

## STRENGTHENING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES (YEP) THROUGH TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL, EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET): A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*There has been growing concern about the rate of unemployment and underemployment among Nigerian youths and graduates. This has increased the crime and poverty rate of the nation. The federal government, international organizations and non-governmental organizations have introduced some youth empowerment programmes to curb the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. Nonetheless, these programmes have not been effective and accessible for the youths. This is because of the poor content of some of the programmes for the reason that they do not appropriately incorporate Vocational Technical Education and Training in its program content. Vocational Technical Education which leads to applied and practical skills acquisition if properly integrated in youth empowerment programmes will strengthen the programmes and thereby reduce unemployment to the minimum.*

### Introduction

The high rate of unemployment, poverty and poor Socio- Economic status of most Nigerian graduates has generated an outcry of many, non-governmental organizations, parents, government bodies and international organizations. Though many nations are faced with the problem of graduate unemployment as Nigeria does but as a nation with diversified employment sectors and unexplored sectors of employment, this problem is expected to be reduced to the barest minimum. Unemployment is a global trend, but it occurs mostly in developing countries of the world, with attendant social, economic, political, and psychological consequences (Emeka, 2011). Thus, massive youth unemployment in any country is an indication of far more complex problems. The situation of unemployment in Nigeria has been on the increase which has resulted in increase in social vices, human capacity under-utilization; increased poverty amongst the citizenry, social alienation and weak purchasing power among other negativity ((Njoku & Ihugba, 2011). The constant complains of insufficient jobs for youth by federal parastatals and other government organization has made it seem so difficult for graduates to have hope or even search harder for places of employment.

Other problems are the class of degree one graduated with, quota system, field of study and so on. Therefore Youth empowerment programme may seem to be the only solution to the enormous unemployment rate amongst Nigerian graduates. Such programmes should have Technical vocational education (TVET) as its core content; this is because youth empowerment programmes are geared towards human capacity building and employability. Since TVET encompasses practical and technical skill acquisition training, manpower development which can also be called capacity building, then this makes TVET the best programme content for youth empowerment programmes and training in Nigeria.

### The Concept of Empowerment

The word "Empowerment" has been defined by several authors and bodies as it relates to the subject they are dealing with. (World Bank, 2011) defined Empowerment as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This definition sees empowerment in the light of

human capacity building for the purpose of making the individual or groups self-reliant. (Alsop and Heinsolm 2005) delineate Empowerment as a person's capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. With the above definitions, one can say that empowerment is a process of building an individual in the aspects of skill, economic, finance, social, moral and psychological development with the aim of making the individual self-reliant and useful to him or herself and the society at large. Financial empowerment seems to be one of the most powerful tools in graduate empowerment, it should come after the training has been completed and should serve as a startup capital for the trainee at the completion of the training.

### Lapses in Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

There have been and still are many empowerment programmes, poverty alleviation and youth development programs in Nigeria, but the major problem is the consistency and positive outcome of these programmes. (Ohize and Adamu, 2009) stated; Nigeria has witnessed a wide range of poverty alleviation policies and programs from previous governments. However, despite these concerted efforts by the government, the poverty situation seems to be getting worse. This situation could be as a result of inconsistency, poor administration, and poor programme contents in the youth empowerment programmes.

In view of the fact that empowerment programmes are geared towards making one self-reliant and skillful, it is imperative to integrate technical and vocational skill acquisition training in its programs, this is because technical and vocational education is designed and directed towards skill acquisition and self-employment and development. Since this is the case then it becomes necessary to assess the empowerment programmes before administering them. Some factors should be considered and discussed when designing graduate empowerment programmes for the realization of the set goals of the programmes. And it is imperative that the content of the empowerment programs should also relate to the present and future needs of the nation. Some of these factors are:

1. If the programmes are practical and applied skills oriented
2. Are Crafts (trade), Agriculture, Commerce and business part of the programme contents?
3. The benefit of the program to the graduates and the society,
4. The suitability of the program for the graduates in question
5. The interest of the graduates in the program
6. How self-reliant will the graduate become at the completion of the program.
7. The availability of funds to sustain the programmes
8. If provision for start-up capital is made for the beneficiaries/participants of the programmes.
9. Provision of supervisory staff to supervise the beneficiaries of the programme at least six (6) months from the day they establish their own business.

Once these factors are put into consideration then the empowerment programmes will achieve the set goals.

Youth empowerment programmes are expected to be accessible for every youth regardless of the individual's social status, class of degree of graduation, course of study and year of graduation. In addition, these programmes are also expected to be reachable to all and not a selected class of people in the society. For empowerment programmes designed for tertiary institution graduates like the Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and the Government Internship Scheme (GIS) introduced by the federal government of Nigeria in 2012, from the office of the Presidency, Federal Republic of Nigeria, the

programmes are anticipated to be introduced to students in their final year possible immediately after their final exams while waiting for their undergraduate results, or during their national youth service year. But this is not the state of affairs of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. Graduates are not well informed about most of these programmes because of the medium of publicizing the programmes and delay in the publicity or advertisement. Also funds allocated for the implementation of these programmes are misappropriated. Therefore, it seems difficult for the youths to effectively access and be part of the programme.

### **Role of TVET in Youth Empowerment Programmes**

Vocational education could be regarded as that aspect of education, which provides the recipients with the basic knowledge and practical skills needed for entry into the world of work as employees or as self-employed (Oni 2007). Vocational education if well implemented builds practical and applied skills in an individual which are essential for national development in aspects of commerce, agriculture, industrial, economic and socio-economic development. According to National Policy on Education (FRN 2004), Vocational Technical Education is defined as that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. The policy further delineated the goals of technical and vocational education as;

1. To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and business particularly at the craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
2. To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills training necessary skills for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

And the policy also enumerated the objectives of technical education as thus;

- i. To provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades.
- ii. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for Agricultural, Industrial, Commercial and Economic Development.
- iii. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for use and convenience of man.
- iv. To given an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- v. To give training and impact necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant.
- vi. To enable our young men and women to have intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology

Vocational and technology education and training encompasses every aspect of education and employment, this makes it unique form other forms of education. The neglect of technical and vocational education in Nigeria is socially and economically injurious because it is robbing the nation the contribution the graduates would make on national development (Abubakar, 2010). Since empowerment programmes are geared towards skills acquisition, human development, self reliance, self employment and poverty reduction then it implies that youth empowerment trainings cannot be completely functional if Technical vocational education and training is not integrated in it, this is because vocational and technical education and training is practical and applied skills based.

### **Conclusion**

The majority of African youth continue to face unemployment, underemployment, poverty, due to lack of skills, lack of relevant education, denied access to capital, and many unmet expectations. (African Union, 2012). This shows that the basic requisite for curbing unemployment and underemployment among Nigerian youths is equipping them with basic vocational and technical skills, relevant education that leads to self-reliance and self-employment and empowering them with capital to startup their business. Vocational and technical trades are not capital intensive, therefore, with the right skill and technical knowledge; one can start up his or her business without a large amount of money. Therefore when vocational technical education and training is inculcated in youth empowerment programmes, there is bound to be visible results in capacity building, unemployment reduction and self-employment amongst youths; this will in turn lead to national economic growth.

### **Recommendations**

Vocational and technical education is result oriented (Musa, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended that:

- i. TVET should be incorporated in all types of youth empowerment programmes.
- ii. Financial provision for startup capital should be provided for the beneficiaries of the empowerment programmes at the completion of the training, this is realizable since technical and vocational trade is not capital intensive.
- iii. Given that most graduates are unemployed as a result of insufficient jobs in their field of study, it becomes necessary for emphasis to be made on the importance of vocational and technical education for youths seeking for admission into tertiary institution so that they can easily be self-employed at the completion of their study.
- iv. Vocational and technical education should be introduced and implemented in all forms of youth empowerment programmes, graduate internship and youth employment training schemes.

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