Youth Empowerment Scheme in a Democratic Setting: A Case Study of Niger State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The level of unemployment, poverty and hunger in the developing countries especially Nigeria is high. It has been estimated that six out of every ten of the world's poor are youths. This study examined the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in a democratic setting with reference to Youth Empowerment Scheme in Niger State, Nigeria. A structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from 232 respondents. The respondents were purposively selected with 78 respondents from zone I, 77 respondents from zone II and 77 respondents from zone III of the three Agricultural zones in the state. Results obtained were subjected to Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Duncan multiple range tests was used for mean separation. It was found that all the respondents had the enterprise/life skills which were mainly acquired through the Youth Empowerment Scheme Project. Most of them earned between N200 - N300 daily from their separate enterprises. There was significant relationship between educational status and the level of income of the beneficiaries. There was also significant difference in the level of income of the type of relevant skills acquired/enterprise of the beneficiaries. However, there was no significant relationship between the methods of setting up of enterprises and the level of income of beneficiaries. The study concluded that acquisition of life skills should be encouraged by all stakeholders in youth development. Government and other related agencies should focus on the youths; their needs, potentials and development so that unemployment and poverty will be greatly reduced in our society.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that over one billion of the world's population live in poverty, facing daily the unacceptable conditions of hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, unsafe environment and social exclusion. Majority of the population consists of young people, three quarters of them living in rural areas (World Youth Forum, 2001). Of this, two hundred million youths of the developing world live or spend most of their time on the streets (Johnson, 1998). The cycle of indebtedness of developing counties is a major contribution to hunger and poverty. This is complicated by the fact that debt forgiveness is not being implemented with the expediency and urgency of the need. In Nigeria, the situation is not different. It is estimated that over fifteen million youths roam about the streets nation-wide in search of basic necessities of life (NDE, 1996). In Niger State, the youth are sickly, dirty and inadequately clothed (Baggo, 2002). They survive by begging, hawking petroleum products and sometimes resort to abuse of alcohol and other addictive substances in order to escape the misery of their lives. Something urgent and remedial has to be done in order to curb this menace, hence the relevance of project YES (Youth Empowerment Scheme) is seen as appropriate and timely at this period. Empowerment is a construct shared by many disciplines and areas: Community Development, Psychology, Education, Economics and other social movements and organizations (Harter, 1993). The term empowerment has different meanings in different social and political contexts and does not translate easily into all languages. An exploration of local terms for empowerments include: self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, own decision and being free (UNDP, 1995). As a suggested definition, empowerment can be defined as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives (Pitman and wright, 1991). Project YES was established in April, 2000 and is designed to address peculiar social problems of unemployment and the attendant consequences on the youth. This hydra-headed problem is a disturbing social affliction that has continued to engage the attention of most governments in Nigeria. The Project has as its cardinal principles the use of skill acquisition along with guidance and counseling as fundamental strategies for building a youth cadre in Niger State that will be responsive to the development of the larger society.

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The problem to which this study is set to explore is the assessment of youth empowerment scheme in Niger State.

Objectvies

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the demographic characteristics of the beneficiaries of the scheme.
2. To investigate the level of income of the beneficiaries of the scheme.
3. To examine the methods by which the beneficiaries set-up their enterprises.

The following hypotheses formulated in the null form were tested in the study:

H_o1 – There is no significant relationship between the demographic characteristics and the level of income of beneficiaries.

H_o2 - There is no significant difference in the level of income based on the relevant skills acquired by the beneficiaries.

H_o3 - There is no significant relationship between the methods of setting up of enterprise and the level of income of the beneficiaries.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The state has 42 LGAs which are divided into 3 zones based on the cropping patterns: Zone I, II and III. Multi-stage cluster sampling method was used in selecting 3 LGAs from each zone as follows:-

Zone I: Bida, Agaie and Lapai LGAs.
Zone II: Shiroro, Bosso and Minna LGAs.
Zone III: Kontagora, Mariga and Magama LGAs.

For each zone, 80 questionnaires were administered giving a total of 240 respondents. However, a total of 232 questionnaire were returned and ultimately used for analysis. The administration of the questionnaire started in October, 2003 and was completed in December, 2003. Items of the questionnaire were divided into three based on the objectives of the study. The study is descriptive and correlative in nature. Inferential statistics such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-square were used for hypothesis testing. ANOVA was at 5% probability level. Multiple means comparison of income was done with Duncan multiple range test. All statistics of the result were executed using the statistical package for social scientists (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

Demographic factors of the respondents include age, sex, marital status, religion and level of education. The average age of the beneficiaries was 22years. Data in Table 1 show that 38.4% of the beneficiaries were between the age of 10-20years, 58% were between 21-30years while 3.4% were between the age of 31-40 years. From the analysis it could be seen that the beneficiaries were mostly between age 10-30 years. Within this age bracket, the beneficiaries are mentally alert and ready to learn. About 69.0% the respondents were female, while the remaining 31.0% were male. This showed that most beneficiaries were female. This study corroborated that report by (Baggo, 2002).

It could be observed from data Table 1 that 75% of the beneficiaries were single. 24.1% were married. Since most beneficiaries are single, they have more time to learn and imbibe life skills. About 87.9% of the beneficiaries were Muslims while the remaining 12.1% were Christians. There were no traditional worshippers among the respondents.

Table 1 shows that 1.7% of the respondents had no formal education 5.2% had primary education, while 68.5% of the beneficiaries had secondary education and 21.1% of the beneficiaries had education in tertiary institution. There was no case of adult education while koranic education accounted for 3.4%. The level of education has an impact on imbibing life skills (Ryan, 1988). Hence, with a high percentage of the beneficiaries being educated, it is expected that learning and acquiring of life skills will be relatively easy.

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TABLE 1: Distribution of Respondents by their Demographic characteristics (n = 232)

Demographic Characteristics	Percentage (%)	Mode
Age (Years)		
10-20	38.4	
21-30	58.2	21-30
31-40	3.4	
Sex		
Male	31.0	
Female	69.0	Female
Martial Status		
Single	75.9	Single
Married	24.1	
Divorced	-	
Widowed	-	
Religion		
Islam	87.9	Islam
Christianity	12.1	
Traditional Worshipper	-	
Educational Status		
No Education	1.7	
Primary Education	5.2	
Secondary Education	68.5	Secondary Education
Tertiary Education	21.1	
Adult Education	-	
Koranic Education	3.4	

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics tested for the H_o1. The result indicated that both sex and level of education were significant. This is in agreement with earlier findings: Nollan (1996); Havighurst, (1982) and Ryan (1988). Their significance level were less than 0.05 for the Chi-square of the beneficiaries. Reject the null hypothesis (H_o1) and accept the alternative hypothesis. There is significant relationship between the demographic characteristics and the level of income of the beneficiaries.

TABLE 2: Results of Chi-square Analyses comparing Demographic characteristics and earnings per day

Demographic Characteristics	Chi-square	Remarks
Age	0.97197	Not significant
Sex	0.00491	Significant
Marital Status	0.22089	Not significant
Religion	0.71811	Not significant
Level of Education	0.00078	Significant

Hypothesis Two

Table 3 shows the results of analysis of variance comparing type of skills acquired and earning per day. There is significant difference between the income of tailoring, barbing, hairdressing and other skills. Further test reveals that between tailoring and barbing, there is no significant difference, but the difference between hairdressing and tailoring/barbing is significant. Hence, hairdressing is the most lucrative in terms of level of

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income. Reject the null hypothesis (H_o2) and accept the alternative hypothesis. There is significant difference in the level of income based on the relevant skills acquired by the beneficiaries.

Table 3: Results of Analysis of variance comparing the type of skills acquired and earnings per day

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Ratio	F Prob	F
Between group	5	21.5916	4.3183	9.0114	0.00
Within groups	226	108.3007	0.4972		
Total	231	129.8922			

Mean	Skills
1.2500	Shoemaking
1.2500	Welding
2.1094	Tailoring**
2.3125	Barbing**
2.4697	Hairdressing***

* indicates significant differences.

3.13 Hypothesis Three

The various methods available for setting up of trade by the beneficiaries were the following options:- Savings, Bank loan and Project YES. Majority of the beneficiaries (78.9%) were set up by Project YES. From table 4, it can be seen that regardless of the method of set-up of the enterprises, there was no significant relationship in the income of the beneficiaries. Accept the null hypothesis (H_o3) and reject the alternative hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between the methods of setting up of enterprise and the level of income of the beneficiaries.

Table 4: Method of setting up of enterprise and earnings per day

Methods	Chi-square	Remarks
Bank loan	0.41572	Not Significant
Savings	0.33526	Not Significant
Project YES	0.79142	Not Significant

4.0 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the objectives and findings of the research, the following conclusions are hereby considered valid for this study.

(1) The mean age of the beneficiaries of project YES in Niger State is about 22 years. There is a positive relationship between the age and the level of income of the beneficiaries though the relationship was not significant. Age 22 years is considered appropriate for the scheme because youth of this age are mentally active and are ready to learn and take risks.

(2) The level of literacy among the beneficiaries is high. About 94.9% had one form of formal education or the other. This had pre-disposed them to imbibing life skills which is essential for empowerment.

(3) The major enterprises of the beneficiaries are hairdressing, tailoring, welding and shoemaking. Hairdressing had the highest percentage of beneficiaries (56.9%) and coincidentally, it is the most lucrative in terms of income level of all the enterprises.

(4) Majority of the beneficiaries (89.7%) acquired their life skills through training by project YES and most of the skills acquired were short-term with duration of learning below 3 months and medium-term with duration of learning between 3-6 months. Long term vocations with duration of 12 months were not subscribed to by the beneficiaries.

Recommendations

(1). Government and privately owned agencies as well as related Non-Governmental organization (NGOs) should focus more on the youths, their needs, potentials and development – incorporating youth friendly environment programmes and technologies.

(2) All stake-holders in youth development should encourage acquisition of life skills.

(3) Greater commitment should be directed at getting all children of school age enrolled and kept in school. This is because the level of education (literacy) is one of the factors limiting empowerment.

(4) Agriculture which is the main occupation of the populace in the state should be more prominent in the activities of Youth Empowerment Scheme.

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