

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT REDUCTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE REALISTIC WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Poverty and unemployment are issues that affect national development which need to be addressed urgently by means of empowering the youth. The paper attempted to explain some basic concepts such as youth empowerment, poverty, unemployment and sustainable national development. The paper also x- rayed some problems of youth unemployment and poverty to include: high rate of crimes such as, kidnapping, thurgery and prostitution among the female as well as urban migration leading to housing congestion in the cities, environmental problems and high rate of insecurity in the country. The paper recommends that policy makers should try to encourage entrepreneurial education and vocational and technical education to be incorporated into school curriculum for self employment and as well give loan to students after graduation so that they can establish their own business and become employers of labour rather than job seekers.

Key words: Youth Empowerment, Poverty, Unemployment and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has been increasing because most graduates seem to lack marketable skills that will make them to become creators rather than job seekers. Federal Government acknowledged that about 80% of Nigerians' youth are unemployed while about 10% are under employed Salami (2013). Report from National Bureau of Statistics (2010) also indicates that approximately 112.5% of the Nigerian population lives in relative poverty conditions. In the light of the above scenario, United Nations (UN) in a bid to eradicate poverty, declared the year 1997-2006 for poverty eradication decade. Both national and international initiatives identify education as the answer to poverty eradication and youth empowerment. According to Nuhu and Yusuf (2011), Nigeria is among 192 countries that signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2000 for attainment of the goals by the year 2015. However, the goals were not actually attained. Youth empowerment is the central issue of development, particularly human resource development.

Development needs to be powered through the youth as the critical agent because youth is a young man, fresh and vigorous occupying life between childhood and manhood (Daku 2007). The goals were not fully actualized and gave birth to another agenda in September 2015 by United Nations (UN) setting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to serve as benchmarks for every nation to ensure global prosperity, protection of the planet, and an eradication of poverty. Slade (2017) opined that the agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom and we recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. All countries and stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.

Empowerment is a relative term which is socially appealing and suggests a way of gaining a capacity to effect a change. Poverty is an age long phenomenon that has bedeviled both human and societal image in one way and the other. Poverty is the evidence of the failure of modern societies to adopt social and economic strategies that will benefit the generality of Nigerian citizens, especially youths. Nigeria is richly endowed with both human and natural resources, yet it is caught in the cyclic web of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and diseases (Ogbiji, Ode and Agida, 2013). Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries of the world today and still carries tag of developing nation, despite the fact that it is the 6th largest producer of crude oil in the world market. Youth form the largest population among the young and the adult. Youth is just like the connecting link between the young and old people in our society. According to Daku (2007), the youths are the representatives of individuals with limited priority of life that can contribute significantly to the development of any nation economically, politically and socially. The youth constitute about 40% of human society,

considering their strength numerically (Kalu, 2007). The period of youth is the time of a particular intense discovery of human as well as the properties and capacities associated with it (Kalu, 2007). The period of youth is between the ages of 6-30 in Nigeria according to national planning. It is the period of complex change, rapid and physical change, development and intellectual change, mental alertness and a search for truth and meaning of life. Youth may also mean the stage of physical growth and psychological development through which individual human is built upon.

The concept of empowerment is not an end in itself, but a means to an end (Daku, 2007). He maintained that it is the ability to do something and the process where there is a facilitator "Y", whereby a powerless "X" is made powerful or more powerful than going through "P" refers to empowerment. This is because empowerment has the seed of making persons independent, assertive and autonomous, as it gives the recipient the capacity and ability to be rational and more reflective in actions. Daku (2007) sees empowerment as expansion of assets and capabilities of the poor people to influence, control, participate in, negotiate with, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. It is also the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of the deprived groups (youths). Empowerment enables groups or youths to perform better by improving themselves, families and the nation or country at large.

Empowerment according to Ogbiji, Ode and Agida (2013), is a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means of access to and control over such resources and means. This implies that an individual has the potential to acquire power through his or her initiatives and as well can have power through another person or party. It is also a process of awareness of capacity building resulting to greater participation, decision making, and control of power to transformative action. This is because empowerment makes an individual, especially the youth to gain insight and awareness of what is unfavorable, undesirable about their current situation and to perceive a better situation on the possibility of attaining and realizing what is within their reach and what to do for the betterment of the society, and development of nations. For instance, in an attempt to empower youths in Anambra State, Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State presented a cheque of N100, 000.00 each to about 506 beneficiaries after two weeks character/vocational skills acquisition training programme (Onuchukwu, 2014). This is part of measures of tackling unemployment in Anambra State and empowers the youth.

Development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism as attempts have been made by erudite scholars to conceptualize development in different way due their divergent opinions. Some of these definitions will be explored for the purpose of this paper as thus:

In the opinion of Lawal & Oluwatoyin (2011) development is perceived as an idea that connotes all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not imperil the future, as it demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. Development seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. The authors believes that development is usually involves not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life.

Development is a process of establishing people to accomplish things they could not do before. This means applying information, values, attitudes and skills previously unavailable to a nation. Daku (2007) stressed that development is a process in which a system is transformed into stronger, more organized, efficient and effective form and human wants and aspirations proves to be more satisfying. Kalu (2007) equally defined development as "the transitional process of sustaining multifaceted improvement in human condition leading to positive structural and functional changes in social, political, economic, scientific, and all aspects of human endeavors.

From the foregoing, national development can be seen as a planned and sustained growth which moves a nation from its present status to preferred level. This implies moving from mass poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and frustration that goes with underdevelopment. Economic growth, socio-political, economic and educational variables all support national development just like what the various government of Nigeria since 1962 have been trying to achieve. Unemployment in economic sense is a condition that exists in an economy when able bodied men and qualified persons willing to work cannot find productive and paid job to earn their living (Musa & Ibrahim, 2011). Unemployment is a justification of human resource wastage because it encompasses under-utilization

or miss-utilization and non utilization of a good number of employable people in any nation. This implies that people that are qualified and active to work are unsuccessfully engaged in working for a living.

Sustainable Development is development that is consistent with the needs of the present with a solid framework for future generations to meet their own needs. This is development that can be sustained for a long time not minding deterioration or societal or societal and environmental changes. If development is stable then it can be considered sustainable. Although, sustainable development is a concept prone to several interpretations or conceptions, it is development that is consistent with growth. According to Ajibola, Lukman and Habiba (2014) Sustainable development has been variously conceived in terms of vision expression, value change, moral development, social reorganization or transformational processes towards a desired future or better world. The core idea was defined most influentially by the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Commission) as, "development which meets the needs the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987:8).

In another related development, Haruna & Abdullahi (2011) perceive Sustainable development as a process of change by which the exploitation of natural resources and creation of technological development are in harmony. It encompasses all round growth and focuses on the developing nation on how they can achieve awareness, develop skills, attitudes and abilities that can empower them to harness the natural resources of their environment efficiently and effectively in a sustainable manner in such a way that the quality of lives of both the present and future generations will be ensured. According to Oladosu (2014), sustainable development means gradual process of growth towards an advanced stage in a continuous manner. In another dimension, Oladosu (2014) assert that sustainable development addresses four major obstacle faced by states in their efforts at maximizing the welfare of their people by:

- i. Achieving competitiveness in a diversified economy.
- ii. Refocusing agriculture to remove hunger.
- iii. Reducing the gap of inequality and poverty among citizens.
- iv. Promoting peaceful co-existence among its citizens.

Therefore sustainable development is possible if the state is able to attain the above conditions and continuously withstand the stress that tends to undermine its development. Development according to Haruna & Abdullahi (2011) is the improvement and ability of a society to influence the environment economically, politically, socially, culturally and technologically for the advancement of living condition and wellbeing of the generality of the society.

Poverty and Unemployment and factors responsible for it

Poverty as a menace has no universally accepted definition. It depends on the parameter or dimension one perceives or views it. Maduagwu (2000) opined that poverty makes people to compromise moral values and forget it completely. This is because poverty causes corruption and corruption is an effect of poverty and loss of moral values. Haruna and Abdullahi (2012), define poverty as a state of being poor, having little money, not having at all, and not able to get the necessities of life. Poverty is also defined as the scarcity of human basic needs and inability of individual society to acquire human basic needs for existence (Haruna & Abdullahi, 2012). It is inability of people to discharge their basic responsibilities. This is because poverty exists only when people lack the means of satisfying their basic needs.

Poverty according to Udoh and Ukpong (2013) is manifested in poverty history, intellect and ideology. This is because the people that are deprived of basic needs are regarded as the poor in the society. Poverty is also conceptualized as the state of human beings having little or no material means of living a comfortable life due to exploitation of the poor by the rich, bad government, and lack of individual responsibilities leading to crime and violence. Poverty is a pathetic life situation by which people lives from hand to mouth finding it difficult to eat three square meals a day.

In Nigeria, there are several factors that account for high rate of poverty and unemployment. The two concepts go hand in hand as poverty is a product of unemployment, one factor leads to the other. Nuhu and Yusuf (2011) outlined causes of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria to include; ill-planned system of education, rapid population growth, the pursuit of inappropriate government policies and programmes, neglect of entrepreneurial education, non-mechanization of agriculture, imperfect information, rural-urban migration, low capacity utilization, hostile economic environment among others.

Haruna (2014) also maintained that lack of continuity of government policies and programmes, corrupt or bad governance, over population, lack of self-discovery, privatization and commercialization of public enterprise, quest for white collar jobs, high salaries and allowances for political office holders, lack of proper supervision among others can lead to poverty and unemployment in Nigeria and it affects development of nations.

In another related development, Opara and Ugwuadu (2013) states that growth rate of poverty in Nigeria is as a result of such factors among others as production factors, income distribution, economic, governance problem (corruption), inter sensorial factors, gender factor and social conflict factors. In the same light, Adaji and Dasuma (2011) assert that imbalance created by colonial administration and post-independence leaders, high population growth, low productivity and corruption are causes of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. In the views of Onoja and Zakari (2011), causes of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria is attributed to corruption and embezzlement, excessive external debt burden, rapid population growth, lack of comprehensive national poverty alleviation policy, poor leadership and lack of sound agricultural policy and protracted neglect of the sector.

Idoko and Agyenyi (2011) opined that poverty in Nigeria is caused by lack of basic services, lack of assets, lack of access to means of supportive rural development in poor areas, inadequate access to market and lack of access to employment opportunities. From the foregoing analysis of various causes of poverty, and unemployment in Nigeria, permit us to discuss some of the points highlighted at this juncture.

One of the major causes of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria is high rate of population estimated at about 2.83%. While the Gross Domestic Product is only 2.7%, which affects the living standard of people. People marry and give birth any how without considering the implications on the development of Nigerian economy.

Lack of self-discovery among individuals is equally responsible for poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. Some people have potentials in them that will make them self-reliant and become self-employed, thereby reducing poverty and unemployment in the society. Privatization and commercialization also causes poverty and unemployment in our society. For instance, Aduabo (2013) stated that Nigeria, Africa's largest producer, plans to begin privatizing its four state owned oil refineries before the end of the first quarter of 2015, according to petroleum minister, Diezani Alison Madueke. Workers that are gainfully employed in the oil sector will face unemployment and consequently may lead to poverty as they may be relieved of their appointments.

Demand for white collar job by young graduates is yet another cause of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria; most of our graduates today only depend largely on government works without discovering the potentials in them to be self-employed, and even become an employer of labour to alleviate themselves from poverty and unemployment.

Finally, lack of comprehensive poverty alleviation policies is also responsible for high rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. In this case, government policies like embargo on employment, retrenchment of workers, federal character and quota system, state of origin and lack of proper planning for the targeted group of beneficiaries who are the poor and unemployed youths are responsible for poverty and unemployment in Nigeria.

Consequences of Poverty and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

The consequences or implications of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria are enormous which can be observed clearly in our society Nigeria. Some of the implications of poverty and unemployment are x-rayed as follows:-

One of the consequences of poverty and unemployment is breakdown of law and order. According to Adeoluwa (2013), insecurity in Nigeria today have always been put at the door step of poverty and unemployment, porous borders, corrupt officials, poor funding of agencies. Since a hungry man, they say is an angry man, he maintain that the poor youths who are unemployed could not obey the rules and regulations governing them and the society, rather they compensate themselves with dubious means of survival like cultism, terrorism, kidnapping, political thugry, and 419 to mention but just a few disturbing the development of nations, economically, politically and socially. Elucidating further,

Onojo and Adaji (2011) stated that the growing scale of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria has created an avalanche of available non elites who are hireable to commit arson, assassinations, general mayhem, and stealing of ballot boxes.

Another great consequence of poverty and unemployment is crime. The rate of crime in the country is quite alarming. Incidences of robbery, drug trafficking, human trafficking, militants in the Niger Delta and Boko-Haram in the North Eastern part of Nigeria are all attributed to poverty and unemployment among youths in particular.

More so importantly, the image of the country in the international arena is sadly enough. Nigeria has been given various negative labels such as terrorist country, center of kidnapping, corrupt nation and above all, the center of criminal behavior (Abekhale and Antyo 2013). In international scene, Nigerians are seen with suspicion as they are considered dishonest, corrupt, fraudulent and destructive. All these labels have reduced the reputation and image that was accorded to Nigeria as a nation. It is embarrassing to obtain a visa to travel abroad as a Nigerian, as it requires serious interviews. For one to address himself as a Nigerian abroad, it takes courage because he may be called some derogatory names, and as a result of these attitudes that are negative, it is quite unfortunate as Nigerians may no longer attract friends and foreign investors into the country.

In addition, ethnic and religious crises in some parts of the country are largely attributed to unemployment and poverty because an idle mind they say is the devil's workshop. Similarly, poverty and unemployment could render government policies ineffective, weaken the basis for growth and development and consequently make the system to collapse.

Corruption is yet another implication of poverty and unemployment. Corruption weakens the political systems and renders the basic principles of democracy and governance impotent. For instance in many cases, corruption are induced directly or indirectly by sheer pressure of poverty and greed to escape poverty in future. According to Adaji and Dasuma (2011), Nigeria has received over \$300 billion in oil revenue alone over 25 years, and this is enough to bid poverty farewell, but owing to issue of corruption that infiltrates in both low and high places, laudable programmes and policies of the government when frustrated, hinders national development.

Efforts of Successive Governments towards Youth Empowerment, Poverty and Unemployment reduction in Nigeria since 1972 till date

Successive governments' administration in Nigeria has initiated various poverty alleviation programmes aiming towards national development. The first poverty alleviation programmes in 1972 under General Yakubu Gowon's administration were National Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) aimed at boosting food production and unemployment, but the effort was not fully achieved due to corrupt officials. This is justified from the investigation panel that found all the governors under Gowon's administration guilty of corrupt enrichment and assets worth more than 10 million naira confiscated. More than two thousand public officials were also indicted according to Akpotor in Edimeh (2007).

On assumption of office in 1976, General Murtala Ramat Muhammed after seizing power from Gowon left no one in doubt about getting rid of corruption in Nigeria, as many corrupt officials were relieved of their jobs, but unfortunately the regime was short lived as a result of Murtala's assassination; which led to excessive increase of corruption by public officials that were massively dismissed. General Obasanjo took over power in 1976, after the demise of his boss (Murtala) and continued with Jaji declaration to wage war against corruption, but the irreversible cankerworm continued to exist among officials under his regime before handing over power to democratically elected president Shehu Shagari in 1979. The level of corruption greatly increased in Nigeria through inflation of contracts, embezzlement of public funds, ghost workers syndrome, senseless importation and abandoned projects among others. According to Haruna (2007), effort was made to avert corruption and reduce poverty by introducing ethical revolution in 1982 to re-orientate Nigerians on the culture of greed, graft, patience, discipline and avarice to one of probity and accountability. All these efforts during this administration as a result of corrupt governors proved abortive as all governors except Balarabe Musa were found guilty of corruption. Victor Masi, the finance minister then embezzled N15.3 million, Nigeria was duped of N15 billion through wheat importation, Alhaji Umaru Dikko was notorious for office abuse, £16.2 billion was siphoned to England through the JMB affair (Edimeh, 2007), and projects were abandoned littering the national development all of which made the ethical revolution a mere lip service and led to the overthrown of the government in a coup led by General Muhammadu Buhari.

General Buhari launched War against Indiscipline (WAI) to curb corruption, and introduced back to land in 1984 to alleviate poverty and hunger. The regime was actually tough on corruption in public service, disorderliness, smuggling and drug trafficking, but lack monitoring and supervision to achieve results. This made an officer to smuggle a huge amount of money under military escort but the identity was withheld due to lack of transparency.

Gen. Babangida introduced Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Directorate for Food and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), NACB, and Community Banks in 1986 to reduce poverty and unemployment for development of the Nigeria, and his wife also introduced better life for rural women programme to augment the effort of her husband in alleviating poverty, but has the shortcoming of corrupt officials under his regime.

Late General Sani Abacha introduced Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1993 and National Directorate of Employment with the aim of reducing poverty and unemployment challenges facing Nigeria, and the wife also supported the programme with Family Support Programme (FSP), and National Directorate of Employment (NDE) which seem to have recorded remarkable achievements in terms of youths skill acquisition training and self-employment. Though these programmes has been insignificant, as a result of poor funding, poor coordination, mismanagement, lack of transparency, as well as inadequate target of potential beneficiaries. War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) was introduced to checkmate corruption but to no avail.

Obasanjo led administration in 1999-2007 introduced several poverty and unemployment reduction programmes such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Nation Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), aimed at re-orientating values, wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction. Alongside the aforementioned poverty and unemployment reduction programmes, Nigeria adopted global means of reducing poverty which is Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which has the goal number one as poverty reduction, hunger and unemployment by the year 2015. The increasing level of poverty and unemployment in the country is a sign of the programme failure despite the introduction of EFCC and ICPC to checkmate activities of corrupt officials.

Conclusion and the way forward

This paper examines the concept of poverty, empowerment, national development, sustainable development, causes of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. It further discuss some consequences and implications of poverty and unemployment in Nigerian society and finally recommends that proper funding and monitoring should be emphasized by the government at all levels to ensure success of poverty reduction and unemployment challenges. Poverty and unemployment can be minimized or reduced but cannot be totally eradicated in any nation, be it developed or developing nation because in any society, there is clear distinction among individuals; for all hands cannot be equal. Socio-economic and political development of a country cannot be attained without youth empowerment when faced with poverty and unemployment. Therefore, poverty and unemployment hinders growth and development of any nation in terms of scientific, political and socio-economic activities of any nation like Nigeria, since the youth constitute majority of the working class. It is pertinent at this juncture, that there is no governance without the governed. Leadership connotes followership and one may really not be able to divest one from the other. It is reasonable to argue that leaders are selected or elected from among followers, and that every society deserves the kind of leaders it gets (Adeoluwa, 2013). Youths suffer a lot of deprivation which militate against their positive contribution towards national development. Therefore the youth need to be empowered to achieve poverty and unemployment reduction in Nigeria for development of the nation politically, socially and economically abiding by the following ways:

Realistically, age limit as a criteria or condition used by most of the ministries, departments and agencies (M.D.A) is one of the major problems of unemployment leading to increase of poverty among youth in Nigeria.

- i. The youth should embrace entrepreneurial skills acquisitions and training in the relevant disciplines in the institutions of learning so that they will be employers of labour rather than seeking for white collar jobs after graduation thereby reducing poverty and unemployment in our society
- ii. National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should be empowered to recruit the youth after embarking on training just like the Federal Civil Service Commission charged with responsibility of employing people in different fields

- iii. All state government in Nigeria should embark on youth empowerment scheme by creating entrepreneurship and craft centers' to train their citizens to acquire skills that will enable them to be self employed just like the craft village established by Katsina State government to reduce poverty and empower their youth through training in different craft
- iv. The unemployed youth in every society should be identified and made to benefit from the targeted policies such as education, health care, crime prevention, power supply and housing.
- v. Non-governmental organizations should work closely with the poor youth by making them to act as watchdog on various activities sponsored by the government on poverty and unemployment reduction.
- vi. Adequate funding of policies and programmes targeted towards youth empowerment and poverty reduction should be provided by the government to ministries that overseas such policies at various levels and be properly monitored to ensure success.
- vii. Determinants of extreme poverty and unemployment need to be mapped out by individuals, society, region, gender and the nation at large so that it can be vigorously handled by the relevant bodies because a problem known is a problem half solved.
- viii. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should punish any official who thwart the efforts of the government in the policies towards youth empowerment and poverty alleviation rather than been used as hunting dog for political opponent irrespective of one's position or status.
- ix. Furthermore, our educational system in terms of its curriculum should be restructured to make it easily adaptable and flexible to the ever changing societal needs. The educational system should comprise of vocational, entrepreneurial and professional training to prepare youth for self-employment and self-reliance in order to overcome poverty and unemployment in Nigeria for national development.
- x. Finally, over bloated salaries and allowances of political office holders should be reviewed for redistribution of income among the citizens and politicians should be advised to save in Nigerian Banks rather than foreign account to minimize corruption and invest in Nigeria to reduce poverty and unemployment which in turn leads to development of nations

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