
REPOSITIONING THE NATION'S ECONOMY THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

One of the strong concerns of the debate among patriotic Nigerians of different shades of opinion is the aspiration for sustained structural transformation and repositioning of the Nation's Economy. This paper examined ways of repositioning the Nation's Economy and enhancing productivity by empowering Nigerian Youths through Non-formal Education (NFE). Emerging issues in productivity and economic development, productivity and the challenges of unemployment, government institutional interventions in enhancing youths contributions to higher national productivity and economic restructuring and the task of nation building and productivity improvement through NFE were highlighted in this paper. Finally, the paper recommended that all hands should be on deck to see to the total success of adult and non-formal education programmes for enhancing productivity and repositioning the nation's economy as education for all is the responsibility of all.

Introduction

The painful retrogression of the Nigerian economy since the early 90s from boom to depression has brought the problem of declining productivity into sharp focus. The managers of the nation's economy have become more enthusiastic in promoting the nation believing that only a substantial increase in productivity could turn around the economy (Ahmed, 2007). Increased productivity alone may not be the panacea for our woes, but the level of commitments and discipline which bring about increased productivity together with self-reliance consciousness

constitute the path to economic turn-around. The position and role of Nigerian Youth is that of a prime over. If youths are of prime importance in repositioning the Nation's Economy there is need to get themselves educated so as to be sufficiently committed and to enable them to contribute their utmost towards realizing these objectives.

Education is a variable tool for both national and economic development (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 2004). The awareness of and the demand for education have made the society to continue to plan for accelerated

educational development as well as the expansion of educational opportunities. Education in Nigeria is currently being faced with reforms to make it functional. In recognition of this fact, the federal government has made substantial investment on education at all levels-primary, secondary and tertiary (Oviawe and Aluyor, 2009).

Over the years, governments through its adult and non-formal education in conjunction with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have embarked on various adult and non-formal education programmes towards the eradication of mass illiteracy so as to alleviate poverty in the nation. This is with the notion that "illiteracy is a scourge on earth, a humiliation of human dignity and violation of social justice" (Omada and Boh, 2006).

Conceptual Framework Non-Formal Education

The concept of adult and non-formal education goes beyond the ability to read, write and calculate Omada and Boh (2006) contends this view when they says that "adult education is renewal by transmission, and forming of activity which involves shaping and moulding individuals into standard forms for social living. Non-formal education therefore emphasizes literacy and

fundamental education, vocational or job training, as well as education about physical and personal development, social education, community organization, political, civic and economic education and variety of other educational programmes designed primarily for man. This is usually carried out to help man to overcome his development needs. Non-formal education connotes alternative to schooling hence the term out of school education." The rubric of non-formal education covers training and instructions outside the formal education system and ranges from individualized apprenticeship to nation wide literacy. This may be vocational such as craft training centres in the nation, design to provide employment opportunities for young school leavers and for other employed persons, or the girls' vocational centres that are established to train girls in vocational skills and prepare young women for marriage and business. Alachi (1996) is of the view that:

Non-formal education centres on man and his immediate environment thus involving people in planned programmes of which they have adequate knowledge and from which they can acquire skills, which in turn will

enable them to grapple more successfully with the odds and ends of life (p.63.).

Productivity

Productivity connotes a relationship between outputs generated and resources inputs over time. Productivity therefore is the efficient and effective utilization of all resources (individual, firm and national) to produce a given level of output of a particular quality. Productivity on a macro level is a function of economic growth and development. Productivity improvement drive, therefore, seeks to produce larger output values from input procurement. It is the energize surplus thus generated by way of profit that is re-involved to ensure corporate continuity and give substance and compensate for individual efforts. We wish to submit that productivity improvement determines our ability to work better and not necessarily harder (National Productivity Centre, 2007).

Since 1960, economic development has been conceptualized: as a term of expanding capital base, inducing competitive economic climate which results in the distribution of the direct gains of production. A rise in manpower, capital,

technology, living standards, manufacturing and agro-allied production, has for long been accepted as productivity indicator. The benefits of this surplus have to be distributed and re-invested for economic development in a manner in order to maintain progressive improvement in productivity (Ahmed, 2007).

The Nigerian economy inspired by the rapid pace of its modernization is still largely under developed. It is apt to note therefore, that the country- has achieved through the various development plans, some economic growth but with limited development. Efforts made by government to alleviate these economic problem from the economic stabilization (temporary provision) Act of 1982, deregulating the economy, National Minimum Wage, Act of 1981, Structural adjustment Programme (SAP) reforms of Obasanjo's administration of 1999-2007 have yielded limited success which are manifested in the trend of domestic output and productivity.

All these go to show that our resources are neither fully -nor efficiently utilized. Productivity therefore should be given the utmost attention it deserves, since productivity remains a vital source of economic growth and development. Growths in productivity thus provide a

significant basis for evaluation die potential of an economy to expand output and improve living standard (National Productivity Centre, 2007).

Productivity and the Challenges of Unemployment

A nation's living standard is determined by the productivity of its economy which is measured by the value of goods and services produced per unit of the nation's human and capital resources. Social and economic development means bringing a better future to the people and the ultimate goal of productivity improvement as a driving force of economic development is to improve the quality of the people.

Productivity influences the ability of individuals and organizations to earn a living and make a profit through contribution into producing and selling goods and services. It should be noted that in the face of competitiveness only those individuals or organizations that provides superior goods and services to the consumers would survive. These economic values are determined by innovations, quality, timeliness and costs. Thus collective and individual productivity determines degree of economic prosperity and standard of living. When the economy increases its productivity level it becomes competitive and tend to

lower the rate of unemployment. The more enterprise or organization, the more income it generates for further investment. In this case, more jobs can be created. Since productivity results in efficient use of resources, it contributes positively to sustainable development, continued acceleration in economic growth and human capital development a driving force in employment creation.

As indicated by the United Nation's Development Programmes (UNDP) issues of self-reliance and nation building are "a process of enlarging people's choices". The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to have a long any near try life, to be educated, and to have access to resources needed for a: standard of living. Additional devices include political freedom guaranteed human rights and personal self-reliance. Therefore, to liberate man from the shackles of poverty, his income generating potential must be fully utilized (Ahmed, 1985).

The Nigeria Youths

In the context of Nigeria's historical experience, Youths have rendered valuable contributions to the struggle for liberation and national development. They constitute a reservoir of energy and dynamism for national transformation if they are correctly

guided, mobilized and fully integrated into the social rubric of the nation. They can also constitute a threat to national survival and stability if they are away from purposeful direction. No nation aspiring to national greatness and prosperity can afford to ignore the youths the repercussion would be that of allowing them to constitute a major social problem. They are a vital source of manpower and do possess leadership potential, and are full of future promises. Once these innate potentials in them are fully exploited and properly handled, their contribution to national development can be immense.

The youths in Nigeria, that is, persons between the ages 6-30 years, form about 59 percent of the population. The active proportion of the productivity active group among the youth i.e. persons between the ages of 15-30; constitute 47 percent of the productive population of the country. This therefore means that the youth population in the country is a big reserve of labour. With appropriate training and guidance, the youth can provide the manpower need of the country and if they are able to develop talents and are inculcated sense of responsibility, they can make positive contributions to national development (National Productivity Centre, 2007).

Government Supporting Empowerment Scheme for Higher National Productivity and Economic Restructuring **Agencies Supporting Youths**

In the first place, it is the government realization of the importance of productivity-driven economy that brought about the National Productivity Centre and other agencies. Government agencies that are involved in Youth Employment Scheme directly or indirectly are:

- i. Small and Medium Enterprises Development of Nigeria (SEDAN). Its head office is at Port-Harcourt Street, Grace II, Abuja and some other states of the Federation.
- ii. Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) of Nigeria. Located at General Yakubu Gowon Way, Kaduna and all over the country.
- iii. National Directorate of Employment (NDE). Headquarters at Wuse District, Zone 1, Abuja and all over the country.
- iv. Presently Bank of Industry (BOI) is supporting handcraft made for export market. The Head Office is at Waff Road, Kaduna (National Productivity Centre, 2007).

Nation Building and Productivity through Non-Formal Education

The patriotic commitment to Nation Building is a duty of all citizens. No single individual can undertake the role of building a nation. Such patriotic but complex task requires that our youths be productively mobilized and challenged to pay their own dues as it were. There are various endowments in any given society. All these talents can be productively harnessed and utilized to form the strong pillars upon which the nation is built.

The application of Productivity Improvement principles and or strategies is enough to create national consciousness towards a sustainable culture in the economy. There is therefore, the need to sensitize our youths to the basic tenets of productivity. We can cut down on absenteeism, lateness to work, extravagance and unnecessary excuses if we want to be seen as working more productively. It is through such resolve that most of those nations who, a little more than a decade ago were economic underdogs have emerged in the global polity to be counted among the economic tigers of the world today (Ahmed, 1985).

However, in the process of repositioning the nation's economy it is very important to alleviate

poverty which is one of the factors militating against Nigeria's economic development effort. Omada and Boh [2006] noted that poverty is said to be multifarious, and defining it may make one to negate some salient features of poverty, as it is better experienced and described. It is multifaceted and characterized by lack of purchasing power, exposure to risk, insufficient access to social and economic services and limited opportunities for income generations. Poverty can be absolute whereby provision for food and non food services for physical subsistence because of very low income. (p. 114).

Nwakaireh and Oreh [2008] opined that poverty can manifest itself in low income, lack of access to quality services such as education, health care, information, credit, water supply and sanitation; lack of political power, participation, dignity and respect, and high dependency among others. The removal of these factors which contribute to poorly is poverty alleviation. The major purpose of poverty alleviation is to provide citizens those congenial opportunities that would enable them provide the basic and essential means of achieving socio-economic independence.

It is widely accepted that poverty and illiteracy are intrinsically interrelated and adult education is

one of the most important and efficient ways to empower the poor. During the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000, the international community underscored the need to eradicate extreme poverty and gave its collective commitment to work towards this aim through education. Through adult education, literacy skill is acquired. The new concept of literacy is no longer limited to reading, writing and computation. Literacy today is measured in terms of the ability to use the knowledge, skills and beliefs that literacy learning brings to solve practical problems in everyday living, to adapt to society and to improve the quality of life.

When adults acquire literacy skills, they are empowered for the future. Again poverty alleviation is not just a matter of income increase or economic development; it is quality raising and capacity building. This type of education is not limited to the school environment but must extend his boundaries to adult education. This will enable public awareness and mobilization of all available resources (p.4-5). Omada and Boh [2006] noted that for poverty alleviation in Nigeria to succeed there is every need to mobilize all and sundry in the country's rural areas through non-formal education programmes. Non-formal education itself is a viable tool that

can be used to alleviate poverty (p. 113).

Roseline and Justina [2006] noted that in Nigeria, particular in the rural areas, where the male life span is much shorter than their female counter part, most women are the breadwinners of their families. The need for women empowerment can not be over-emphasized, if only Nigeria is serious over its war against both illiteracy and poverty alleviation for sustainable economic development in the new millennium. They strongly recommended for centre for adult and non-formal education to be established in all communities, especially vocational education centers where women and young drop-outs should learn, hair dressing, weaving, soap making, pomade making, bakery, bay making etc.. Lack of vocational skill acquisition on the part of the individuals has been considered the blame of the economy of many African countries, particularly Nigeria (p. 46).

Another way to reposition the nation's economy is to encourage and support Computer Non-formal Literacy Programmes. Okpoko (2006) reported that computer literacy became integrated in the school curriculum of formal education system in Nigeria in 1987. Computer literacy means the ability to identify and operate the

soft ware and hard ware of a computer so as to be prepared for the world of work requires computer usage.

The Federal Government realized that computer literacy cannot be achieved through formal education system alone because of economic situation prevailing in the country. She then started to encourage the use of non-formal educational settings for the teaching of computer programmes for the purpose of promoting computer in the country. Hence, she established the Computer Professional Registration Council of Nigeria (CPN) under the umbrella of the Computer Association of Nigeria (COAN). This council encourages members set up training institutes, as well as initiate and sustain polices or improving Non Formal Computer Literacy Programmes for the inculcation of computer literacy among the Nigerian populace with set of standards for training institutions. These standards consist of the curriculum, method of teaching compute and infrastructures required as well as the environment needed for the teaching and operation of the computer (p.53-54).

The computer literacy training programme offered in Nigeria beginning in Lagos, and some other large Nigeria cities from 1990 at different centres are expected to achieve the objectives

of:

- Increasing the number of computer literate citizens in Nigeria.
- Increasing the level of computer appreciation among young people especially with regards to potentials of the computer.
- Engage young people to acquire and utilize computer skills in computer operations in the various aspects of life and occupation.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) is seen increasingly as independently valuable pathway to knowledge and skills acquisition; and in some instances constitute a more effective avenue than conventional formal education and training. It is an indispensable and powerful instrument that contributes towards the development of any nation by engineering and motivating the majority of the populace to be active members of the society. Non Formal Education plays a great role in human development processes due to the fact that it serves both old and young, literates and illiterates (Nzeneri, 1996).

In Nigeria government agencies like the operation feed the nation, green revolution programmes etc were formed to give non-formal education to people on how to improve the agriculture production sector of the economy and help

people to become self reliant.. The War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which was introduced by Buhari/Idiagbon military junta was another non-formal education instrument to help inculcate discipline and moral uprightness to Nigerians irrespective of their educational qualification. The war against indiscipline disciplined the minds of the people such that they became orderly in the society. This at that time made the people to become good citizens of the Nigerian society. With WAI in place the entire citizenry became conscious of acts that constitute indiscipline and avoided them. Popular theatre alliance identifies the directorate for food and rural infrastructure (DFFRI) and mass mobilization for economic recovery self reliance and social justice (MAMSER) which had the same function as NOA National Orientation Agency (NOA) as all agents for non-formal education.

The directorate for food and rural infrastructures was formed as government agent to listen to and rectify rural calamities while mass mobilization for economic recovery, self-reliance and social justice embodied the principle of mobilizing and conscientising the rural man for self reliance.

All these serve the purpose and function of non-formal education aimed at educating the people on certain issues aimed of poverty

alleviation and they are organised out of the formal school system. The better life for rural women programme was a campaign aimed at educating the rural women on how to make life better for their living by way of up lifting their conditions of living in the rural areas. Non-formal education therefore is a systematic organized activity out of formal school system through which people seek to acquire skills to better their living conditions (Omada and Boh, 2006, p.114). The economic role of adult education in development is apparent in its contribution to human capital formation. It is now well established that, alongside health care, sanitation, and nutrition that improve people's standard of living and productivity by reducing sickness and mortality rates and by increasing life expectancy, adult basic education, by equipping recipients with essential literacy and numeracy skills, yields high rates on investment, thereby enhancing labour productivity. An educated population also provides a more attractive investment climate. Thus, investment in the development of human capital, through adult education, is crucial for developing a labour force and managerial know-how, able to compete in today's global economy. Formal education alone is not sufficient for playing this roles as even those categories of the population who have had formal education and

training might need to be updated and re-skilled through adult education, mainly because today's knowledge society tends to render previously acquired knowledge and skills inappropriate [Commission of the African Union, 2005:16].

Conclusion

Nigerian youths should be conscious of the fact that whatever they produced, they are contributing to nation building. The challenges ahead are enormous and daunting, with a strong zeal, commitment and the right value orientation. Nigeria and youths can break through and excel with the aid of non-formal education.

Great achievers are those who resolved to brace the storm and outline every odd they encounter on their way up. As a team player in the patriotic task of nation building and national economic transformation, youth must envision a great Nigeria with prosperous people. In getting involved in any of these roles, they will be contributing to enhance nation's life collectively by lending a hand to the programmes of economic restructuring and nation building.

Recommendations

The paper recommended that the Federal Government's intention of making education accessible to

everybody is a project whose success lies on with the cooperation of administrators, teachers/instructors and indeed the learners. Therefore, all hands should be on deck to see to the total success of adult and non-formal education programmes for enhancing productivity and repositioning the nation's economy as education for all is the responsibility of all. This could be made possible if the government can ensure that, its greatest budgetary, allocation goes to the educational sectors with much priority to adult and non-formal education.

Finally, adequate support should be provided by both governments and private sectors to youth empowerment scheme programmes for enhancing Nation Building and Productivity through Non-Formal Education in Nigeria.

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