



**ROLE OF YOUTH  
EMPOWERMENT  
PROGRAMMES IN  
ACTUALIZING THE  
TRANSFORMATION AGENDA IN  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

**T**ransformation Agenda is a vision encoded with hopes that will turn Nigeria around and give it a new sense of direction. The Transformation Agenda has been articulated into policies, programmes and projects which when faithfully implemented and systematically evaluated are expected to bring about positive changes in developmental indices of the country. The transformation agenda policies and strategies include but not limited to: Job creation, to be achieved through the National Action Plan on Employment Creation (NAPEC), implementing a youth empowerment safety net support programme; development of industrial clusters; reviewing of university curricular to align with job requirements in industry among others. There has been a lot skill acquisition programme aimed at transforming Nigeria but has constantly failed

due to implementation problems. The role of skills acquisition programme in actualizing the transformation agenda are: the

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transformation  
agenda

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that after apprenticeship registration, youths are given an orientation course that matches both their attitude and aptitude among others. There are a lot of challenges that the youths face in the bid of acquiring these skills, they include the following: Location of skill acquisition workshop, problems of instructors, lack of money and start-up-kits and interest of the youths among others. It is concluded that skill acquisition programmes if implemented well, will actualize the transformation agenda. It is therefore recommended that Skill acquisition workshops should be established in every nook and cranny of each states of the Federation to make it accessible to the youths. This is because establishing such schemes in selected states and urban areas in the country may discourage a large proportion of the youths from different states and rural areas of the country from benefiting on the programme,

competent and experienced craftsmen and women of reputable character should be recruited by the federal and state Governments as instructors to sustain and make the programmes more viable, money and start-up-kits-stocks and tools should be made available to each participant in the scheme promptly to start or set up his or her own business after graduation among others.

### **Introduction**

**N**igeria's development efforts have over the years been characterized by lack of continuity, consistency and commitment (3Cs) to agreed policies, programmes and projects as well as an absence of a long-term perspective. The culminating effect has been growth and development of the Nigerian Economy without a concomitant improvement in the overall welfare of Nigerian citizens. Disregard to these 3Cs has resulted in rising unemployment, inequality and poverty. The need for a holistic transformation of the Nigerian State has necessitated a strategy that gives cognizance to these 3Cs. The Transformation Agenda which is based and draws its inspiration from the Nigerian Vision 20:2020 (FGN, 2011)

The Transformation Agenda has been articulated into policies, programmes and projects which when faithfully implemented and systematically evaluated are expected to bring about positive changes in developmental indices of the country. Anyim (2018) observed that these articulated policies and programmes are capable of facilitating the revamping of the various sectors of the economy, ensuring comparatively high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and High Human Development Index (HDI). The transformation agenda therefore emerges from integration of action plans and strategies designed to eliminate the mistakes of successive past administrations in policy formulation and implementation. The transformation policies and strategies include but not limited to: Job creation, to be achieved through the National Action Plan on Employment Creation (NAPEC), implementing a youth empowerment safety net support programme; development of industrial clusters; reviewing of university curricular to align with job requirements in industry among others.

The objective of this study is therefore to identify the roles youth empowerment programmes play in actualizing the transformation agenda. It will also outline the challenges of transformation agenda and the one the youths are facing in the bid to acquire these skills in actualization of the lofty goals of transformation agenda.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment is the condition or situation where person or group of persons are without jobs (Adebayo, 2018). Adebayo noted that unemployment as a global concern is of more dire consequence for youths. The root cause of unemployment in Nigeria as identified by Adebayo include; skill mismatch, lack of relevant skills, lack of qualified an trained manpower, rapid rural-urban migration, inappropriate school curricula, rapid population growth, rapid expansion of the educational system, decline in the manufacturing sector and corruption among others. International Labour Organization (ILO, 2007), see unemployment as the number of economically active population who is without work but

available and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work. Osakwe, (2017) in another occasion explained that, unemployment exists when a fit and eligible individual or group of individuals do not have a job or work to do for some compensation. Similarly, Akwara (2018) noted that unemployment and under-employment in a developing country such as Nigeria are largely caused by pressure of rapidly growing population of school leavers, defective manpower planning and job seekers selectivity of job availability and location. Indeed, unemployment is a global trend but it is prevalent mostly in the developing countries of the world such as Nigeria, with social, economic, political and psychological attendants.

Unemployed persons, according to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) are persons above a specified age (usually 15) not being in paid employment or self-employment but currently available for work during the reference period. The unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to reach 32.5 percent. The figure is projected to increase further in 2022. Chronological data show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria rose constantly in the past years. What is driving unemployment in Nigeria? One factor that is driving unemployment in Nigeria is the state of the economy. The economy has not been in good shape for the past five years and first went into a recession in 2016. In 2020 in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic it plunged into another recession – its worst in four decades (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021).

### **Youth Empowerment**

Empowerment according to Kogi State Government (2019) is a way of changing the attitude and potentials of individual's to positively re-direct them to gain control over their life or situation they are in. This involves making individuals to create and produce goods and services that will help them economically. Youth empowerment according to Ogbe (2016) involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their life style. He maintained that youth empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of transformation of ideas into

creativeness. Youth empowerment can also be seen as a means of exposing the youths into skills or training that makes them productive. It encompasses different ways youth can be exposed into different trades that may help them to engage in sustainable paid and self-employment.

### **Types of Empowerment**

The various youth empowerment programmes so far discussed can be classified into the four main types namely, economic empowerment, productive empowerment, marketing empowerment, and skill acquisition empowerment.

- i. Economic Empowerment:** Economic empowerment according to Ogbe, (2016) is the way of motivating individuals in the society to be productive and self-dependent by inculcating into the individuals entrepreneurship skills such as personal business initiatives and basic skills in business development. In fact, the best foundation for any business success is to have several possibilities for creating profits. However, profit creation is determined by the choice of the business, self-concept, interest, resources, and aspirations which in turn would enable the person to achieve self-development, self-actualization and self-fulfillment.
- ii. Production Empowerment:** Production empowerment according to Idachaba (2016) is a basic focus of entrepreneurship initiatives. It is determined by what the person trained wants to produce, how to produce and to whom those goods are produced. Personal trait and initiative will instinct in the person on what to produce which depends on the resource available. How to produce the goods depends on the factors of production available to him. Finally to whom such goods are produced depends on the market. Knowledge of the factors of production which determines how the goods are to be produced and to whom they are to be produced can be imbibed mostly through training and marketing strategies.

- iii. **Marketing Empowerment:** Marketing of goods and services produced in any economy according to Magbagbeola (2019) is one of the crucial attributes of a businessman. This is because it creates in businessmen or women the ability to convince a customer that what have been produced is the best. Acquisition of adequate marketing skill through training enables the entrepreneurs to market their product easily. Usually, different marketing strategies are learnt and are applied to convince the customers of the need to purchase the products. The marketing strategies include effective communication, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- iv. **Skill Development Empowerment:** Skills are acquired as ability for individual or group of individuals to acquire more skills for the resolution of a particular situation. Youth empowerment as an act of skill development therefore signifies different creative measures of developing basic ideas through training in skills that are relevant to the social and economic survival of the nation (Ochiagha, 2015).The above empowerment strategies are expected to imbibe in the youths the spirit of craftsmanship and entrepreneurship which makes them job creators instead of job seekers.

### **Skill Acquisition**

Skill acquisition can be defined as the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance. It involves the training of people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainers and the trainees for certain duration and under certain conditions. Ochiagha (2015) defined skill acquisition as the process of demonstrating the habit of active thinking or behaviour in a specific activity. He further stated that skill acquisition is seen as the ability to do or perform an activity that is related to some meaningful exercise, work or job. He maintains that for skill to be acquired, appropriate knowledge, attitudes, habits of thought and qualities of character are learnt

to enable the acquirer develop intellectual, emotional and moral character which prepares him or her for a brighter future.

Similarly, Donli (2016) is of the view that skill acquisition is the manifestation of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. He stressed that if individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self-sustenance in the economy, it will promote their charisma in any work environment. Donli further avers that skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people. The purpose of skill acquisition programme as a means of youth empowerment according to Ogundowolo (2018) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in future. Ogundowolo maintained that the ideal skill acquisition is capable of ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and transforming them into creators of wealth and employment instead of seekers. Youth empowerment involves different ways through which the youths could be empowered to achieve self-sustained national development instead of depending on government for provision of empowerment opportunities. It is believed that training through skill acquisition programmes will enhance the sustainability of the youths in different fields of trade. This is possible when the culture of creative ideas is instilled in youths to make them productive and self-reliant members of the society. This is very important because as Olaitan (2016) rightly stated, skill acquisition is meant for those who need it, want it, and can profit from it.

### **Transformation Agenda**

Transformation Agenda is a vision encoded with hopes that will turn the country around and give it a new sense of direction. The agenda draws its inspiration from vision 20:2020 and the previous National Development Plans (NDPs) which had been in place before President Goodluck Jonathan took the mantle of leadership. This revised government plan of action for revitalizing the Nigeria economy comes up against the backdrop of several failed National Development Plans and programmes mounted by previous

regimes such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted in 1986 to redeem Nigeria's economy. SAP eventually had more negative effect on the economy resulting in de-industrialization and increase in the country's debt burden. The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), adopted in 2003 did record some measure of success in economic growth but was not sustainable (FGN, 2011).

Transformation means qualitative change, an act of changing in form or shape or appearance. Before the word transformation comes into play, it means that there is a lot things wrong with the status quo. Transformation Agenda is a vision encoded with hopes that will turn the country Nigeria around and give it a new sense of direction. The agenda draws its inspiration from vision 20:2020 and the previous National Development Plans (NDPs) which had been in place before President Goodluck Jonathan took the mantle of leadership. This revised government plan of action for revitalizing the Nigeria economy comes up against the backdrop of several failed National Development Plans and programmes mounted by previous regimes such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted in 1986 to redeem Nigeria's economy. SAP eventually had more negative effect on the economy resulting in de-industrialization and increase in the country's debt burden. The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), adopted in 2003 did record some measure of success in economic growth but was not sustainable (FGN, 2011).

### **Major Challenges in Implementing the Transformation Agenda**

- i. **Governance:** One of the major challenges in the implementation of the transformation agenda is governance. Most Federal and State Ministries including the Ministry of Education are still grappling with the bureaucratic bottle necks. The minister of education herself has been quoted to complain of having to struggle against the frustrating attitudes of bureaucrats' to implement the President's Transformation Agenda (Vanguard Newspaper, 2012) Nigeria's inability to tackle most of the developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment,

security and poor infrastructure can be largely attributed to poor governance arising from poor policy formulation and implementation, mismanagement of resources, institutionalized corruption, wastages and economic crimes. Individuals must be carried along as they have a key role to play in the promotion of good governance.

- ii. **Programme Review:** Review of the programme should be in the form of strategic interventions such as: Clearly articulating the roles of the Local, State and Federal governments in the implementation of the programme to avoid encroachment into each other's constitutional rights. Similarly, redefining the roles of UBEC so that it does not conflict with the roles of the National Institute for Educational Planning (NIEP) in training Managers, National Education and Research and Development Council (NERDC) for curriculum development and the National Teachers Institute (NTI) for teacher development. Employing a built-in monitoring mechanism to ensure achievement of set targets. Setting intervention strategies based on the identified loopholes and barriers to UBE, EFA and MDG targets of every LGA and every State. Providing more information about the implementation strategies so that the people can be carried along all through the process.
- iii. **Implementation:** The institutional capacity and commitment of the personnel in the various government agencies and institutions overseeing the implementation of the Transformation Agenda is grossly inadequate. For instance the problems in the implementation of UBE include poor supervision of projects, poor quality of work, poor preparation of action Plans and changes in Action Plans without reference to the commission. Also, poor prioritization of projects and accountability by states constitute setbacks. The distribution of books to primary schools across the country in order to restore reading culture among the pupils and to improve the quality of primary education is being undermined

because oftentimes these books do not get to the target beneficiaries, rather the books are found in various markets! Moreover, what is the meaning of distributing books to a non-reading public without intervention to enhance reading. Implementation can only be effective if the people key into the objectives.

- iv. Sustainability:** Sustainability has been the bane of most National policies and development programmes. These policies and programmes are mounted by government to tackle specific problems and after a couple of years fizzle out or are abandoned by successive regimes. In the present Transition Agenda, we are assured that there is an overriding push for effective planning, coordination and provision for continuity of policies and programmes of the agenda with creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation through Public Private Partnership (PPP) (Anyim, 2012). The challenges in sustainability are linked to governance, poor implementation and non-ownership of such policies and programmes by the individuals and institutions that are to implement them.
- v. Equitable Access:** Issues of gender equity (comparable education experience for boys and girls) in education and gender parity (equal enrolment of boys and girls), have been the subject of much debate during the past decades and have become a prominent topic of debate in all countries. However, it is no longer a case for agitation among women in Sub-Sahara Africa or developing nations as a whole. There is a rising global consensus for the rights of women. This is seen in international treaties such as the declarations of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. Countries acceding to the treaty (which Nigeria is among) are bound to provide equal opportunities for men and women. In Education, MDG and the EFA compels Nigeria and other developing nations to ensure that

there is both parity and equity in education. A positive correlation exists between the enrollment of girls in primary school, the gross national product and increase of life expectancy (World Bank, 2012)

### **Review of Related Literature**

With the onset of the Transformation Agenda of Federal Government, it is timely for educational sector to queue in. It is essential to ask ourselves one basic question and that is, do instituted time lines and performance indicators show progress and achievement of set targets so far? To provide accurate response here, it is essential to outline the priority policies for the development of the education sector, under the Transformation Agenda and these are to: promote primary enrolment of ail children of school-going age, irrespective of the income profile of the parents, engage in the provision of infrastructure such as classrooms across all levels, so as to ease overcrowding, increase access and reduce pupil/teacher ratio; and enhance the efficiency, resourcefulness and competence of teachers and other educational personnel through training capacity building and motivation (FGN, 2004).

Considering the strategic importance of education in human and economic development of any nation, a well-coordinated approach is needed, to tackle the enormous task of achieving this policy thrust. Tertiary Institutions in the country have been mandated to introduce entrepreneurial studies into their curricula, to ensure that youths leave school with skills that will turn them into job creators, rather than waiting for years to secure jobs. This alone will not address quality; it has been found that most Nigerian learners find it difficult to put what they learn into practice (Nwosu & Ekpo, 2018). We should look inwards at our teaching techniques and values, laying less emphasis on paper qualification rather than skill acquisition.

Basically, the creation of wealth and employment will lead to poverty reduction and increase of welfare status of individuals in the country. In line with the above view, Ogbe (2016) stated that wealth creation acquired through youth empowerment is expected to reverse the structural

weakness and imbalances in the economy by providing strategic focus and direction and inculcating in the youths the right ethics, discipline, values, hard work, honesty, respect and humility among others. To meet up with these challenges facing the youths, different skill acquisition programmers were initiated and put in place by the Federal and State governments throughout the country to instill in them the habit of acting through repetition and practice. The skill acquisition programmes instituted in Nigeria over the years according to Douli (2016), include the following:

- i. The green revolution programme which was in response to the programme of operation feed the nation 1976.
- ii. The school-to-land programme and skill acquisition programme of 1978.
- iii. The youth employment and vocational skill development scheme of (NDE) in 1986.
- iv. The small-scale industrial and graduate farmers programme of NDE in 1988.
- v. The national open apprenticeship scheme of 1988.

Prominent among the reasons for the growth and expansion of skills acquisition programmes in Nigeria was the need for the survival of the youths through self-reliance programmes. Initially, the efforts of the government towards youth empowerment was in agricultural production but as time went by, training is diversified into agricultural, industrial and handcrafts production that can yield income and make the youths viable. These training programmes are:

- i. **National Directorate of Employment:** The national directorate of employment is an organization set up by the federal government in 1986 to assist the youth to ensure a base in life. This according to Idachaba (2016) is achieved through workshops, seminars, industrial loan scheme and a host of others. To make this scheme a reality venture, there were diversity of training by the directorate to make the youths more viable. The training programmes among other things include:

- ii. **Workshop and seminars:** In this case, the directorate organizes workshops and seminars on different trades and invited the youths to participate in such exercises. Papers were invited from both private and public sectors to enable the trainees acquire skills and knowledge that will be relevant to them in future.
- b. **On the-job training:** New employees of the directorate are usually assigned to specific jobs or work in shops, offices and mechanics workshops, to enhance their creative ability. Effective on-the-job training depends primarily on qualified and competent hands employed to train the youths. This type of training according to Ochiagha (2015) is helpful because it makes the trainees to master the job easily.
- c. **Off-the-job-training:** This type of training enables the trainees to leave their job and obtain an additional training which enable them to be acquainted with new ideas in the work environment. The training programme according to Magbagbeola (2019) was initiated by the directorate because of the intensiveness of the training. It is believed that after the training, the trainees get accustomed to their work easily because of past experience on the job.
- d. **Programmed instruction:** Programmed instruction is the method of training which uses teaching machines, programmed books or filmstrip in training. The youths are recruited and posted to these training grounds to equip them with new training techniques that will better their future. This type of training differs from conventional training because it is mounted with information and communication technology (ICT).
- e. **National Open Apprenticeship Scheme:** National open apprenticeship scheme according to Douli, (2016), is the type of skill acquisition programme designed to help in training of unemployed youths such as school drop out to acquire marketable skills that will help them to find meaningful employment on completion of training. In the operation of national open apprenticeship scheme, applicants are given forms to complete by indicating their vocational interest, location and educational background. This implies that to a large extent each applicant has a choice as to what trade he or she wants to learn. The forms according to Ochiagha

(2015) are processed in youth employment (YE) and vocational skill development (VSD) department at NDE headquarters. Decision to admit or reject an applicant is arrived at after weighting the individual factors, the quota and other relevant requirements. The trainings are mostly conducted by self-employed master-craft-men and women in different trades where training is offered. Trainers are found in government owned or privately owned institutions and workshops.

The training programme according to Ozaga (2017) has two components: theory and practice. Practical training is conducted five days in each week representing 80 percent of the training. Saturday is designed for theoretical training which represents 20 percent of the training. Training according to him is by direct on-the-job apprenticeship attachment. The trainer holds the success or the failure of the scheme since he or she is responsible for imparting the required skills to the trainee and supervising all the training activities. The most striking issue in the programme is that the monitoring officers make periodic visits to the training establishments to evaluate training activities. These visits are needed to encourage interaction between trainers and trainees and to find out problems encountered in the course of training (Ochiagha, 2015). Through the interactions, solutions are proffered. The trainees are evaluated at the end of the training period to ascertain the reliability of such training so as to assist in the provision of necessary instrument needed for starting the business or trade.

### **Role of Youth Empowerment Programme in Actualizing the Transformation Agenda**

The unique advantage of such training is that it exposes the trainees to various skills that can make them self-reliant and self-dependent in their area of trade. From the above explanations, it is important to note that out of the whole skill acquisition programmes initiated by the federal government over the years, the national open apprenticeship scheme is the most prominent whose objectives according to Ochiagha (2015) include the following:

- i. The placement of unemployed youth as apprentices in private and government establishments for a period of one to three years, depending on their chosen trade and experience helps youths to shun social vices
- ii. It equips individual youths with skills that can make them employable
- iii. It ensures that after apprenticeship registration, youths are given an orientation course that matches both their attitude and aptitude.
- iv. It ensures balanced and all round learning which is based on 20 percent theory and 80 percent on the job training.
- v. It ensures that at all stages of training; the youths are monitored and given counseling where necessary.
- vi. It ensures that the youths who exhibit entrepreneurial skills are given small scale business loans.
- vii. It provides participants with basic kits and working capital to start a self-employment venture. The open apprenticeship scheme enables many participants to set up productive business ventures which empowers them economically.

### **Challenges faced by Youths in the Skill Acquisition Programme**

There are a lot challenges bedeviling the skill acquisition programme. They are as follows:

- i. **Location of skill acquisition workshop:** Most of the skill acquisition workshops are located in the major cities of the country which may be far from the house of abode of most unemployed youths. This means that most of them who are not residence of that environment or location are expected to rent rooms to live alone. Living alone and living faraway from homes may constitute a lot of problem for the youths and the scheme all over the country.
- ii. **Problems of instructors:** lack of trained and competent instructors to handle the workshops is another problem that might constitute a lot of threat to the smooth running of the scheme. According to Ogundowolo (2018) most instructors

recruited for the scheme are neither experienced nor well trained to handle the scheme. Consequently, most of them cannot competently handle the programme.

- iii. **Lack of money and start-up-kits:** lack of money according to Ozoga (2017) is one of the major problems confronting the youths in the scheme. This is because most of the youths may lack pocket money and that reduce their interests in the scheme. Also provision of money and start-up-kits for take-off among the graduating apprentices might be problematic to many homes and that may militate against the youths joining the scheme.
- iv. **Interest of the youths:** one thing about a project is who and who is interested and who will benefit what? To be able to ascertain who among the youths is interested in the scheme, actual census of the youths who are unemployed and who are interested in the scheme is expected to be conducted annually to make sure that the benefiting youths are those who are interested. But, from experience and available statistics, most of the youths in the rural areas are discriminated against in the recruitment of participants.

## **Conclusion**

Skill acquisition is the manifestation of idea and knowledge through training which is geared towards instilling in individuals, the spirit of entrepreneurship needed for meaningful development. If individuals are given the opportunity to acquire relevant skills needed for self-sustenance in the economy, it will promote their charisma in any work environment. Skill acquisition increases competition and cooperation among people. It requires a holistic approach in the realization of creative ideas. It helps in the transformation of knowledge and skills into creative venture that will bring about the actualization of one of the transformation agenda strategies in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are put forward to streamline the skill acquisition programmes in line with the dream on which it was established for:

1. Skill acquisition workshops should be established in every nook and cranny of each states of the Federation to make it accessible to the youths. This is because establishing such schemes in selected states and urban areas in the country may discourage a large proportion of the youths from different states and rural areas of the country from benefiting from the programme.
2. Competent and experienced craftsmen and women of reputable character should be recruited by the federal and state governments as instructors to sustain and make the programmes more viable.
3. Money and start-up-kits-stocks and tools should be made available to each participant in the scheme promptly to start or set up his or her own business after graduation.
4. The situation where the graduates wait for assistance from friends and relatives to enable them embark on their own businesses is not healthy for the sustainability of the programme.
5. The census of the actual youths who are really eager to undertake such training should be ascertained yearly to guard against the act of negligence in inviting and selecting participants who have no interest in the programme who after the training will abandon the programme.
6. The rural areas of the country should not be discriminated against in the implementation of the youth empowerment programmes. All the youths in the rural areas who are unemployed should be identified and encouraged to bridge the gap of inequality between the rural and urban centers in the country. This can be achieved through rural based empowerment programmes. The issue of considering urban centers alone for the programme should be discouraged.

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