



Enhancing Human Capital Development and Economic Sustainability through Youth Empowerment Counselling

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issue of youth empowerment as an agent of human capital development and economic sustainability which serve as a catalyst for unemployment in Nigeria. The paper also examines the importance of empowering the youths in enhancing human capital development and sustaining the nation's economy. Efforts have been made in this paper to show how youth empowerment counselling can help in enhancing human capital development and sustainable economy. It explored current literature on human capital and its impact on national development. Human capital is today considered as the most valuable asset and component of economic development at the organizational and national level. Useful suggestions and recommendations are made among which are government should intensify effort to establish youth empowerment centre in each local government across the federation with counselling services to keep youths out of street and provide them with employable skills and technical knowhow and counselling services should be made available in secondary schools across the nation to sensitize the students on empowerment education and skill acquisition.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of Nigerian youths wandering on the street without something to do has become a source of worry. Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa, is blessed with enormous human and material

resources. However, the citizens are still struggling to survive due to economic instability and under turn. According to Nwagwu (2014), the majority of Nigerian population is enmeshed in the net of abject poverty due to faulty economic policies and



unsustainable poverty alleviation programmes of successive governments. The high rate of poverty cannot be unconnected with the level of youths' unemployment. Unemployment increases poverty rate due to loss of income and decline in the living standard of the people. This implies that people find it difficult to provide for their needs and that of the family. Fajana (2000) observed that unemployment leads to loss of economic strength, responsibility, identity and respect which may bring about psychological trauma.

According to Nwagwu (2014), National Bureau of Statistics (2005) illustrates that administrative data indicates that the country generates about 4.5 million new entrants into the labour market annually. This figure is made up of people out of the school system (1 million); primary school leavers not proceeding to secondary school (2.2 million); secondary school leavers not proceeding to the tertiary level (1 million); and tertiary graduates (300,000). Most often the labour market absorbs about 10% of the new entrants, thereby leaving about four million (4 million) people who are either openly unemployed or underemployed. Nwagwu related further that the high rate of unemployment results from a relatively slow growth of labour demand. Official figures from the Bureau of Statistics puts the figure of unemployed at 19.70 per cent, about 30 million, but this figure still did not include about 40 million other Nigerian youths captured in World Bank statistics in 2009. By implication, it

means that if Nigeria's population is 140 million, then 50 percent of Nigerians are unemployed (Njoku & Ihugba, 2011).

Unproductive youth population is a great social problem to a nation such as Nigeria in the sense that they do not generate income for the state and as a result of poverty, parents are likely to give their children poor education or none at all and this makes them not to qualify for career employment (Ukpong & George, 2012). Dabalén, Oni and Adekola (2000) reported that the massive rate of unemployed Nigerian graduates is traceable to the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and the lack of essential employable skills by the graduates. There are thousands of opportunities that the unemployed could not fill due to lack of necessary skills. This is the inability of the Nigeria educational system to provide graduates with the demand of industries and occupational skills to be self-employed and function effectively in present economic situation (Jimoh, 2014).

In recent time the saturation of the job market due to recent downturn in the world economy increases the rate of unemployment and human capital is a fundamental factor in overall progress and development in any country of the world. According to Sanusi (2012), the recent surge in growth in most emerging markets indicate that growth could be primarily driven by innovation or factor efficiency – through research or improved productivity which is principally



facilitated by human capital development. Sanusi observed further that human capital has come to take centre stage as a principal driver of economic growth and development.

Marimuthu, Arokiasamy and Ismail (2009) stated that it is important that firms leverage on workforce as a competitive weapon. A strategy for optimizing and improving productivity and drive higher value is through human capital development which enhances economic sustainability. Human capital is proportional to the amount of time an individual has worked. Bontis, Dragonetti, Jacobsen and Roos (1999) defined human capital as the human factor in the organization; the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that gives the organization its distinctive character. The human elements of the organization are those that are capable of learning, changing, innovating and providing the creative thrust which if properly motivated can ensure the long-run survival of the organization. People are endowed with innate abilities, behaviours and personal vigor which make up the human capital they bring to their work.

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Human capital is defined as an input for organizations especially for employees' continuous improvement mainly on knowledge, skills and abilities (Rastogi, 2002). It is referred to as the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing (Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development – OECD, 2001, p.18). Marimuthu, Arokiasamy and Ismail (2009) defined human capital as the process that relate to training, education and other professional initiatives in order to increase the level of knowledge, skills, abilities, values and social assets of an employee which lead to the employee's job satisfaction and performance. Human capital is the innate abilities, knowledge, skills, competencies and other attributes possessed by an individual that facilitate productivity and proficiency (OECD, 2001 & Armstrong, 2006). Human capital development encompasses the growth and expansion in the capacities and abilities acquired by individuals, groups and societies that enable them perform assigned responsibilities for the attainment of predetermined goals.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The idea of sustainability grows from concerns relating to effective exploitation of human and natural resources. Sustainability implies a system of production that satisfies present consumption levels without compromising future needs. It emphasized that sustainability is a matter ensuring the capacity for wellbeing between present and future people are put in a way that neither the present generation nor the future generations can readily reject (Anand & Sen, 2000). This entails the ability of maintaining the economic system in a way that favours both the present generation and as well does not deprive



the future generation the chance of living a useful life.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT COUNSELLING

Youth signifies a significant proportion of the able bodies and economically active group of the entire labour force. According to Fan, Agu and Tsav (2016) observed that the energy, vigour, inventiveness, character and orientation of youth define the pace of development and security of any society. Given this, it is very important to expose youths (employed and unemployed) to relevant skills and training to increase their competences and efficiency. This can be done through empowerment in various areas such as farming, sanitation and health, leadership and vocational training. Youth connotes a time between childhood and adulthood. The concept of youth is contextual, its variability depend on culture, geographical locations and community. The United Nations considered individuals between the age group of 15-24 as youth. In Uganda, youth is from 12-30 years while in Nigeria it is between 18 and 35 years (ILO, 2005; Ibbih, Anthony & Itari, 2015).

The term youth empowerment is broadly employed to explain efforts aimed at providing coping skills and an enabling environment for youths to lead decent lives and contribute meaningfully to national development (Kolade, Towobola, Oresanya, Ayeni and Omodeun, 2014). Jimba (2006) defined youth empowerment as different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their life

style. The author maintained that youth empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of transformation of ideas into creativeness. Youth empowerment, beyond formal education, will involve exposure to and up-grading of relevant skills, instilling core values, increasing competence and efficiency and creating an environment for the implementation and sustainability of acquired skills, amongst other things.

Quite a number of programmes (both long term and short term plan) have been put in place by federal government of Nigeria for the development of the youths. These programmes include among others National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Resources Development Conservation Scheme (NRDCS), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), The equivalence of NEEDS in the state and local government levels are State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) and The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Without exaggerating, the efforts of the federal government of Nigeria to eradicate poverty and empowered youth for a sustainable economy and development failed due to corruption, inconsistent government policies and poor implementation, politicization of national issues. According to Iheanacho (2014), development plans in Nigeria



have failed to achieve their desired objectives due to many challenges which include corruption, lack of commitment, absence of relevant data, over ambitious development plans and lack of continuity of government programmes

Youth empowerment counselling is an interpersonal relationship that exists between a professional and youths to help them explore and understand their potential, strengths and weaknesses and provide them with coping skills and an enabling environment to take charge of their lives (self-fulfillment and actualization) and contribute meaningfully to economic, social and cultural development of their societies.

Youth Empowerment Counselling

Counselling has been globally accepted as an instrument for helping individuals out of their educational, vocational and personal-social difficulties. Counselling is an interpersonal encounter between a professional and client in order to help him or her explore, understand his problem(s) and plan action to make well informed decision and be a well-adjusted person in the society. The purpose of counselling is to provide learning experiences to enable clients acquire knowledge, skills and competence related to making personal, educational and career decision (Clark, 1999). To create more wealth and sustain it for the nation require appropriate human capital development. Hubpages (2008) observed that one may accumulate,

maintain and increase human capital in many ways; through education, job training, work experience, life experience, investment in health, etc.

Going by the rate of unemployment and social vices in Nigeria, there is urgent need for youth empowerment counselling. The benefit of youth empowerment in Nigeria is enormous and there is no better time than now; the period of economic recession and downturn. Youths are full of energy, aspirations and potentials, if adequately tapped and giving the opportunity to function in the capacity of the talent possessed, they will be assets to their community (Jimoh, 2014). He further stated that being an energetic, vibrant and active group of any nation, youths constitute the productive parts of the labour force. More education is very important for individuals in particular and society as a whole; not only in terms of economic outcomes like wages or employment, but also for a wide range of social outcomes like health improvement, crime reduction and higher well-being achievement.

To enhance human capital and sustain economic for national development, youth empowerment counselling is paramount to help in identifying the appropriate skills, capacities and opportunities that will enable them to effectively engage in society which will further provides opportunity to achieve economic and social goals in life. Necessary counselling services need to be utilized to help youth in identifying their



potentials and contribute to the development of their societies.

Information Services: For effective decision making, information is an essential component. Information services would help the youth to be well informed about various available educational and career opportunities in the society. One of the reason why unemployment is rampant is not the absence of job opportunity but inadequate information about job availability and required entrance skills. if youths are adequately informed of these opportunities, it will enhance the development of human capitals and keep them on the job for economic sustainability.

Counselling Services: The poor development of self by Nigerian youths is sometimes benched on lack of understanding of self (potentials, strengths and weaknesses). The counselling service will assist the youths to explore and understand who they are, their problems and plan action. It is very essential to understand that problem identified is problem half solved.

Appraisal Services: A major purpose of appraisal service in counselling is to gather information about client that will aid them in understanding of themselves, their problems and making meaningful and decision; for most clients do not know what they can do, how good they are or what to think of themselves (Sambo, 2016). For youth empowerment counselling, this is utilized to help youth diagnose their problems and gather data concerning

the cause in order to find solution to the problem.

Placement Services: Despite the availability of opportunities and provision of information relevant to the job openings, there is need for decision making concerning the type of job or career to choose. Many at times develop themselves in a wrong career thereby making them unsatisfactory or uncomfortable with the job. To enhance human capital development, there is for appropriate placement of individuals with skills and potential that tally with the career of field of life. This service helps in fixing individuals in a position (career) which suit their personality characteristics (interest, intelligence, aptitude, etc).

Follow up Services: According to Tambawal (2005), follow-up service determines the appropriateness of a course of action for a client after he or she has embarked upon it. Anagbogu (2005) observed that follow up assures continuity, consistency of helping and assisting clients for their future development and improvement. He further stated that it is a process of checking how far or the extent of counselling effectiveness of a client. This will help to assess the progress of clients (youths) in their various career choices and in the process make appropriate modification for effective adjustment of individuals.

CONCLUSION

Unemployment and under employment are serious problems in Nigeria which impact negatively on Nigeria's sustainable development. The



social vices that have characterized the nation; armed robbery, child and drug trafficking, terrorism, prostitution and abduction among others, cannot be independent of high rate of unemployment in Nigeria. Therefore, adequate measures should be put in place for the future of Nigerians to be guaranteed. Efforts have been made in this paper to show that human capital development and economic sustainability requires empowerment of youths who are the major work force of any nation. It explored current literature on human capital and its impact on economic sustainability and national development. Human capital is today considered as the most valuable asset and component of economic development in any nation of the world. The empowerment of youths (economically, educationally, politically and socially) helps the nation in sustaining its economy thereby prevent recession and economic downturn. This necessitates the relevance of youth empowerment counselling in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with this discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should intensify effort to establish youth empowerment centre in each local government across the federation with counselling services to keep youths out of street and provide them with employable skills and technical knowhow.
2. Counselling services should be made available in secondary schools across the nation to

sensitize the students on empowerment education and skill acquisition.

3. Universities and other institutions of higher learning should incorporate relevant programmes of sustainability such as poverty reduction, peaceful coexistence, environmental protection, conflict resolution, justice and health.
4. Also, empowerment programmes in the areas of vocation, farming and mining should be organized for youths who are out of school through appropriate counselling services.
5. Youths should also be sensitized on the essence of human capital development and economic sustainability especially as relates to their futures.

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