

Poverty Reduction: Adopting Vocational and Technical Education as A Veritable Tool for Developing Youths for Gainful Employment and Self-Reliance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *One of the targets of the nations of the world as prescribed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to terminate poverty by the year 2030. Less than a decade to the deadline for the realization of this laudable situation of “no poverty” among the people in across the globe, the economic situation in Nigeria is such that more and more people are becoming poorer having weaker purchasing powers to cope with ever increasing inflation rates. Youth unemployment keeps increasing. The paper identifies the gap between the educational content to which most of the Nigerian youths are exposed and the required skills in the markets and industries; thereby resulting in unemployment and underemployment. Technical and Vocational Education with entrepreneurship training has been examined and presented as a more reliable educational model that better prepare youths for fulfilled employment and wealth creation. The paper suggests the roles of different stakeholders in ensuring poverty reduction.*

KEYWORDS: Nigeria wealth creation, poverty, unemployment, TVE, SDGs

INTRODUCTION

Keeping All on the Same Page by Clarifying Concepts

It is pertinent to set up the flow of the arguments in this paper by briefly underscoring the exact meaning of some of the key items used in this paper such as “education”, “vocational”, “technical” and “employment”. According to the online Dictionary, education is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. Education is construed as an activity or process that consists of cultivating certain dispositions which include skills, abilities, knowledge, attitude, beliefs, values and character (Frankena *et al*, 2002). In the same vein, Bowan and Peter (1974) define education as “acquired virtue which is the direct resultant effect of individual encounter with a

given experience”. According to these scholars, the experience may be of skills, elements of knowledge, influence of others, or the total atmosphere of a social environment (Adeyeye A. & Adekeye D.O. 2016:119). The import of this assertion is that the expected outcome of any educational experience is the acquisition and display of virtue by the recipient or learner. Virtue in this sense is not restricted to moral virtue, but in a broader sense of it which includes intellectual and artistic virtues.

Education is vocational if it relates to an occupation or employment; vocational education is directed toward specific occupations and their cognate skills. Technical education relates to particular subjects, art, or craft or its techniques. Employment is the act of being lawfully engaged for the purpose of earning income. There is full-time employment, underemployment and unemployment. There is full-time employment when the employee is engaged for at least forty (40) hours a week. According to Briggs (1973), unemployment is the difference between the amount of labour employed at current wage and working conditions and the amount of labour not hired at these levels. Unemployment refers to a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment (Fajana, 2000). In other words, unemployment is a situation whereby people who are willing to work at the prevailing wage rate are unable to find job (Paterson, Price, & Reich, 2006).

Crisis of Youth Unemployment and Poverty in Nigeria

Many writers and scholars have provided vivid descriptions of the development status in Nigeria, Some of them are of the view that “this is a country that is blessed with abundant resources – human and material – yet the social being of a large percentage of her citizens is characterised by clear signs of underdevelopment; their existence is one harrowing and continuous struggle, plagued by poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance” (Arua & Oladipo 1991). The global experience of the progress in science and technology, which fascinated some thinkers in the 1930s, has not positively impacted Nigeria in real development terms. For example, the famous British economist John Maynard Keynes' prediction that by the end of the 20th century, most problems of human needs would have been sufficiently overcome and that the problem would become how to manage leisure has become unrealistic from the Nigerian perspective. Today, two decades after the deadline for eradication of the problems of basic human needs by Keynes, poverty, inequality and insecurity have escalated in Nigeria.

There are two major global blueprints, which we consider in this lecture as constituting an expression of universal vision and mandate for comprehensive socio-economic development of every human being. These documents: the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** serve as theoretical instruments to guide nations of the world on policy formulations, implementation strategy, assessment of performance and sustainable development templates among other things. The latter that is the Sustainable Development Goals calls on countries to begin efforts to achieve the seventeen (17) sustainable development goals over the next fifteen (15) years. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute the shared vision of humanity and a social contract between the world's leaders and their people. They are checklist for the welfare of people and planet, and a blueprint for success. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include:

1. **No poverty**
2. **Zero hunger**
3. **Good health and well-being**
4. **Quality education**
5. Gender equality
6. **Clean water and sanitation**
7. Affordable clean energy
8. **Decent work and economic growth**
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. **Sustainable cities and communities**
12. **Responsible consumption and production**
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. **Peace, justice and strong institutions**
17. Partnership for the goals

The above goals, and especially the highlighted ones, constitute the basic indices for measuring a society that is moving in the right direction or otherwise. The standard of living of most Nigerians, which is the reflection of the “real” national economic situation of our country, indicates that many Nigerians are currently living below the minimum requirement of meaningful human existence as stipulated in these global human development instruments. This condition is apparent in two major ways: first; many Nigerians lack the purchasing power to access their basic needs. Secondly, many Nigerians live in perpetual fear of insecurity of lives and property.

The economic situation in Nigeria since independence in 1960 has been largely characterised by incessant degradation and inconsistency, coupled with increasing unemployment, poverty, inadequate social facilities, poor health care delivery, to mention a few. The long years of military rule, which were virtually void of democratic principles and values, had a devastating effect on the Nigerian economy. At the same time, the many years of democratic regimes have not in a meaningful and sustained manner translated to better standard of living in the lives of millions of Nigerians.

Although, it is not within the scope of this paper to debate which of the two forms of governance is a better alternative in the delivery of indices of sustainable development, the point remains that many Nigerians hoped that transition to democratic governance in Nigeria, which ushered in the new millennium, would enhance their economic and overall development aspirations. Under the two dispensations (military and democracy), Economic planning was haphazard, policies were distorted and implementation processes were undermined. Corruption, fraud, dishonesty, gross indiscipline and other forms of financial impropriety were recurring features of the two dispensations. The Nigerian economy has largely remained comatose with soaring figures of unemployed population.

High level unemployment has become the trademark of the Nigerian economy. Many of the graduates from institutions of higher learning in the country are either simply unemployed or underemployed. Thousands of hitherto employed citizens have lost their jobs in the very recent years. The following statistics captured in the Punch (online) newspaper of 23 December, 2017 is a vivid revelation of the unemployment situation in Nigeria. “The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) says the country’s unemployment rate rose from 14.2% to 18.8% in 2017. It also said that Nigeria’s labour population increased from 83.9million in the second quarter to 85.1million in the third quarter of 2017, a difference of 1.2million in additional workforce. The NBS state that the total number of people in full-time employment (at least 40 hours a week) declined from 52.7million in the second quarter of 2017 to 51.1million in third quarter”. The inference that could be deduced from these figures is that; as the workforce keeps expanding on the one hand, labour space keeps shrinking on the other hand. In all of these, the situation of the Nigerian youths is particularly discouraging. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 33.1% in the third quarter of 2017. On the average, youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was 21.73% between 2014 and 2017 (this figure is above the general unemployment rate that peaked at 18.8% in 2017).

We shall conclude this section of the paper by suggesting some of the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. An individual could be unemployed if he or she has no good or service to offer in exchange for income. Many of the Nigerian youths, even graduates, are not equipped with the capacity to offer those goods and services that the society requires in term of skills. There is no gainsaying that this unemployment phenomenon is as a result of continuous and over production of graduates without saleable skills. Frankly speaking, most Nigerian graduates are unemployable because they lack the employability skills (Aririhu, 2022). This is as a result of apparent disconnect between the societal needs and the products of our institutions of learning. Basically, the gap exists between the type of personalities that the current market requires and the kind of personalities that constitute the labour force. If the society (market) needs adventurous creative thinkers and the bulk of the workforce are conservative conformists, unemployment may increase unabated.

Education, being strategic to socio-economic development of any nation, makes it very reasonable for whoever is addressing the issue of economic challenges and importantly, the problem of unemployment to consider reviewing the educational policies and practices of the concerned country. In essence, inadequacy of the educational policy in driving industrialization in Nigeria implies that the nation will be left with very little of those skills required for economic expansion especially in emerging economies and more of those specializations that are not urgently required by the market.

Technical and Vocational Education: Strategic Capacity Building for Employment and Job Creation

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004, 2014), posited that Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving in addition to general education, the studies of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations at various sectors of

economic development. Technical education “is a planned programme of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education”. Vocational education and training “prepares learners for careers that are based in manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation”. Vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to “live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society”. That is, it prepares recipients for competitiveness in the global economy. Technical and Vocational Education positions one for the world of work with which the individual becomes reliant and can make contributions to the development of the society. Put succinctly, the purpose of Technical and Vocational Education is therefore to equip individuals with skills and knowledge that will enable them to be more economically productive. As employers look for new talents, every year among new graduates, it is important to not only have a solid education but graduates that have features that stand them out from the rest of the graduating students (Osolor, 2013, Olanipekun, Brimah & Rabi, 2015). These features could be occupational skills derived from technical and vocational learning experiences.

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is strategic both to personal capacity building as well as national development. Hence, it has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development (Dike, 2005). Therefore, it has been suggested that leaders should appreciate the relevance of technical and vocational education in building a productive workforce capable of engendering sustainable national socio-economic development. The utility of technical and vocational education is that it enhances personal freedom. In other words, the individual who possesses one or several occupational skills has plethora opportunities in the areas of employment and job creation. It enhances personal capacities for gainful employment and self-reliance. Skill acquisition is one of the surest ways through which young people can find ways into the labour market either in the public or private sectors (Anaele, 2002). It provides students with “life skills” to become productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas, enlarge the economic pie, and increase personal freedom (Dike, 2005).

However, the current scenario in Nigeria is that many graduates of Technical Colleges are not excluded from the devastating unemployment trend. Some of the major reasons that readily come to mind are:

1. Many of the Technical and Vocational institutions are not adequately equipped with required facilities and personnel. Students of these Colleges are therefore not exposed to modern equipment and skills to cope with advancement in various vocations.
2. The current market space requires something more than hard skills which many of the Technical and Vocational Colleges offer. To excel in the contemporary business and market environments, there are certain non-negotiable soft skills which must be appreciated and imbibed by potential graduates of Technical and Vocational institutions.

Entrepreneurship Development: Path to Sustainable Wealth Creation

The Nigerian Government, through its relevant agency that is saddled with the task of regulating academic matters in the Nigerian Universities - NUC, having realised the inevitability of entrepreneurship training in developing a productive workforce, has made it mandatory for all prospective graduates to undergo entrepreneurial trainings alongside their respective disciplines. The entrepreneurial training basically introduces students to various aspects of entrepreneurship through business ideation. Entrepreneurship is a value addition that helps to convert raw and hard skills to wealth. According to the National Universities Commission (2014), the objectives of entrepreneurship are to enable students to:

1. Understand the relationship of enterprise, entrepreneur, business, entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity.
2. Analyse the historical perspective of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, and relate it to the recent trend of unemployment, under-employment and job dissatisfaction, personal, national and global economic recession.
3. Identify the roles of entrepreneurial development agencies and regulatory bodies.
4. Cultivate the spirit of entrepreneurship.
5. Correct wrong attitudes and mind-sets and develop high entrepreneurial potential in student.
6. Select possible business ideas.
7. Build the capacity to develop business plan to start a business.

Wealth creation is a product of the mind. It starts from the prepared and trained mindset and it is sustained in the same manner. The superiority of the trained mind is evidenced in the fact that artisans are not necessarily wealth creators, however, it takes the ability of the entrepreneur (who may not be an artisan) to utilize the resources around him (including the artisans) to create wealth. In order to transcend the limit of earning wages from labour, it is important that technical and vocational skills be spiced-up with elements of basic entrepreneurial training and development.

CONCLUSION

Considering the national and global economic realities, it could be said that there is no end in sight for the increasing rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Public and private establishments are financially stressed. Workers of private organizations are being laid off and workers of government institutions are being owed salaries and allowances, leaving many of them in the same poverty just like the unemployed. Therefore, the penchant for the white collar jobs is no more encouraged.

The option for the government is to review its national educational policy in such a way that vocational and technical education becomes more attractive to the teeming population of youths. Modern technologies, equipment and teaching aids should be acquired into the vocational and technical institutions across Nigeria. Mission and private organizations should focus and invest in the vocational and technical development of the youths. Parents and youths should wake up to the current reality of

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national and global economies/markets. It is high time they embraced and prioritize technical and vocational education as a potent way of stemming the tide of youth unemployment and arresting the imminent youth restiveness which may consume the entire nation.

Finally, it must be noted that the days of “certificates as meal tickets” are long gone. Formal technical and vocational education trains the youths’ minds as well as their hands to make them complete, self-reliant and financially free.

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