

## EMPOWERMENT: A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MASTERS STUDENTS IN BABCOCK UNIVERSITY, ILISAN REMO, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Considering the present state of the labour market where unemployment is ravaging the economy, there is the need to look into the empowerment scheme in Nigeria in the context of seeing empowerment as a tool for economic growth and development. This study is focused on the level of awareness about empowerment and its impacts on the Nigerian citizens. The study employs survey design as its research approach. The sample frame consists of all 2014-2015 masters students in the faculty of management sciences of Babcock Business School with the total population of 307 with a random selection of 20 from each department as the sample size of 120 from 6 (six) departments. Data for the study was collected through primary source by administering 120 questionnaire of which 110 representing 92% were successfully filled and returned. The secondary source was through relevant literature from journals and internet. The data was analyzed using simple percentage based on three research questions. Research question one shows 98.1% that greater majority of the respondents agreed that there is sufficient awareness about empowerment as a tool for economic development. Question two also shows 31.8% that there is significant difference in the perception of the respondents as regards the positive impact of empowerment on the citizens. Third question revealed that 90.9% people have accepted the effect of empowerment on economic growth and development as perceived by the respondent. The findings from the study revealed that, majority of the people have sufficient awareness about empowerment as a tool for economic development as perceived by the respondent and came to conclude that the four key objectives of employment generation, poverty reduction, wealth creation and value reorientation are indeed attractive issues to be the crux of any worthwhile development plan. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended among others that empowerment as a developmental tool, needs special attention in the area of policy(ies) implementation.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Economic Development,  
Master students.

### Background to the Study

Since independence in 1960, successive governments in Nigeria have come up with various poverty alleviation strategies aimed at empowering Nigerians in rural and urban areas. Several of these programmes notwithstanding, poverty in Nigeria remain an issue of great concern. According to Kabuoh, Ajike, and Ogbuanu, (2015). The impact of empowerment on the Nigerian economy cannot be over emphasized because it has brought about increasing efficiency and effectiveness in all areas of the economy. Ibrahim, (2002) cited in Kabuoh, et al (2015) also states, On business activity alone, it has constituted a major turnaround, development, stability, efficiency and effectiveness. Nigeria is a country that gained independent from the British colonial masters since 1960 (now 54 years), during this period Nigeria was practicing federalism to govern her people. Within these span of years, the economy has not been at its peak, due to the fact that the country cannot boast of satisfying 50% of her citizens due to lack of employment opportunities, skills acquisition, job creation thereby leaving most of her citizens in abject poverty leading to low standard of living of her citizens, they are giving second class level over the globe (Kabuoh, et al 2015).

Development empower people to take advantage of these opportunities by creating a system of incentive that reward hard work and punish corruption, by investing in education, special programmes for the most vulnerable members of the society (National Planning Commission and Central Bank of Nigeria, 2005 6) in Ikeanyibe (2009) who also asserted that development on the other hand is a word that is difficult to define because of the multifarious contextual usage of the concept. But in its simplest reductionism, the term means improvement or to become more advanced, more mature, more complete, more organized, more transformed etc. Rodney (1969) in Ikeanyibe (2009) sees development as a many sided process but defines it in relation to the individual. As he explains, "at the level of the individual it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being".

Empowerment policies would be on such vital areas as tackling social exclusion, housing, health care, education, skills acquisition, protecting the vulnerable and promotion of peace and security. The core of this strategy is to fight poverty, which the plan recognizes as being multidimensional. It does not only involve measures to improve incomes but also to tackle social and political factors that lead to poverty. Wealth creation is therefore intrinsically linked to the strategy of employment generation. (Ikeanyibe, 2009).

Education, by which it is hoped to empower the citizens, has witnessed increase in educational institutions both at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The universities has increased from about forty in 1999, and mainly belonging to federal and state governments, to about 120 in December 2014 with greater private sector participation. However the cost of education where average private university charges fees as high as three hundred and fifty thousand per session puts a limit to the number and class of citizens that can have access to such education in a country where over 70% of the citizens are poor (National News Paper 2010 in Emmanuel and Ufiem n.a) . Empowerment of the people will lead to employment generation, The promotion of private enterprise by providing an enabling environment through ensuring security and rule of law, provision of necessary

infrastructures such as electricity, good road network, liberalization of markets, deregulation and provision of strategic support in terms of finance and other supports to the productive sectors such as agriculture, industry especially small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and service sector are measures through which the plan hopes to generate employment.

According to (Adeola 2001) cited in Emanuel and Muhammed (2009), It is also worthy of note that Nigeria remains the only member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that is categorized among the world's poorest twenty countries. Indeed, the alarming and seemingly uncontrollable high rate of crime and shady deals in the country has been linked to the poverty situation. To buttress this fact, Oludotun (2001)cited in Emanuel and Muhammed (2009), revealed that the increasing rate of crime such as armed robbery, advance fee fraud (419), corruption, prostitution, nepotism, drug trafficking, cultism and other social vices are definitely the product of persistent poverty in the country. The situation affects sustainable national development adversely.

#### Objectives of the Study

The issues covered by this paper include the conceptual approaches to empowerment and the extent to which the level of awareness about empowerment, its impacts on the Nigerian citizens and how it can enhance economic growth and development in Nigeria. Specifically, this study is focused on the level of awareness about empowerment and its impacts on the Nigerian citizens.

#### Literature Review

##### Empowerment: An overview

From the Nigerian perspective, the concept of empowerment means different things to different people depending on their role/position in the society. For the Nigerian state and those acting on its behalf, empowerment is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people while the disempowered includes the rural poor. This group includes small - scale farmers, tenants and the landless (World Bank Report, 1975:3). Empowerment also means extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas (Ekanem, 2004: 52 in Emmanuel and Ufiem n.a).Despite the multiple ideological roots to the concept, empowerment can be broadly defined as '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'. A failure to clearly define what is meant by 'empowerment' can weaken its value, either as an agent for change or as a tool for analysis.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) (SDC 2004, in Cecilia, Sitna, Claire and Kate 2009) conceptualizes empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. Understanding this helps to identify the kinds of strategies needed to shift unequal power dynamics. In the following, the study distinguishes between three groups of empowerment aspects: Political empowerment, economic empowerment, and social/legal empowerment.

Political empowerment: the ability of citizens to publicly voice their opinions and to affect the composition of legislative assemblies. Political empowerment is the capacity to analyse, organize and mobilise. This results in the collective action that is needed for collective change. It is often related to a rights-based approach to empowerment and the empowering of citizens to claim their rights and entitlements (Piron and Watkins, 2004 in Cecilia et al 2009).

Economic empowerment (EE)/ Opportunities: Key aspects of this type of empowerment are access to formal sector employment, self-employment, borrowing, saving and access to and control of economic resources. EE seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities, resources and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods. Legal/social empowerment: A third aspect, in the classifications of empowerment, relates to the roles as social actors in the community. Norms are in this regard defined as rules of conduct or expectations for the behaviour of members of society. And social empowerment: As a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and their society, by being able to act on issues that they define as important (Page and Czuba, 1999 in Cecilia et al 2009).

#### Why empowerment is inevitable in Nigeria

The Nigerian Economic Summit Group, while assessing the eight years of Obasanjo's economic reforms on 6 May 2007 in a Press Conference, highlighted that the economic reforms of the Obasanjo's government did not tackle poverty effectively. Although the group applauded the reforms in service industry like the Banks, Insurance, Oil and Telecommunication, it however noted that "the reforms did not have appreciable impact in poverty reduction especially employment generation and self-empowerment" (Iba 2007 in Emanuel and Muhammed 2009).

According to Benjamin (2012), after the successful transition to civil rule on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, the then President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, stated the need for reform because of the myriad socio-economic problems that engulfed Nigeria. The economy was experiencing low industrial outputs, high unemployment and a crushing debt burden (Obasanjo, 1999). The President therefore launched a series of economic reforms in March 2004 designed and condensed in what they called an all-embracing home-grown economic program known as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), State (SEED) and Local (LEED) to address the structural and institutional weaknesses of the Nigerian economy such as;

- i. Reforming Government and Institutions;
- ii. Growing the Private Sector;
- iii. Implementing a Social Charter;
- iv. Value Re-Orientation.

With the advent of the Yar'Adua Administration in 2007, the Federal Government articulated the 7-point Agenda for national development. The policy thrust revolved around the seven-point contract of that Administration with the Nigerian people: Energy, Education, Agriculture, Infrastructure, Wealth Creation and Poverty Alleviation, Land Reforms, and Security. The point was further made, that these reforms would catapult Nigeria to the rank of one of the 20 most developed countries of the world by the year 2020.

On April 16, 2011, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan won a pan-Nigerian mandate. He made a promise to radically transform the nation. Sadly, after years of policy reforms, Nigeria has painfully remained an economy with a weak and tottering national currency, a nation without an effective industrial infrastructure for economic take-off, a deficient power and energy sector, insecure and inhospitable environment (Benjamin 2012).

#### Empowerment Policies in Nigeria

According to Ikeanyibe (2009), Empowerment policies would be on such vital areas as tackling social exclusion, housing, healthcare, education, skills acquisition, protecting the vulnerable and promotion of peace and security. Successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960 have come up with various empowerment programmes aimed at alleviating poverty both in rural and urban areas. From the Green Revolution Programme (GRP) of the early 1960s, the Agricultural Development Project (ADP), the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDA) of the 1970s, the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Integrated Rural Development (IRD) of the 1980s, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Better Life Programme (BLP), and Family Support Programme (FSP) of the military era in the 1990s which targeted urban and rural women, to the Obasanjo regime's National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2000 to 2007; the list is long and in-exhaustive (Emmanuel and Ufiem n.a).

This was not to be as poverty has remained unabated in Nigeria since then. By 2010, The Nation News Papers in its November 30 editorial reported that over 75 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line. A factual indicator is the result of the Harmonized Nigerian Living Standard Survey published by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2011 that showed that large proportion of Nigerians live in poverty. This is because there exist's a strong nexus between EE and education (Obadan, 1997; Agbor, 2004 in Emmanuel and Ufiem n.a).

Many view empowerment as both a process and an outcome. Others take only an instrumentalist view of empowerment, focusing more narrowly on the importance of process. On the other hand, those who take a transformative approach question the way in which participation alone can be empowering without attention to outcomes. These distinctions have obvious operational implications. An emphasis on process leads to a focus on organizational capacity building or an increase in participation of previously excluded groups in the design, management and evaluation of development activities. An emphasis on outcomes leads to a focus on economic enhancement and increasing access to economic resources.

Empowerment policies must be geared towards the provision of qualitative formal masses, especially those at the rural level. The failure of poverty intervention programmes to address the problem of mass illiteracy is at the root of the rising incidence of poverty in Nigeria. Those who go to school must be made to acquire qualitative vocational skills to enable them be self-employed and productive. This, therefore, calls for the restructuring and reformation of Nigeria's educational sector to meet this objective.

The Transformation Agenda when President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan came on board; Final Report defines the goal of the reform exercise in these words: During 2011-2015, the policies and programmes directed at addressing governance will focus on the public service, security, law and order, the legislature, anti-corruption measures and institutions, the judiciary, economic coordination, and support for private investment... These will be addressed through the implementation of the recommendations ... in the areas of public service reforms, judicial reform, anti-corruption initiative, electoral reform, land use reform, fiscal management reforms, power sector reform, police reform, financial sector reform, infra-structural development reform, and information and communication technology (Cited by Asobia, 2012 p. 51; in Benjamin 2012).

#### Types of Empowerment Source

Adapted from Economic Empowerment of Women (2008) Economic Empowerment: Access to Resources and control of resources Social and Legal Empowerment: Roles and expectations. Political Empowerment: Representation and voice Institutional strategies to empower poor people will necessarily vary. Strategies also evolve and change over time in any given context. The challenge, then, is to identify key elements of empowerment that recur consistently across social, institutional, and political contexts. Institutional design must then focus on incorporating these elements or principles of empowerment.

According to Narayan and Shah (2000), Four Elements of Empowerment; there are thousands of examples of empowerment strategies that have been initiated by poor people themselves and by governments, civil society, and the private sector. Successful efforts to empower poor people, increasing their freedom of choice and action in different contexts, often share four elements:

1. Access to information
2. Inclusion and participation
3. Accountability
4. Local organizational capacity.

Below, shows the summary information of the various programs and projects implemented over the years in Nigeria as adapted from Nigeria Strategy Support Program (NSSP) Report No. 003, December 2009.

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) 1987, IBB Regime Design and implement programs to combat mass unemployment; and articulate policies aimed at developing work programs with labor intensive potentials targeted at the Unemployed youth by Training, finance and guidance. Better life for Rural Women (BLP) 1989 in IBB Regime, Stimulate and motivate women towards achieving a better and higher standards of life; educate women on simple hygiene, family planning, and to increase literacy; well as social, political and economic responsibilities by teaching the women Self help and rural development programs, skill acquisition, and health care.

The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) 1996 in Abacha regime to address the Social poverty and Poor standard of living for the Niger Deltans. The Family Economic Advancement programme (FEAP) in 1997 by Abacha Regime targeted at Sustainable human development by providing credit



facilities to cooperative societies and facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) 1999 Provide both intellectual and nonintellectual competencies to all Nigerian Children, youths and adult for learning or trade Nine years of primary and junior secondary education, and out-of-school literacy and nonformal education. The Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) 2000 in Obasanjo Regime Setting in motion effective economic empowerment of the people in urban, sub-urban and rural communities; and stimulating economic growth through engagement of semi- skilled and unskilled labor in productive activities.

The Youth Empowerment Scheme popularly tagged Project YES is a registered non-governmental organization initiated by Hajiya Zainab Kure, the former first lady of Niger State. The Scheme which was actually introduced in April 2000 was registered as a non-profit making venture with the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria with registration number RC 13705. (Emanuel and Muhammed 2009) According to the initiator, Hajiya Z.K, Project YES is a form of human development intervention organization which offer opportunity for a wide range of vocational skills training for the youths because of their socio-economic situation (Kuti 2006, cited in Emanuel and Muhammed 2009).

The National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) 2001 in Obasanjo Regime ensure mass participation in the economic development process, empowering the poor to have a voice, and expressing their ideas; through Youth Empowerment Scheme, Community Economic Sensitization Scheme, Social Welfare Service Scheme, Rural Infrastructure Development Schem. And The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) 2002 access to healthcare services at an affordable cost to all Nigerians. The National Fadama Development Project introduced in 2004 to Increase average real income of farmers through capacity building, rural infrastructure investment, demand responsive advisory services, project management.

Current types of empowerment programmes includes among others; The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS). <http://www.wyesurep.gov.ng>

The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) commenced in October, 2012 as a social safety net component of Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P). It is implemented by the Federal Ministry of Finance with a mandate to provide short term employment for graduates. The Scheme aims to achieve this by creating opportunity for them to be attached to firms /organizations, where they can work for a year and enjoy a monthly stipend of N18,000. Such interns can use the opportunity to gain working experience and enhance their employability. The scheme has three main objectives as; (1) To enhance the employability of up to 50,000 unemployed graduates in the 36 states of the Federation and the FCT through internship programs in pre-selected institutions; (2) To reduce the vulnerability of unemployed graduates, and (3) To build manpower base towards attaining national development operations. The programme seeks to enhance building the manpower requirement to drive the Nation's Transformation Agenda and Vision 20:2020.

### The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN)

Is the third edition of the entrepreneurial scheme which is designed for entrepreneurs aged between 18 and 45 years. Some of the objectives is to create thousands of jobs by helping winners to strengthen and expand existing businesses as well as turn innovative ideas into solid businesses also provide a one-time Equity grant for 1,200 selected aspiring entrepreneurs to start or expand their business concepts and mitigate start up risks. The Programme is a collaboration of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication Technology (CT), the Ministry of Youth Development and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development that will launch an annual Business Plan Competition (BPC) for aspiring young entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The programme will be implemented in partnership with Nigeria's private sector, which will be requested to provide funding support.

### Impact of Empowerment on Economic Development

One method of encouraging people to make the necessary changes is to engage them in the decisions about the policies and programmes that will be necessary. Economic development is viewed as holistic and multi-dimensional. It includes the ability to sustain a balance between improvement in health, education, the environment, food security, shelter, sanitation and other important sector that impact the well-being of the citizens. According to Hans, (2007) cited in Alao, (2013) sustainable development is a process which tells of the development of all aspect of human life affecting sustenance. It is a development that cut across the economic, physical and natural needs of man. Sustainable development in this wise and as observed by Akpobibio (2001) cited in Alao, (2013) means development that meets the needs of the present as a bases for enhancing the future. Schumacher (1995) in Alao (2013) therefore emphasized that development does not start with goods but with people.

Keiffer's (1984) work on personal empowerment is one of the only major empirical studies which examines personal empowerment as a process. He labels empowerment as a developmental process which includes four stages: entry, advancement, incorporation, and commitment. The entry stage appears to be motivated by the participant's experience of some event or condition threatening to the self or family, what Keiffer refers to as an act of 'provocation'. In the advancement stage, there are three major aspects which are important to continuing the empowerment process: a mentoring relationship; supportive peer relationships with a collective organization; and the development of a more critical understanding of social and political relations. The central focus of the third stage appears to be the development of a growing political consciousness. Commitment is the final stage - one in which the participants apply the new participatory competence to ever expanding areas of their lives cited in (Lord and Hutchison 1993)

### Theoretical Framework

Having looked at the various key concepts in this work, there is the need attention to a theoretical explanation of empowerment with particular focus on Nigeria. This theoretical explanation is necessary to give us a better understanding of how the Nigerian state or those who act on its behalf define and understand empowerment, who they consider the empowered and the disempowered.



Maslow's Theory: Also known as the theory of hierarchy of needs by Abraham Harold Maslow. He built a hypothetical pyramid where our physiological level of needs (food, water, and shelter) was put at the base of the pyramid while self-actualization was placed on the top of the pyramid. In between these two extreme level, safety, human bonding and self-esteem were positioned. The five levels were examples of different strata of human life. The theory doesn't specify the time period required attaining them, but it actually helps you to understand the importance of these elements in one's life and once we have plenty of resources to spare, we knock at the door of self-actualization. Within the Nigerian context, Akaredolu - Ale (1975) in Emmanuel and Ufiem (n.a) has identified four theoretical postulations to the explanation of the causes of poverty. These theories include; the necessity theory, the individual attributes theory, the natural circumstantial theory and the power theory.

The necessity theory with three variants namely; functionalist, evolutionist and capitalist entrepreneurial variants explain the emergence of poverty from role stratification and associated reward. Poverty in this regard emerges spontaneously with inequality arising from a system of evaluation that rewards some roles higher than the others. Those whose roles are rewarded meagrely automatically form the poor population. This theory draws a nexus between economic inequality and the division of labour within the society as a function of job performed by the individual and attendant reward. The thrust of this theory is that because of the marked inequalities in our society that create a lacuna between the rich and the poor, and given the different jobs that individuals perform in the society and attendant rewards that accrue, categories such as 'the poor' and 'the non- poor' develop. What this theory, however, fails to do is to establish clearly who does the valuation of roles. Is it the society generally or the powerful few? (Agbor, 2005: 63 in Emmanuel and Ufiem n.a)

The natural circumstantial theory explains the causes of poverty from environmental and geographical constraints. The geographical location of the individual and the natural endowment of his environment are capable of making him poor. In this case, unfavorable geographical location and scanty natural endowment automatically spell poverty. Other explanatory variables enunciated by this theory include old age, unemployment, sex and race (Agbor, 2005: 63). The power theory of poverty asserts that what determines the extent and distribution of poverty is the structure of political power. In this context, the powerful few who are largely instrumental to public policies organizes and influences the economic system in a manner that places them in advantageous position to amass wealth.

#### Methodology

This study employs survey design as its research approach. A survey design is that in which a portion of the population is selected as representative of the entire population. The sample size is 120 comprising a random selection of 20 students from each of the 6 (six) departments.

### Research Questions

The survey aimed at addressing the following research questions;

1. What is the awareness rate about empowerment as a tool for economic development?
2. What is the respondents' perception as regards the impact of empowerment on the citizens?
3. To what extent have people accepted the effect of empowerment on economic growth and development as perceived by the respondents?

Analysis of Research Questions: Table 1: Response

S/N	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	I am aware of any empowerment scheme in Nigeria	60(54.5%)	45(43.6%)	2(1.8%)	-	-	110
2	I am a beneficiary of empowerment scheme in Nigeria	10(9.1%)	25(22.7%)	20(18.2%)	40(36.4%)	15(13.6%)	110
3	Empowerment is a tool to economic growth and development	55(50%)	45(40.9%)	-	10 (9.1%)	--	110

Source: Field Survey 2015

The table reflects that 95(91.8%) of the respondents agreed, while 2(1.8%) were undecided; which states that "I am aware of any empowerment scheme in Nigeria". This implies that a greater majority of the respondents agreed that there is sufficient awareness about empowerment as a tool for economic development. Item 2 that says "I am a beneficiary of empowerment scheme in Nigeria" and 35 (31.8%) agreed, 20 (18.2%) were undecided, while 55 (50.%) Disagreed.

This indicated that there is significant difference in the perception of the respondents as regards the positive impact of empowerment on the citizens. Item 3 reflects that 100 (90.9%) of the respondents agreed, and 10 (9.1%) disagreed stating that, Empowerment is a tool to economic growth and development. This indicated that people have accepted the effect of empowerment on economic growth and development as perceived by the respondent.

Findings from the study revealed that:

- i. Greater majority of the respondents agreed that there is sufficient awareness about empowerment as a tool for economic development.
- ii. There is significant difference in the perception of the respondents as regards the positive impact of empowerment on the citizens.
- iii. People have accepted the effect of empowerment on economic growth and development as perceived by the respondent.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Empowerment as economic development tool has not really done better especially in the actual implementation than previous development plans in Nigeria. The four key objectives of employment generation, poverty reduction, wealth creation and value re-orientation are indeed attractive issues to be the crux of any worthwhile development plan. Thus, to make meaning, empowerment policies in Nigeria must seek to do the following, amongst other things; Seek to radically transform the existing power structure and regime of economic ownership and vested interest by a few that enforce macro level exploitation and engender poverty; Provide not just employment for the people but productive employment that can enhance the productive capabilities and base of the society, especially at the rural level. It is in the enhancement of society's productive capability and base that the high level of incidence of poverty can be tackled effectively and reduced. This can be achieved through the provision of investment capital for the people rather than the giving of hand outs as has been the case.

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