

## TRAINING FOR SKILL ACQUISITION: AN ANTIDOTE FOR EFFECTIVE POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Poverty is a major focus of concern and an active area of research and policy debate. It is a central problem in development studies because it has been discovered to be rampant in developing countries including Nigeria. The incidence of poverty has been on the increase. Present concern for poverty and poverty reduction worldwide has resulted in both international and domestic initiatives to reduce the miseries of the poor. This paper focuses on the need for training in skill acquisition to all those who need and can use skills as a means for tackling the problem of unemployment and underemployment thereby reducing the incidence of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria.*

### Introduction

Improving the job skills of the work force has been a cornerstone of economic development theory and practice and has received more international assistance than any other form of or level of education. Unfortunately, the results of much of the investment in skill training over the years seem to have been disappointing. One consequence has been growing uncertainty among governments and donors about the next steps to take in developing national training capacity in both public and private sectors. However, educational system must continue to provide the needed skills required by the market to enhance the employability of Nigerians. The educational system must provide a suitable platform for exchanging ideas and training in skill acquisition aimed at creating employment. As the complexity and responsibilities of jobs increase, specific manual skills become less important than higher-order conceptual skills and theoretical knowledge. Training individuals to acquire skills needed in the workplace become necessary in order to stem the incidence of poverty facing the Nigeria nation. The acquisition of relevant work skills provides the learner with the confidence and motivation necessary to progress, gain qualification, and succeed in life and the workplace.

This becomes necessary because poverty and unemployment has been identified as one of the intractable problems facing mankind today. Record released by World Bank in 2010, showed that an estimated 1.6 billion people out of the estimated 6.2 billion people in the world were in the shackle of extreme poverty, living on less than one dollar a day. The World Bank indicator 2011 revealed that 39 per cent of the poor lived in East Asia and Pacific. While, the Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 34 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. In sub-Saharan African, the poverty situation is deplorable. For instance, Sokenu (2003) reveals that about 74.8 million youth aged 15-24 were unemployed in 2011, an increase of more than 4 million since 2007. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming particularly in the face of the current global economic crises. However, unemployment in Nigeria is not a recent phenomenon; given the fact at the period of economic boom (1970s) the country recorded 6.2 per cent level of unemployment among youth (Oladunni, 1999)

Similarly, according to Eroke (2012), the level of unemployment especially among the youth has risen to 9.8 per cent and 11.5 per cent. The rising unemployment rate has

become a major concern to all Nigerians in view of the dangerous signal it sends to all segments of the society. Current figure released by the Bureau of Statistics puts youth unemployment rate at over 25 per cent. The implication is that 60 million youth out of a population of 150 million are unemployed; a situation that no doubt is threatening the corporate survival of Nigeria as a nation.

The depth of poverty is greater in sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere in the world. This was confirmed by the Human development Report (2000) cited in Ifijeh (2000). The report expressed deepening poverty in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Similarly, report by Edemodu (2000) showed that poverty situation in Nigeria is on the increase. Edemodu lamented that Nigeria has moved from 136<sup>th</sup> position, five years ago to 151<sup>st</sup> position as from 2010. Various studies have shown that there has been steady increase in the number of people living below poverty line using the standard one dollar per day. It is estimated that the incidence of poverty is around the region of 70 per cent which ranks Nigeria as one of the 20 poorest countries of the world. For instance, the report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2004 showed that poverty and unemployment accounts for 52.9 per cent on those aged 25 and 44. Considering the population estimates, Nigeria may well be harboring the third largest number of the poorest people in the world.

Similarly, Soludo (2007) cited by Kudan (2012) observed poverty inequalities in Nigeria. Kudan pointed out that while 95 per cent population of Jigawa State is classified as poor, only 20 per cent of Bayelsa State is so classified. While 85 per cent of Kwara State is classified as poor, only 32 per cent of Osun is in the same boat. These inequalities among other related challenges mean that different Nigerians live different in parts of the country. All these point to the fact that poverty and unemployment is a serious problem to the Nigeria nation. Hence, the need for skill acquisition training to all Nigerians as a means of increasing the productive power to stem out the menace of poverty reduction in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Training and Need for Skill Acquisition.**

Poverty has many strands and must be tackled from several directions at once. One of the ways to fight poverty to a standstill is by equipping individuals with salable skills needed for gainful employment in the public sector as well as self-reliant. Training is the process of learning the skills that are needed to do a job. It involves imparting required skills, knowledge and attitudes to an individual in order to increase his/her productive capacity. It is that activity which involves the acquisition of special skill, knowledge and attitude to perform a particular vocation (Okorie, 2000). Okorie stressed that training proceeds from the assumption that a gap exist between the required and actual performance, which calls for a bridge via training is the result of inadequacy of knowledge, skill and attitude in the chosen vocation or job. Therefore, the objective of training is to provide individual with salable skill needed to function in the workplace. The high incidence of unemployment amongst the Nigeria population especially school leavers clearly highlights the importance of skill training and career development which is achievable through skill acquisition. The youths who cannot fit into the academic oriented curriculum would need practical skill to enable them function profitable in the work-based society. Skill training might be needed amongst the youth who enter the market seeking employment that hardly exist in Nigeria today. To draw the majority of these seekers out of the unemployment market, vocational and technical training become the most potent elixir.

Though many people still view training as costly and time wasting there is still much value in training people for proficiency in their jobs. In order to achieve industrial growth and poverty reduction in Nigeria, there is need for skill acquisition training programmes that will provide opportunities for meaningful development of the citizenry in order to achieve productivity and enhance performance (Ilori, 1999). The demand of the 21<sup>st</sup> and the effect of globalization have made it necessary to Nigerians to acquire skills and competences needed to face realities of the workplace. It is accepted widely that no nation can rise above the skill level of its human resources. Therefore, the acquisitions of relevant skills by adult and youth alike that will eventually be part of workforce development become imperative.

This need become necessary due to inability of the school system to meet the needs of the students in recent times (Ogwo and Oranu, 2006). However, the costs of not training in effect are tremendous in spite of the fact that many cannot see the effect readily, demands sustainable training to reduce poverty in Nigeria. All efforts should be geared towards exploring means of making training a more effective instrument. The acquired skills through training should be in-line with the chosen vocation and the need of the community. This is particularly important because training is wasted if it is not directly related to the need of specific skilled-manpower. In Nigeria, training for skill is usually provided in government polytechnics, technical colleges, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB), vocational training centres, National Directorate of Employment among others, while the informal sector works mainly through the apprentices. Both of these systems face problems. Some of the problems faced by skill training centres as outlined by the Department for International Development (DFID), (2009) include:

1. Poor financial management
2. Poor perception on graduates of vocational trade
3. Graduates of skill acquisition training do not appreciate the significance of private sector in the provision of relevance skill
4. Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) who should be major employers of these graduates are not involved in the design and delivery of Vocational Education Training programme.
5. Inadequate support from government and its agencies

It is however worthy to note that in order to get the most of skill acquisition and/or VET system in Nigeria, government and agencies responsible for this noble work must address problems facing it.

### **Concept of poverty and poverty Reduction**

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept, so its definition is often dependent on the angle from where it is being perceived. And because it is a problem of social action, the appropriate basis for defining and measuring poverty has been widely debated. The United Nations Development Programme [(UNDP), 1999] defined poverty as the denial of choices and opportunities most to human development to lead a long health, creative life and enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others. It is the lack of basic needs of adequate food, shelter and clothing, access to health facilities, dearth of skills and education. To drive the matter to present time, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in Sekenu (2003) defined poverty as the

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condition of not having enough to eat, poor drinking water, poor nutrition, unfit housing a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, inadequate health care, lack of productive assets, lack of economic infrastructure and inability to actively participate in decision making process.

Traditionally, poverty is viewed in terms of insufficient income for securing the basic necessities of life such as food, potable water, clothing and shelter. Thus, it is observed that poverty exist in any situation, when income or disposable resources are inadequate to support a minimum standard of decent living.

Poverty reductions are efforts to eradicate poverty in a nation. In the words of Oladunni (1999), poverty eradication in Nigeria consists of series of purposive acts and measures designed nationally and internationally or at local levels to address poverty situation and to bring succour to the affected individuals. It focuses on meeting the basic requirement for a permanent reduction in poverty through the provision of basic needs such as health services, education, water supply, shelter, clothing food among other. Olaitan, *et al*, (2000) enumerated five broad purposes of poverty reduction as follows:

- The control of arbitrary irruptive human population growth.
- Provision of training in skill acquisition to all those who need and can use them.
- Tackling the problems of unemployment and under-employment through massive job creation.
- Provision of ample and affordable services and
- Improvement of the environment.

Other purposes of poverty reduction include the control of urban-rural drift, establishing a happy, contented citizenry and stimulation of economic growth and social stability.

The quest for poverty reduction in Nigeria is historical. Successive government in Nigeria since independence have formulated policies and programmes aimed at bringing succour to the poor by introducing policies which sought to reduce poverty among the masses. The scourge of poverty has been found to have more biting effect in the rural areas where the bulk of Nigeria population lives (Balogun, 1999).

The earlier programmes focused mainly on the provision of food, as food was identified to be controlled in the fight against poverty. Thus, Programmes like Back to Land; Green Revolution Programme; Operation Feed the Nation focused on ensuring the availability of food to fight against hunger. Between middle 1980's to the present time, well articulated poverty reduction programmes such as National Directorate of Employment (DNE); Directorate for Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI); Family Support Programme (FSP); Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) have all come on board. These are brilliant ideas from all indications but their outcome hardly go beyond the political theories with which they were launched (Olaitan, *et al.*, 2000).

Ajakaiye and Olomola (1999) observed that one of the impediments to poverty reduction in the developing world is lack of internal motivation and ingenuity to fight poverty at the right time and in the right place. They added that the theories and ideas about the design,

timing, sequencing and financing of poverty reduction programme have been flowing in a unidirectional manner from the western world to the less developed countries.

### Causes of Poverty and Poverty Situation in Nigeria

Poverty embodies the issue of human right, health, nutrition, customs and tradition and dearth of skills. It also includes environmental demographic and political, legal, social, cultural and historical conditions. In effect, anything that combines to create poverty. Given the magnitude and spread of poverty and the desire to reduce its size and curb the spread, there is need to identify the causes of poverty. Identifying the causes of poverty and poverty situation in Nigeria will no doubt facilitate the processes of poverty management and planning.

Although the basis causes of poverty can be easily discerned by even casual observation, the World Bank's Poverty Task Force, as documented by its report on Sub-Saharan Africa in Ilori (1999) identified the following factors as the root causes of poverty in the sub-region.

- i. Inadequate access to employment opportunities
- ii. Inadequate physical assets such as land and capital and minimal access by the poor to credit even on a small scale.
- iii. Inadequate access to means of supporting rural development in poor regions.
- iv. Inadequate access to market where the poor can sell goods and services
- v. Low endowment of human capital
- vi. Destruction of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity.
- vii. Lack of participation, failure to draw the poor into the design of development programme and
- viii. Inadequate access to assistance for those living at the margin and those victimized by transitory poverty.

In addition to the above mentioned factors, rapid population growth or over population, the use of poor or inappropriate technology, low growth rate of economy, prevalence of locative inefficiency particularly in the public sector and low rate of investment are critical factors.

The prevalence of poverty has serious negative consequences on both the individual and the larger society. The lack of access to resources by individuals leads to a state of powerlessness, helplessness and despair, as well as inability to subsist and protect oneself against economic shocks, social, economic, cultural and political discrimination and marginalization (Olaitan, *et al*, 2000). This predicament leads to desperation and helplessness and if left unchecked could in turn lead to violence, high rate of robbery, theft, thugery and other deviant behaviours.

Poverty situation in Nigeria is alarming; various researches have shown that poverty is on the increase in Nigeria. For instance, Sekonu (2003) in her findings claimed that Nigeria moved from 28.1 per cent in 1980 to 46.3 in 1985 and escalated to 65.6 per cent in 1996 and 70.4 per cent in 2011. Equally, Oladunni (1999) finds out that about 67 million Nigerians are living below poverty line. The report also shows that the percentage of the rural dwellers in the core of poverty bracket rose from 3.0 and 6.5 per cent to 0.4 and 7.5

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per cent respectively. Within the same period, the percentage of moderately poor in the rural areas rose from 21.8 to 36.6 per cent and 14.2 to 30.3 per cent. The findings of the Human Development Index as reported in Oladunni (1999) ranked Nigeria as the most populated black nation on earth and the eight in the world, with a population of over 150 people. On the other hand, Salami (2011) observed that Nigeria has a nominal Growth Domestic Product (GDP) of 207.11 billion and she is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy in Africa and also the sixth largest exporter of crude oil. The report by Salami indicates that there is poverty in the mist of plenty. Nigeria is also ranged as 140 and 147 poorest country out of 175 countries with a real GDP per capital of 1016 and 1352.00 in 2000 and 2012 respectively.

The above deduction shows that Nigerians in general are becoming increasingly poor. This is anchored on the Nigerians lack of basic choices and opportunities to live a long and healthy life and to enjoy a decent standard of living. The reality on ground which helps to give a better understanding of the poverty situation in Nigeria is that which can be seen every day on the streets of the Nigeria roads and in the rural areas. However, the paradox of this issue which is baffling to development observes in Nigeria is, how this situation was allowed to germinate in the midst of abundant human and material resources the country is blessed with.

### **Skill Acquisition and its Impact on Poverty Reduction**

Skill is the ability to perform a task well, especially as a result of long practical experience. The term generally denotes a movement that is reasonably complex and the execution of which requires at least a minimal amount of practice. According to the Business Dicionary.com (2011), it is the ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or jobs functions involving ideas (cognitive skills) , and/or people (interpersonal skills). Skill denotes a well established habit of acting, thinking or behaving in a specific activity, which has become so natural to the individual through repetitive practice that has become automatic. Okorie (2000) refers to skill as expertise, practical ability, dexterity and tact. He stressed that skill is an organized sequence of actions, proficiency executed and usually displaying a flexible habit of thinking and behaving in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetitive practice.

Skill acquisition is the process of equipping youth and adult with salable skills necessary for employment and to help workers update their job skills and instruction in their chosen career (Olaitan, *et al* 1999). Skill acquisition can be accomplished through work experience or through education in the school, workshops and laboratories. The need for skill acquisition training at all level of human endeavour as a weapon against poverty reduction cannot be over stressed. This is so because skill acquisition is aimed at developing a better way of integrating academic, skill training and work experience as well as a means of increasing the productive power of individual and a nation.

Therefore, skill acquisition is seen by Maigida (2005) as that which provide training to individuals with the aimed of equipping them with various salable skills for sustainable poverty reduction in the world of work would no doubt empower youths and adults alike to generate employment and reduce incidence of poverty and value reorientation towards self and societal development. Skill acquisition requires training the beneficiaries in relevant institutions. In Nigeria, training for skill acquisition in the formal sector is

provided in polytechnics, monotecnics, and technical colleges. While, the informal system works mainly through apprenticeship. Both of these systems are faced with numerous problems.

For instance, Musa (2003) identifies the problem with the formal vocational training system as usually with resources control and management. The community seems to have poor opinion of vocational trade and graduates of the VET are not employable readily. Those who provide the training do not usually appreciate the significant of the private sector who are usually the prospective employers of graduates from the VET system. Similarly, the problems of informal sector are inadequate support from government and its agencies as well as the low profile and image of the sector. Researcher from the Institute of Development Policy and Management (IDPM), United Kingdom and cited in Musa (2003) found that:

- There is high unemployment amongst graduates of polytechnics and technical colleges, especially in the semi urban centres
- A new agenda for the Nigeria VET system has been initiated, and based on the philosophy that VET should include educational institutions that produce graduates who are able to find jobs based on their technical and entrepreneurial skill and education
- Reform of the VET system includes creation of more VET institutions with emphases on self employment, improving the image of the system, accreditation of skills, training new teachers, reforming the curriculum to suit the new needs of the people.

To get most out of the Nigeria VET system, stack holder in skill acquisition training and the Nigeria government should address problems that deal with not just VET system but also outside of it. Government must take stock of consequences of economic libration and deregulation when the considering skill training, unemployment and poverty reduction.

### **Conclusion**

Poverty is an endemic problem that results to man's inability to meet the necessities of life. Its effect in the Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria has been on the increase. The situation in Nigeria has deteriorated as reflected by various indicators in this paper. This situation, development observers opined has worsened the existing low level of indicators such as life expectancy at birth, high infant and maternal mortality rate and death rates among others. It is no doubt that the much needed economic development in Nigeria at a much satisfactory rate is likely to be difficult unless deliberate efforts are geared towards massive skill acquisition training to enable individual realize their potentials so as to reduce the incidence of poverty in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

In order to fight the menace of poverty and to achieve industrial growth in this millennium, there is need for skills training programmes that will provide opportunities for meaningful development of the poor as well as enhancing their productivity and performance. It is on this note that the researchers recommend the following:

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1. A well structured curriculum with in-built motivational instincts, commitments and adaptation skills should be design for both public and private skill training institutions, with right policies and dogged political will to support its implementation.
2. Stake holders in policy formulation and implementation should act decisively and in co-ordinate fashion to reduce the fear and uncertainty that is hindering private investment so that the private sector can restart the main engine of job creation.
3. The unemployed should be given opportunity to indicate which programme and projects are good for them. Instead of exogenous choices being imposed on them.
4. Reform agenda in VET should not only lay emphases on public sector employment, but should also focus on the private sector especially the Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs), and the informal sector which both have the potential to provide employment opportunity
5. There is need to integrate VET system with the informal sector, poverty reduction and unemployment initiatives. For instance, formal accreditation of skill provided by the informal sector can help improve the employment opportunities for unemployed
6. Finally, the public and private skill training institutions should take advantage of emerging trends in Human Resource Development in the informal sector for a dynamic investment for sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria.

Note: an idle man is the devil's worker. Unemployment in the Nigeria society today does not kill only the initiative and potentials of the individual, but it is also a motivating factor for illicit activities. Unemployment has an advert effect on the National security of any Nation as the unemployment rate in any country is directly proportional to the crime rate.

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