



## Youth Empowerment Program In Nigeria: A Strategy For Poverty Alleviation And National Development

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Development is a process of attaining sustainable growth and the system's ability to cope with periodic changes in the realization of political, economic and social development through policies and programs. Successful governments in Nigeria have introduced several programs to alleviate poverty and attain national development. This paper is positioned on the qualitative method of social science research using secondary sources of data to examine the impact of the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) on poverty reduction and national development. The study reveals that Low GDP growth, economic recession, and low investment are direct causes in the shrinking demand for job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth and above all a mirror image of the state of an economy. It, therefore, explains that YEP has not alleviated poverty among the target beneficiaries and has insignificantly contributed to national development. The paper attributed poor performance of YEP to the high rate of unemployment in the country and therefore recommends for empowering the youth by exposing them into different vocational skills may help them to engage into sustainable-income and self-empowerment for national development which will lead to sustained poverty alleviation.

**Keywords:** Poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, economy and development

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### INTRODUCTION

Poverty has been one of the most serious problems facing humanity for many generations as it poses a lot of challenges to the social, political and economic development of all countries around the world. It reduces the productive capacities of the citizens of the poor countries, thereby constraining the development efforts of the state while at the same time creating a dependence syndrome in international relations. The greatest incidence of poverty has been most felt in the developing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America (World Bank, 2001), and the slow rate at which policies for poverty eradication were intervening always presented a daunting task to governments of the whole world. This trend was likely to continue for many years to come if the right policy dosage was not found soon. Various questions were posed concerning the slow rate of poverty eradication despite continued policy undertakings by governments locally, regionally and internationally. With time, there appeared to be an emerging agreement among scholars that poverty eradication policies were not scoring successes due to the nature of the policy flow and the low level of good governance practices in the developing countries (Kanayo, 2014; Aminu & Onimisi, 2014).

### Problem Statement

Successive governments in Nigeria have continually made efforts to address the challenges of poverty in the country through different government anti-poverty programs since independent to date, some of these programs include National Poverty Alleviation Program (NAPEP), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) Small and Medium Enterprises

Development Agency (SMEDA), Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) to mention but few (Hussaini, 2014). But most of these poverty alleviation programs are embedded with several challenges culminating to their failures. Therefore, this paper intends to evaluate the impact of the youth empowerment scheme program on national development as one of the mechanisms put in place by the government towards alleviating poverty in the country.

### Literature Review

#### POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The concept of poverty is multidimensional in nature. It hinders the development of most of the countries in the world. It is the most powerful antidevelopment reality that prevails around the globe (UNDP, 2006). World Bank has been measuring poverty on statistical terms of income of \$1 to \$2 dollars per day per person for determining the extreme poor around the globe. Their poverty line is the most widely used internationally as the poverty standard. They define poverty as the inability of a person to attain basic needs such as shelter, food, healthcare, education and participation that are required for a meaningful life (World Bank, 1990). United Nation (1995) also define poverty as a condition which is characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including foods, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, healthcare, shelter, education, and information. They said poverty does not only depend on income but also on access to services.

The initial definitions of poverty by both the World Bank and the United Nation reduce poverty as a condition of deprivation of basic human needs. But poverty goes beyond a lack of food, healthcare, portable drinking waters, etc. it involves disease that crushes the



morality and the material well-being of a person (Narayan, 1997). In addition, poverty refers to the lack of availability of the required goods and services needed for a living (Sen, 1983).

Furthermore, Spicker (1993) defines poverty as experienced in deprivation over a long period of time. In a similar view, Ashton (1984) says deprivation basically has to do with a lack of essential needs due to inadequate resources. Ashton defines poverty as a lack of adequate resources to meet up with basic life needs. Poverty is also defined as the inability of a person to cater for a minimum standard of living (Anka, 2009). The above account illustrates that poverty manifests itself in different forms and it is for this reason that various forms of definitions have been used over time.

#### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Youth is targeted at assisting and solving the problems of unemployment among the youth across the globe. The creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty alleviation as well as national development. According to Amadi and Abdullah (2012) revealed that youth empowerment scheme is a capacity-building that implies vocational training and skills development that prepare the youth to be more productive in society. Similarly, Kuti (2006) refers youth empowerment as a form of human development intervention that offers an opportunity for a wide range of vocational skills training for the youths due to their socioeconomic situations which hinders their general wellbeing. It is targeted the training of youths by empowering the youths socially, economically and intervene in their educational pursue and offer a wide range of opportunity for initiating behavioral change in the youth through the guidance and counseling programs aims at putting youths in the proper psychological frame of mind for several encounters ahead in life.

Furthermore, Jimba (2007) states that youth empowerment involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their lifestyle. He maintained that youth empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of the transformation of ideas into creativeness. It is a means of exposing the youths into skills or training that makes them productive. It encompasses different ways youth can be exposed to different trades that may help them to engage in sustainable paid and self-employment. Scholars have held the view that there is a positive relationship between youth empowerment and poverty alleviation on the one hand, and between youth empowerment and national development on the other hand. This is to say that the presence of human development and empowering youth can alleviate poverty and create jobs, especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Hussaini, 2014; Ntiwunka, 2014).

#### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA THROUGH NAPEP

Consequently, the government revisited the matter of poverty alleviation and came up with different youth empowerment scheme programs for the purpose of alleviating poverty and to enhance national economic empowerment and development. According to Obadan, (2001) poverty reduction-related activities under youth empowerment scheme through an institution called National Poverty Eradication Programs (NAPEP) who serves as a central coordinating point for all anti-poverty programs in the country. The schemes have acknowledged four different sectors which include the followings:

**a. Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)** generally deals with capacity acquisition skills, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development, and entrepreneurship development for self-help and economic growth. This program was initiated by the government to enhance employment opportunity to the people who are unemployed, toward enhancing their source of livelihood and to raise their standard of living.

**b. Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)** this scheme deals with the provision and the development of infrastructural needs most especially in the rural areas where majority of them are farmers and they lack the basic necessities of life, the government support them in the areas of water supply system for irrigation farming, transport network to ease (rural and urban) movement of farm produce, rural energy and power support to enhance local business in the rural areas, and communication network for local and national development. This will significantly reduce urban and rural migration among the unemployed youth moving to the cities seeking jobs and better living condition in the urban areas.

**c. Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)** as the name implies focuses on the provision of basic services such as quality primary/special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centers, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit, maintenance of culture, and strengthening the economic power of farmers.

**d. Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)** this scheme seeks to promote participatory and sustainable development of the agricultural sector which was the major sources of income in the country, solid mineral resources development, harnessing of the conservation of land and space (beaches, reclaimed land, etc.) particularly for the convenient and effective utilization by small-scale operators and the immediate community (Ntiwunka, 2014).

In effect, the current poverty eradication programs of the country are focused on youth empowerment, rural infrastructure development, provision of social welfare services and natural resource development and conservation of land, which are all geared towards national and economic development which could play a vital role in poverty alleviation through youth empowerment.

#### CHALLENGES OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA

Like any other programs in Nigeria, Youth empowerment scheme has its own peculiar challenges these include the followings:

**a. Lack of government commitment:** Many graduates in Nigeria are roaming on the streets without anything reasonable job to do for a living. The government is capable but unwilling to provide jobs for them this leaves many highly qualified people in poverty as seemingly no one cares to know what they are capable of achieving in life. Most of the government policy frameworks on youth empowerment and poverty alleviation are not realistic and unproductive. The rates of unemployment have induced poverty in the country which has a tendency to increase the crime rate and violence among youth in the society. Statistics have shown that the country rate of unemployment from 2007 to 2014 is frightening, the record shows a rapid increase from 13.1 percent in 2000, rose to 19.7 percent in 2009 and 23.9 percent in 2011 to 28.5 percent in 2013 up to 30 percent in 2014 respectively (NBS, 2014).

**b. Corruption:** Corruption is generally acknowledged as having adversely affected previous poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria, it has eaten so deeply into the government, public funds that were earmarked for developmental projects are being misappropriated on a daily basis by the leaders, who always put their personal interest at heart while ignoring the large interest of masses in the country. They mismanage and embezzle public funds that are meant for poverty-related programs. There are several issues involved with bad governance in Nigeria, use of wrong policies adopted from the western countries and implementation of those wrong policies which has a direct effect on the general wellbeing of the citizens. In any



case, it is clear that corruption in Nigeria has increased poverty and inequality as well as contributed to the high rate of crime in the country.

**c. Laziness:** this is a common disease which is virtually suffered by many Nigerians youth today, especially those from wealthy households. Everyone wants to be comfortable but they are not ready to work towards their self-empowerment and development. This is one of the critical factors that hinder the youth empowerment scheme in Nigeria where the majority of the youth are dependent on their parents or relatives which indirectly discourage self-reliance among the majority of the youth.

**d. Poor Educational Development System:** Education plays a vital role in reducing poverty globally. According to the World Bank, education is central to development. It promotes economic growth, national productivity and innovation, and values of democracy and social cohesion. In Nigeria, the high level of illiteracy among the populace is so alarming that need a serious government and non-governmental attention. The education system in Nigeria can be regarded as a failure compared to other countries in the world. This right to education has been denied to many Nigerians, of which many of them can be considered invisible to the society now. This deprivation of education applies more to females than males because they are considered inferior sex. This has greatly contributed to the challenges of youth empowerment in Nigeria as the majority of the youth do not attain any educational qualification.

**e. Frequent Change of Governmental Policies:** frequent change of governmental policies have actually created more problems than a solution to youth empowerment programs in Nigeria, particular changes on poverty alleviation policies which in no small measure affect the productivity outcomes of most of the government programs on youth development. Lack of continuity among public authorities has significantly affected the success of youth empowerment in Nigeria.

## Methodology

This study is conceptual in nature and it employed secondary data like journals, textbooks, internet resource, government documents, and several others to analyze the contribution of youth empowerment programs on poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

## Theoretical Framework

Theories on the causes of poverty are the basis upon which poverty alleviation strategies are based. This brings the idea of power theory in this study. According to Lukes (1974) power is evaluated by the ability to insert in people's thoughts interests that are contrary to their own good. In this situation, the structure of political and economic power in society is the basis of the degree of poverty among the citizens. By implication, dominant elites who are the ruling class have mismanaged the public resource and created needless programs and projects without consulting the target beneficiaries of such policies and programs.

Corroborating the above, Kuren (1978) perceived the cause of poverty as socio-economic phenomena where the available resources of the society they are used to satisfy the interest of the few at the detriment of the majority that constitutes the larger society. In other words, people are poor because some political, economic and social structures have been forced on them to be poor and not that they are indolent or want to be poor. In light of the above, this study adopts power theory to explore the attitude and the willingness of the ruling class towards the implementation of youth empowerment programs for sustainable human development in Nigeria.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

Youth empowerment programs involve different ways through which the youths could be empowered to achieve self-sustained development instead of depending on the government to provide them with job opportunities. In addition, the government should embark upon massive youth development programs in all state of the federation with entrepreneurship development as key intervening tools for youth empowerment. It is believed that exposing youth into different vocational skills acquisition will enhance sustainable income, as well as the socio-economic development of the country. This is possible when the culture of creative ideas is instilled into the youths to make them productive and self-reliant members of society. This is very important for the government to ensure that all policies and programs are been in line with the people demands, and must be properly implemented. Similarly, public funds meant for any developmental programs must be properly monitored and entirely accounted for by the related agency involved in order to avoid misappropriation of public funds.

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