

TECHNICAL CAPACITY BUILDING FOR YOUTHS EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *All over the world, youth capacity development has been recognized as critical to the growth and development of various economies. However, the growing complexities of unemployment, underemployment and poverty have engendered a new debate on the relevance of technical capacity building to the empowerment of youth and reduction of poverty. This paper therefore provides analytical perspectives on the variables of technical capacity building for youth empowerment in developing societies. These perspectives are novel, dynamic and strategic to the process of youth empowerment, capacity development for self-reliance and poverty reduction.*

KEYWORDS: Technical Capacity Building; Youth Empowerment; Poverty; Poverty Reduction

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt in the fact that presently, majority of Nigerian youth especially able-bodied men and women are unemployed and even those who are employed, mostly do not have the necessary skills and capacity to sustain themselves should they be out of work. Invariably, poverty which is borne out of deficit in the technical capacity for sustainable development is rampant in the society. In order to reduce poverty, technical capacity building of the formal education system is being sought whereas non-formal education, which according to Yasunaga (2014), refers to all types of education which take place outside of the formally organized school system, such as adult literacy and continuing education programmes for adults and out of school youth which do not necessarily emphasize certification are neglected.

United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1997a; 1997b) describes non-formal education as any organized and sustained educational activities that do not exactly correspond to the definition of formal education. In other words, non-formal education may refer to any educational activity organized by different agencies for a particular target group in a given population, especially adults and youth outside the framework of formal education to provide selected types of skills (Makerere, Makerere & Mazur, 2012). In addition, Ihejirika (2000) stated that, non-formal education is any organized systematic educational activity provided outside the framework of the formal school system to facilitate a selected type of learning to a particular sub-group in the population (adults, youth or children). It includes adult education, the apprenticeship, continuing education, in-service programmes, on-the-job training programmes, personnel and professional development refresher courses, staff development programmes, worker and student industrial training which is expected to develop the capacity of the recipient. Rare Non-formal education also includes community development such as rural development training,

manpower resource training, youth development, holiday programmes, mass mobilization campaigns and community health education (Amirize, 2001; Egbezor & Okanezi, 2008).

Technical capacity building is characterized by a high degree of flexibility, openness to change and innovation in its organization, pedagogy and delivery modes. It caters for diverse and context-specific learning needs of children, youth and adults worldwide. It thereby involves a wide range of stakeholders in the educational sector, such as the private sector, non-governmental organizations and public institutions (UNICEF/UIS, 2014).

Non-formal education has evolved over past decades and regained currency in recent years in the light of changing educational and developmental landscapes (Council of Europe, 2003; Rogers, 2004; Hoppers, 2006; 2007b; Rose, 2009; UNESCO Bangkok, 2012; UNESCO and UNICEF, 2013). In recent years, non-formal education has become an important phenomenon in developing countries where many international, national and local NGOs are providing non-formal education programmes for increasing income generation for the poor and disadvantaged groups (Islam & Mia, 2007).

The concept of capacity building also referred to as capacity development, centres on a conceptual approach to development that focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people from realizing their development goals while enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results. Hence, capacity building often refers to strengthening the skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities in developing societies so they can overcome the causes of their exclusion and suffering. Invariably, one of the important tools of capacity building is training. Training to remove people from obstacles that inhibit their well-being and that put them in poverty.

The above training is what Coombs (2003), sees as a scheme designed to generate expertise or skills needed to perform a particular job or series of jobs and training to improve individuals' general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupations (Dike, 2009). Training is to educate, teach, change the behaviour and make people acquire new knowledge and new skills. Training also teaches people to change their attitudes. Training in the deepest sense is to teach thinking, creating and learning to learn. Training is generally through practical exposure, either informally by practical exposure to job, or through formal institutions established for the purpose of providing exposure to required skills (Ogbimi, 2006). Training imparts an individual with skills required to function profitably in a particular job. Luckily, this is the aim of non-formal education.

The International Institute for Educational Planning IIEP (2006) stated that poverty is a multi-dimensional concept. Poverty means more than simply low income. There is nowadays a general consensus that poverty needs to be understood in a multidimensional manner (World Bank, 1990; 2000). This understanding goes well beyond the traditional use of income measures as proxies for poverty but poverty is related to low achievements in education and health (World Bank, 2000). The concept of poverty also includes vulnerability, exposure to risk and voicelessness/powerlessness (World Bank, 2000). Nigeria is currently facing a number of underdevelopment challenges, poverty, social unrest, hunger, disease, conflict, marginalization

and need to meet targets for the 2015 Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) (Ololube & Egbezor 2012).

According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994), cited by (Olubode & Egbezoe (2012), in order to address these growing challenges, a new development paradigm is called for; one that will put people at the centre of development with regards to economic growth, protecting the life and opportunities of the future as well as current generations, and respecting the natural systems of which all life depends. To this end, skills development can certainly constitute a powerful tool for poverty reduction. An increasing number of countries are designing innovative strategies in this direction. In addition, learning vocational skills when fighting poverty and skills development strategies must look not only at households but also at communities and territories, as local conditions are key elements. Providing training in vocational skills play an important role in equipping young people and adults with the skills required for work and social integration (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006).

The continuing emphasis on certificate as driven by the philosophy of formal system of education has obviously engendered certificated misfits in all facets of development engagements. Consequently, it becomes evident among youth in Nigeria that deficiencies in important technical skills for self-reliance development has led to sustained poverty profile even among able-bodied youth. Meanwhile, the general but wrongly held assumption that non-formal system of education is meant for less intelligent skill endowed youth, that cannot cope with the challenges of modern economies as driven by hitch, has further enhanced the deficits in the employment generation, wealth creation and opportunity driven paradigms which unfortunately, has worsen the desire and reality for self-sufficiency thereby expanding the poverty horizon among youth in Nigeria.

Most unfortunately, as the world is going technological in the processes of generating wealth and reducing poverty, there seems to be no deliberate corresponding attention given to the instrumentality of technical capacity building for youth empowerment and poverty reduction. The questions that emerge from this controversy are that: what are the variables of technical capacity building and empowerment for poverty reduction? Are there relationships between technical capacity building and youth empowerment for poverty reduction? What are the challenges that subsit in leveraging technical capacity building with youth empowerment for poverty reduction?

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2009 noted with concern that, strong capacity locally generated and sustained is essential for the success of any development (youth empowerment) enterprise, without it, the integrity of development achievement can be compromised and progress can remain rootless and illusory, separated from the capacities that already exist and vulnerable to the increasingly severe and complex challenges facing the youth in the society.

Poverty distribution in Nigeria: Perspective on Technical Capacity Building, Empowerment and Poverty Reduction

Studies have shown that all policy instruments at addressing the issues of poverty must be deliberate and consistent with the process of technical capacity building (Kaniaru, *KUNBAD, Mikandla & Kavagi, 2002). It is on this basis that, technical capacity at a national level is conceived

as a measure of what a country, through its people and institutions, are able to do. Technical capacity represents what a country's technical know-how is, as well as the ability to put that know-how to use. It is therefore practically difficult for youth to be empowered if the technical-know-how is not defined in the light of development engagement and experience.

In other words, technical capacity include not just the ability to conceive an idea, but to see it through to function (OECD, 2006). This is the skills acquisition context of the process. Reducing poverty and building institutional capacity framework or architecture for the reduction of poverty is thus driven by innovative minds and this is achieved by promoting technical capacity as one of the levels of ensuring sustainable change. Technical capacity is critical to all facets of youth engagement in agriculture, telecommunication, health care practices, services delivery and distribution logistics. This is perhaps the justification of the United Nation Development Programme (2009) integrated systems approach to technical capacity building which the UNDP refers to as the barometers of capacity development. In the UNDP's barometers, three levels are recognized in the technical capacity development where capacity is grown and nurtured in an enabling environment, in organizations and within individuals.

Within these three levels, UNDP (2009) identified four core issues that are very critical to the development of capacity, namely; institutional arrangement (policies, rules, practices, inspiration and motivation), knowledge (what people know, education) accountability and transparency (service delivery, inter-face between service providers and oversight bodies). Hence, to the UNDP (2009) technical capacity is a process of growth and evolution in a context of upwardly inspiralling cycle of events. In this process, people's skills, competencies and abilities are strengthened so that they can overcome the causes of poverty, exclusion and suffering, while the capacity of the people are developed, the situation gives rise to empowerment.

Empowerment in this sense particularly youth empowerment according to Ledford and Lucas (2013) is a process where children and young people are encouraged (capacitated) to take charge of their lives. A distinction is evident between youth development and empowerment. This is because, while development centered on developing individual, empowerment focused on creating greater community of change which relies on the development of individual capacity (Golay & Malatesta, 2014). Interestingly, youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Activities inherent in this process may include youth led media advocacy, youth rights, youth activism, especially those involved in community decision making (Ledford *et al*, 2013). Evidence of youth empowerment process manifest in six interdependent dimensions namely; psychological, community, organizational, economic, social and cultural. (Sazama & Young, 2006).

Psychological Empowerment:– this enhances youths' consciousness, belief in self-efficiency, awareness and knowledge of problems (poverty) and solutions, particularly with reference to how youth can address problems that inhibit and harm their quality of life (Guerra, & Bradshaw, 2008).

Community Empowerment: This focuses on enhancing the growth of the community through leadership development, improving communication and creating a network of support to mobilize the community to address concerns (poverty) among others (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

Organizational Empowerment:- this focuses on creating a base for resources for a community (youth), including voluntary organizations, unions, and associations that aim to protect, promote, secure and advocate for the powerless and voiceless (women, children and excluded) how to take ownership of their assets and how to attain security of income, saving and investment (Sazama *et al*; 2006).

Social empowerment:- this focuses on social inclusion and literacy as well as helping youth find the resources to be proactive in their communities.

Cultural Empowerment:- this focuses on recreating cultural practices and redefining cultural rules and norms for youth.

In specific terms, Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) reported in their research that, the goals of youth empowerment and associated programmes are aimed at creating healthier and higher qualities of life wherein poverty has no place of recognition. Consequently, five competencies of healthy youth life arising from the above dimensions of empowerment as derived from youth technical capacity are evident in the following:

- i. positive sense of self-efficiency and worth;
- ii. self-control (power for decisions-making) having a voice on issues;
- iii. decision-making skills;
- iv. moral system of belief; and
- v. pro-social connectedness

These goals are achieved through various empowerment programmes which operate globally. However, such programmes that focus on poverty alleviation or poverty reduction must advocate for constructive confrontation to enhance the social power of youth who are considered disadvantaged, excluded and deprived into the poverty cycle.

For example, the 5C's model of youth empowerment focuses on emphasizing competence, confidence, connection, and character and caring. A sixth C of contribution to society was later added, which according to Matin & Hulme (2003), focuses primarily on engagement of youth as a key marker of positive youth development with interest on creative initiatives for empowerment. Besides, a social action model of empowerment also aims at disadvantaged people becoming empowered organized and educated so that they can create and initiate positive and progressive change.

In a related development, the study of Idoko (2014) on skill acquisition and youth empowerment in Nigeria established that skill acquisition programmes for youth is able to reduce unemployment and enhance the self-sustenance of youth in addressing poverty and other deprivations. Idoko (2014) specifically noted in his paper that, the various skill acquisition programmes for youth empowerment in Nigeria included the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (1988); the Small-scale industrial and graduate farmers programme of National Directorate of Employment NDE, 1988; the youth employment and vocational skill development scheme of NDE, 1988; back-to land programme and skill acquisition 1978 and the green revolution programme 1978.

Consequently, Idoko (2014) recommended that when the culture of creative ideas is instilled in youth, they will be productive and self-reliant (empowered) members of the society. This is possible because, skill acquisition is meant for those who need it, want it and can profit from it (Olaitan, 2006).

Capacity Building and Empowerment: Multi-dimensional Perspective on Poverty Reduction

Poverty is a natural deprivation of basic necessities of life arising from exclusion, discrimination, oppression and lack of or inability to utilize basic skill endowment, Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton and Bird (2009) contended that, despite the multiple ideological roots to the concepts of building technical capacity, development and empowerment, it must be understood that empowerment is a progression that helps people gain control over their own lives and increases the capacity of people to act on issues that they themselves define as important. As an emancipation process, technical capacity building focuses on the empowerment of people, who are probably disadvantaged to get empowered in order to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. This is a first step to poverty reduction.

In this vein, Luttrell *et al.*, (2009) reported the activities of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in terms of empowerment. These activities strengthen the poor through bolstering self-confidence and ability to develop potential solutions of their own. The multi-dimensional approach measures individual capacities and collective action to address inequalities that are the causes of poverty. The emphasis is that, poverty is not only about low incomes, but also emanates from social exclusion and lack of access to power, voice and security that now find expression in absolute deprivation.

In a research conducted among International Development Organizations (IDO) Kuti SP, Pillinger, Hemink, Smith and Jayakara (2009), various perspectives were provided on empowerment and poverty. Reducing poverty according to these writers would therefore take into cognizance these perspectives or dimensions which when properly articulated would provide the unit of possible solutions to the poverty questions. Technical capacity building for empowerment will assist in the drastic reduction of poverty in the following ways:

1. *Attainment of functional literary skills*: Functional literacy is entrenched in the youth through the technical capacity building process to enable them become functional in all development activities. Functional literacy opens up the horizon of awareness that is devoid of ignorance and deprivation. Bakare (2011) contended that there is a functional relationship between the state of literacy, the level and distribution of poverty. The expectation is that, functional literacy is an integrational model that incorporate income generation, healthy skills and empowerment in all poverty reduction schemes that are wholly committed to human development.

2. *Empowerment that is derived from technical capacity building is expected to provide an intersection between religion, health, economic, social and political capacity*: Until such intersection is reached, the orientation towards civility may be trajectory to the fight against poverty. Such intersection will define the boundaries of corruption, which of course permeates all personalities whether literates or illiterates and considered as propellant of poverty.

3. *Poverty reduction must be situated in raising the social, economic, political cultural, analytical, reasoning skills, problem-solving skills and decision-making skills of the youth for self-development and self-articulation in all facets of development.*
4. *Sustainability of poverty reduction projects and programmes for continuity is critical. This is a major concern to development partners: Youth technical capacity building activities that are sustainable are capable of addressing engendering long term empowerment schemes for poverty reduction.*
5. It is of note that, the productive engagement of the poor's abundant assets – that is labour, must be institutionalized by government especially in developing countries. This obviously requires policies for market incentives, stable social and political institutions, good and functional infrastructure and adaptable technology. This is a critical step in the reduction of poverty through the empowerment variables.
6. The elimination of social and economic exclusion would also imply that, social services must be made available and accessed by all people irrespective of race, class and religion. This is to ensure that there is redistribution of wealth and incomes in order to solve the problems associated with inequalities. Kazeem and Aghedo (2015) advised that, poverty reduction programmes must be investment driven, which again provides justification for the regenerational attribute of such programmes as measures of sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Poverty is evident where there is high rate of corruption and so, it does not know any boundary. However, every genuine effort to reduce poverty must be individually driven through the development of appropriate creative capacity that can engender the individual skills for functional role in the development process. Efforts have been made in this paper to explain the extent of poverty in Nigeria and the relevance of technical capacity building as a strategy for empowering the youth towards reducing poverty and development of self-reliance. The author is of the opinion that poverty is synonymous with high rate of corruption hence every genuine effort to this process is relevant to technical capacity building for youths empowerment. Nevertheless, it is underscored in this paper that, an enabling environment needs be put in place that is devoid of corruptions, nepotism, unstable or unreliable policies and programmes that may be unfortunately tied to youths development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is against the above issues that the following recommendations are made.

1. Empowering programmes for youth either in terms of individual capacities and collective action must address inequalities that are causes of poverty.
2. Drastic Reduction in poverty and building world-class centres of technical capacity development in the developing economies will not happen by chance. Technical capacity building must be promoted among youth for sustainable process of poverty reduction to be achieved.

3. Empowerment projects and programmes must adopt method that emphasizes reciprocity among adults and youths with a focus on shared decision making and effective learning. This is expected to promote and sustain shared content as a critical factor for empowering youth.

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