

Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijrssmt.v7.i1.09

Abstract

Youth empowerment is the key to sustainable development. Nigeria which stands as the youngest population in Africa has more than 50% of her population fall within the age range known as Youths (16-39)(NBS Report, 2018).The implication of this reality is that Nigeria has a massive prospect for economic development but that will be if the country can efficiently harness this human resources efficiently. Though numerous youth empowerment programs have been put in place by the Nigerian government, those programs lack sustainability. Today, the sad reality is that most of the youths in Nigeria are unemployed. The Nigeria bureau of statistics states that about 20.9 Million Nigerians were unemployed as at the third quarter of 2018, this data also shows that more than 80% of this unemployed Nigerians are youths, the working population of the country. With such a population of youths and drastic dilemma of unemployment and poverty in the country, there is a need for government to adopt new strategy to engage this young population in a very productive way. This paper examines youth empowerment concepts that can be used to engage this huge human resources (the youth in Nigeria) in a productive way that will build sustainable economic development. The paper X-rays youth empowerment concept and their developmental potentials if they are carefully implemented with regulatory frame work to drive their sustainability. The study utilized questionnaires as the primary source of data and research reports and academic publications as the secondary sources of data. The study recommended that the youth empowerment programs should be revamped in a strategic way that will engage the youths and add massive revenue to the economy.

Keywords: *Youth empowerment, Sustainable development, Economic development, Regulatory frame work.*

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Background to the Study

Youth Empowerment Concept refers to economic and labour programs which can be used to impact labour skills and sensitivity to young able bodied, mentally fit individual or group of young persons to enable them participate maximally in the harnessing and distribution of economic and social resources for meaningful self-benefits and the improvement of the society (Educlues, 2016). Youth empowerment entails detailed and well developed programs which can be deployed for improvement of the capacity of young persons to either sustain their personal livelihood or enable them to live maximally and productively in the society upon proper deployment, these concepts can be a major boost to economic development given that the key element of economic development (human resources) is the focus of such programs. Youth empowerment aims basically on improvement of life. However, youth empowerment generally is a process where young people are taught, trained and equipped to respond positively to life by transforming their beliefs, values and attitude. Youth empowerment is achieved through participation in youth empowerment concepts or programs.

Sustainable development on the other hand simply refers to the development that is stable, durable, and consistent. Historically, sustainable development originated from the concerted efforts of local and international community to protect the human aspect of the planet earth. It is an update of the Millennium Development Goals declaration of the United Nations. The concept of sustainable development assumes that development must first occur before it could be sustained. While development depends on growth, its sustainability has remained a myriad and attracted debates among stakeholders of development, resulting to studies and quest for new approach to sustainable development (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2014).

Across the world, there are few youth empowerment programs underway. These programs are driven by mostly non-governmental organization. However, there are handful of others that are driven by government institutions, schools and private organization. In Nigeria, even though the need to institutionalized well-structured youth empowerment concept is obvious, we are yet to see any that have been effective using the unit of measurement Quality of life (QOL) as a standard for evaluating the success of the empowerment program or concept. Over the last two decades, we have seen continual effort from the government as regards the deployment of youth empowerment programs but the common trend is that most of these programs are not sustainable due to the volatile political nature of our young democracy and the massive impact politics has on every facet of the economy in growing economies like that of Nigeria. Few non-governmental organization have pioneered a few programs with various levels of impact but the stark reality is that the need for such programs are overwhelming as a result of the alarming unemployment rate in Nigeria.

The value that quality and strategic youth empowerment brings to an economy is enormous. Amongst which are but not limited to the following.

- i. Employment Creation:** A youth empowered society will not suffer the challenges of unemployment that many nations are battling today especially the third world nations. This is because fundamentally a skilled youth is a job creator.

- ii. **Crime Reduction and National security:** Empowering youth add value to their lives to sustain their livelihood and this on the long run prevent them from adopting crime.
- iii. **Poverty Eradication:** In fact, poverty eradication is the key benefit of youth empowerment. Skill development/entrepreneurship development is a key aspect of youth empowerment and when youths are effectively equipped with essential skills for survival, they can utilize those skill to take care of themselves and assist others given that societies in Nations like Nigeria has high dependency rate. As the youth use the skills to create value, it will increase employability and add to the GDP of the nation. Also, the support for themselves and dependents increases the standard of living in the society.
- iv. **Good Governance:** No doubt, the youths are the leaders of tomorrow when they are empowered, they also empower the masses thereby creating a balance pathway for a better future.
- v. **Improved Standard of Education:** Empowerment in its totality is largely about education and mental transformation. Youth empowerment can lead to social improvement of a country. Empowered youth will always accelerate the spirit of patriotism in the educational sector because they will most likely understand the value education more than a youth which is not empowered.

From the benefits above, it is obvious that a nation like Nigeria must adopt youth empowerment concepts that can run effectively in a multi-cultural society like we have in this country and also concepts that promotes national integration and peaceful co-existence. Today, according to the global organization (UN) reports, Nigeria youth migrants in Europe and America are three times more than migrants from other West African country. This report also shows continuous increase in migration rate with about 32% in 1999 to top about 50% by the end of 2012. So, the inability of the government to institutionalize productive youth empowerment concept to reap its economic benefit will result to negative economic trends prominent amongst which is the migration of their most productive youth population.

Literature Review

Youth empowerment concept refers to the different aspects where a young person or community of young people gain control and power over their own lives in their life context. It is the different means where change and transformation of a young person occurs whereby a person or people with lack of power or disempowerment become one in which some kind of power is somehow gained (Xavier Ucar Martinez et al 2016, Travis and Bowman, 2012). According to the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) under the 2030 agenda for sustainable development the contribution of sport remains one of the potent concept for youth empowerment. However another key concept for youth empowerment is the acquisition of knowledge and capabilities e.g entrepreneurship (Agudo and Alborna 2011, World Bank 2006, Zambrano, 2007) and also the concept of technical skill acquisition and innovation support (HCA Academy, 2009).

UNESCO (1998) recognize youth as equal partners and actors for development and peace. Generating opportunities for young people and investing in their capabilities must be prioritized in governmental policy making at all levels. Development does not begin with goods; it goes along with people and their education, organization and discipline. Its success can be ensured if it is undertaken as a broad, popular movement of reconstruction, with key focus on the full utilization of the drive, enthusiasm, acumen and labor power of everyone (Schumacker, 1995). UNESCO Youth Strategy (2014-2021) emphasizes to invest in research, policies and programs for creating an enabling and rights-based environment for young people to thrive and ensure the prosperity of society (Souter, 2014). Youth's chance for contribution in nation's economic, social and cultural development is maximized through the process of empowerment (Lisbon World Conference, 1998). That's why, now there is an increasing realization among world leaders and policy makers for astonishingly underserved and unheard youth (IRC, 2012).

Akintayo and Adiat (2013) also opined if developing countries like Nigeria yearn for development and prosperity then they need to invest in their youth. Non-formal education, vocational training, on-the-job training and other educational guidance of its kind should be advanced as an essential instrument of empowerment (Arnold et al., 1991). These instruments raise the bargaining power of the poor and bring in substantial awareness of their legal and social rights (Gergis, 1999). Kolade et al., (2014) studied the role of entrepreneurship education and found that nations can gain competitive advantage due to natural resource endowment thriving on quality manpower that can efficiently expedite economic growth. Malyadi and Sunama (2012) argued that the promotion of entrepreneurship as an instrument of job creation, empowerment and economic dynamism has captivating policy concentration. But unfortunately, there has been no systematic attempt to look at it from youth perspectives in many emergent economies. States need to identify the varied needs of youth and focus to develop more sophisticated policy interventions which can lodge this multiplicity. Gone are the days when 'one fit for all' solutions were in place. Therefore, it is advised that government should not impose empowerment from above as top-down approach. It must be brought before an individual as an objective to be strove for while ensuring equal access to economic opportunities, rest hinge on the will and interest of the citizens (Gergis, 1999).

At the 1992 'Rio Earth Symposium' in Brazil, 152 leaders from around the world participated to underscore the significance of sustainability and consensus was made that all countries should fabricate a national sustainable development strategy which is included in agenda 21 of the summit. In sum, youth empowerment is a decisive element for a country's sustainable development. The potential youth is the greatest investment opportunity for a country's sustainable development (Commonwealth, 1998). Hence, to deal with changing world dynamics, youth must be equipped with all-encompassing intellectual, moral, social and relevant skills at earnest (Lagun, 2002). Unfortunately, young people did not receive much-needed care and attention from the concerned authorities during subsequent regimes. Flimsy governance structures, an inopportune record of development, regular episodes of heightened social conflict and a trembling macro-economic situation all contributed to young people's lack of confidence in Pakistan's future (British Council, 2009).

Research Methodology

A detailed questionnaire was distributed randomly to youths within the age bracket of 20 and 35 to ascertain what youth empowerment concept they believe the government can adopt to foster economic development in Nigeria. The survey was carried out in South – South Nigeria, Cross River and Akwa–Ibom State to be precise. About one thousand questionnaires were distributed and collected. A systematic breakdown of the questionnaire was carried out and the findings according to the aims of the research was carefully documented.

The Result of the Study

From the study, it shows that

S/N	Type of Employment Concept	% Response
1	Sport	34%
2	Technical Acquisition and Innovation support	23%
3	Entrepreneurship Training and Funding	30%
4	Academic Scholarship Programs	10%
5	Financial Support Programs	3%

From the table, it is obvious that more people believe that with proper sports development (34%) more youths will be empowered and more youths will be economically engaged and productive in the society. However 30% of the people believe entrepreneurship training and funding is another powerful concept for youth development and 23% of the people believed technical skill acquisition and innovation support has the potentials to birth massive economic development. About 10% believed in academic scholarship programs and 3% on financial support program.

From the study, it can be clearly deduced that a combination of 3 youth empowerment concept will birth a massive economic development with sports, entrepreneurship training/funding and technical skill acquisition and innovation support making the higher potential of 87%.

3 key youth empowerment concept for sustainable economic development

i. Sports: With proper development of sport from grassroots to professional level, youth empowerment will get a major boost because sport is a major economic activity. For example, the market for professional sport in the United States is roughly 169 billion dollars which is 50% larger than that of all Europe, the Middle East and Africa combined (Renter, July 24 2013). In Nigeria today due to lack of proper sport development, the government have not been able to harness the massive economic potential sports has in terms of job creation and value creation, popular sports like Soccer, Volleyball, Basketball, all forms of athletics and field games Can be developed with amateur participation design into Secondary Schools and higher institutions and the professional level structured properly with public private partnership in place to allow for efficiency and sustainability. Sport generally has the potential to employ more youths than any other sector of the economy can (World Bank, 2016).

ii. Entrepreneurship Training and Funding: The true wealth of a nation is the amount of value her citizen can produce when provided the right environment and support by her government. In Nigeria, we have seen few entrepreneurship training programs with funding by

the government like the YOU WIN program. A youth development scheme established by the Goodluck Jonathan led government to empower Nigeria youths. But the challenge has always been sustainability. However, if the government can drive such schemes like the YOUWIN program with proper regulatory framework to institutionalize such program to run independent of the influence of the government in power. It will create ripple effect in the development of the economy, poverty eradication and direct/indirect employment to the youths.

iii. Technical skill acquisition and Innovation Support: According to International Labour Congress, in 2013 Africa had the highest unemployment rate and Nigeria stood top in this statistics. This is traceable to the fact that most employable person lack the right skill for effective productivity as a result of the deficiency in our educational system which rather focus on theory than impacting meaningful skill. But the reality is if the government makes deliberate effort to help youths get trained in technical skills which has ability to add value in the society, then she would have successful curb the menace of unemployment to a large extend. Also, the support for innovation and scaling basic innovation to marketable standard will also be a major game changer.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that Nigeria unemployment rate, poverty and slow economic development is deeply rooted in the lack of the ability of government to implement sustainable youth empowerment programmes. Key concept like development and proper institutionalization of different types of sports and the strategic position of the sports industry to yield increased revenue, promotion of entrepreneurship schemes with proper funding options available and most importantly the setting up of several skill acquisition institutions and proper support for innovation and promotion of such innovation to marketable standards will no doubt reposition Nigeria on a path to massive economic development because her large human resources will be fully engaged.

Recommendations

To address the challenge of slow economic development in Nigeria the following recommendations are made:

- i. Sports should be properly developed and institutionalized. The sport industry should be revamped in a strategic way that will engage the youths and add massive revenue to the economy.
- ii. Entrepreneurial schemes with funding option should be promoted and running continually. These schemes should be properly structured to allow for sustainability of such programs.
- iii. Skill acquisition institutions should be set up and every youth should be encourage to learn a skill. The government should find a way to fund innovations from the skill acquisition institutions.

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