10 Nigerians 7 live on less than \$1 a day and the picture is getting bad by the day [7]. On account of poverty in Nigeria, poor parents beget poor children, thereby creating a kind of dynasty of the poor. Life expectancy is a mere 54 years [5]. Infant mortality is 77 per 100 and maternal mortality stand at 704 per 100,000 live birth which is about the highest in the world. Only about half the population of Nigeria had access to safe drinking water (40% in rural areas, 60% in urban areas). Unemployment and underdevelopment rate is put at 15% of the labour force [7]. Young people see the promise of better health and prosperity as a new infrastructure projects and economic developments. Yet sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where hunger is increasing. This increase is largely driven by the AIDS pandemic, which is compounded by food insecurity. One in three Africans is undernourished, one out of seven dies before their fifth birthday, and half of these deaths are due to malnutrition [8].

The future holds the prospects of education and training. Many African countries are in the process of attaining universal access to education for primary school children. Yet the majority of African countries fear being left behind. In many African countries there are significant barriers to education and training—these include the high

costs of school fees, uniforms and textbooks, the need for families to encourage children to work during school holidays to earn money, as well as discrimination against girls and young women. Young people who are excluded from the education system are more likely to face unemployed, health problems and very much likely to participate in criminal activities than their peers (Boko Haram syndrome in the Northern part of Nigeria) [9]. Getting young people into schools is a challenge, and more so is the quality and relevance of what they learn. Governments have recognized the need to diversify and vocationally orient the curriculum taught in education and training institutions so that young people are provided with knowledge and skills that can assist them in dealing with the demands of adult life and increase their prospects of employment.

Another problem that impedes the actualization of empowerment and developmental programmes in Nigeria as argues by [5] is the nefarious practices of policies formulators. The policy makers in Nigeria formulate policies and programmes with some inbuilt flexibilities to allow loopholes to make inordinate gains. For instance, most empowerment and developmental programmes do not get to the people at the grassroots where most of the poor people reside. The agents of these policy makers often hijack the benefit of such programmes and make returns accordingly to their principals.

The power sector is not stable and thus the enabling environment is not guaranteed for low and medium business to thrive and oftentimes not favourable to small-scale-business holders. Such policies includes: local government tariffs, business permission tariffs, environmental agency tariffs, etc.

Conclusion

Nigeria as one of the three countries in the world identified by the World Bank to join the league of developed nations by 2020, must harness all available resource most especially it human capital through its empowerment programmes now. Various studies over the years have shown that a sizeable number of Nigerians living in the rural areas are disempowered.

Nigeria is brimming with untapped talents. It is the responsibility of every government to provide the citizens with the critical skills and resources to realize their full potential. To develop as it should, Nigeria must take investment in human

capacity development very seriously as no nation can compete effectively in the emerging computerized global market place with poorly educated workforce and poorly made goods and services. Nigeria should adopt a skill-oriented educational principle to strengthen the quality of her education because how quickly a nation recovers from the present global economic predicament depends on the strength of its institutions and infrastructure, ingenuity of the leaders, and productivity of the workers [10]. Scarcity of jobs has combined with lack of employability skills and knowledge to cause high youth unemployment. Any administration that can give vocational and technical education the attention it deserves, stimulate the weak economy and create employment for the army of unemployed youth, will occupy an enviable position in the nation's political and economic history.

Recommendations

Based on the forging, the following recommendations are suggested: The government

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should pursue policies and programmers that encourage the growth and development of Small and Medium Enterprises. The power sector should be repositioned so as to stop or minimize erratic power supply. The downsizing and retrenchment policies of government are anti-poverty reduction strategy [2]. Government should establish new and enhanced existing human capital development centres most especially the skills acquisitions centres at affordable cost and accessible to her citizens. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria should include entrepreneur studies in their curricula irrespective of the students' area of study in order to enable the teeming youth be self-sufficient.

Government at all levels should pursue policies that increase access to loans for financing Small and Medium Enterprises established by youth who are enterprising. Government should also create an enabling environment for foreign investor to invest in the economy for youth to be gainfully employed.