

# Revitalizing Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) for Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development

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## **Abstract**

*Globally, education is acknowledged as a means for transforming and empowering the youths with skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them become productive members of the society. Yet Nigeria as a developing country with population of 140 million is battling with poverty and unemployment problems. This paper therefore focused on the contribution of a revitalized technical and vocational education and training with emphasis on youth empowerment to improve the economic status of the country and welfare of the people. Issues pertaining to integrating technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in education curricula, entrepreneurial activities aimed at jobs was discussed, this paper concludes that to solve the problem of widespread poverty and unemployment, priority should be given to revitalizing technical and vocational education and training with the priority given to empowering the youths on vocational education. Six major recommendations were made.*

## **Introduction**

Youth as defined by the National Policy on Youth Development, is any Individual who is a citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, between the ages of 18-35. Between 1991 and 2006, the youth population in Nigeria has grown from 22.5 million to over 30 million, young people currently comprise over 25 percent of the Nigerian population (Nigerian Youth Policy, 2001). In absolute numbers there are more young people in Nigeria than ever before.

From the census of 1991, 6.1 million young people between the ages of 12-24 were illiterates (NPC, 2003) and a survey in 2003 shows that 10.4 percent male young people and 12.4 percent of these aged 20-24 had no formal education (NDHS, 2003). Also only 37 percent of youth aged 12-17 attended secondary school. Over the last few years, due to the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, school enrolment levels have increased significantly, yet the inclusion of technical and vocational educational training is not adequately addressed (Nigerian EFA Reports, 2004).

Young people make up two thirds of the Nigerian population. These young people are faced with numerous challenges ranging from unemployment and poverty. Many of those who drop out of secondary schools and those who manage to pass through, lack the skills to compete in the rather weak economy and tight labour market, therefore the loiter around from dawn to dusk while battling with poverty and unemployment

The goals of technical and vocational education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) are to:

- (a) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- (b) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- (c) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self reliant economically.

Though the goals of technical and vocational education as stated above are quite laudable but the implementation of the programme has fallen short of expectation. The slow pace of unemployment, the increasing rate of unemployment and the inability of the country to provide the good things of life to her citizens are evidences in this direction.

### **Revitalizing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Nigeria**

Skill training enhances productivity and sustains competitiveness in the global economy. Worldwide countries are renewing efforts to promote technical and vocational education and training, this is because it is the only way to prepare young people for world of work, which reaches out to the marginalized and excluded groups to engage them in income-generating livelihoods. High unemployment has been leading to increasing poverty and serious social problems in Nigeria: coincidentally there has been a decline in TVET enrolments (EFA, 2000). Less than 1percent of secondary schools was oriented towards technical and vocational skills. Therefore there is the need to revitalise TVET as the best means to improve economic opportunities for the teaming youths of Nigeria. It is in recognition of this, that government has gone into agreement with the UNESCO's section for technical and vocational education through the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). Currently NBTE is implementing a project that aims to better equip large numbers of young Nigerians for a world of work. A cost sharing agreement was therefore signed in 2000, between UNESCO and Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education to revise the curricula for secondary technical colleges and post secondary polytechnics and established a new system of continuing technical staff development and training, (EFA Reports,200). But still the Nigerian government need to do more in view of the enormity of the problem.

### **The Concept of Vocational Technical Education**

Technology education was formerly limited. Technical and vocational education is a form of education designed to equip the learners for gainful employment. Okoro (1993) described vocational technical education as that part of education that provides the skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for effective employment in specific occupation.

According to Dawodu (2006), technical and vocational educations are the most reliable vehicles for self sustenance, economic prosperity and political supremacy of a nation over others.

Technical and vocational education according to Osuala (1981) is a form of education that includes preparation for employment in any industry for specialized education for which there is societal needs and which can most appropriately be acquired in schools.

According to the Federal government of Nigeria (2004), technical and vocational education is a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understandings, and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic life.

In summary, technical and vocational education could be described as:

- (a) An integral part of general education
- (b) A means of preparing for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work.
- (c) An aspect of life long learning and preparation for responsible citizenship.
- (d) An instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development.
- (e) A method of alleviating poverty.

Technical and vocational education is particularly relevant in solving the present economic problems in the country due to the advancement in technology, occupational mobility, high rate of unemployment and increasing number of women in workforce.

It is concerned with producing the manpower who will apply scientific skill towards the improvement and solution of the environmental problems, thus making the environment more conducive and useful for mankind.

According to Olaitan (1990), technical and vocational education is for the following:

- Skill and knowledge required in the society
- Economic development
- For work and economic activity
- For job creation and
- Self respect, social contact and participation.

From the foregoing, technical and TVE education is a skill development programme which is highly required for the country's quest to be one of the 20st economic nations of the world by the year 2020.

### **Technical and Vocational Education and the Youth**

Technical and vocational education and training plays an essential role in improving the wellbeing of youths and communities. It increases productivity, empowers individual to become self reliant and stimulates entrepreneurship. Businesses are more willing to invest in a community with strong human resources. Chinwe , (2008). Skills development can therefore contribute to strengthening the social links of a community by promoting employment creativity and sustainable means of subsistence. Vocational education and job training programme has been an integral part of national developments strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resources development, productivity, and economic growth. Despite it's proven contribution Nigeria does not seem to give vocational education the attention it deserves; and that appears one of the reasons for the rising unemployment and poverty in the society. Vocational education is therefore the missing link in Nigeria's development policy.

Although TVET seams deficient in 'citizenship or leadership training' (Friedman, 1982), they could provide youths the skills to become productive entrepreneurs and engender creative and innovative ideas that would enlarge the nation's economic pie and increase personal freedom. Here TVET becomes a handy tool, as it can be both formal and informal. Such skill development of the youth empowerment must take into account:

- 1) Skills to diversify the youths for self-actualization, rather than reliance on government alone.
- 2) Equipping the youths to value their handwork.
- 3) Training in basic literacy, numeracy and life skills should be an integral part of the whole system.
- 4) The promotion of the growth and profitability of the youths for self-employment to enhance the economy.

Though the neglect of vocational education is socially injurious, as it robs the nation the contribution the youths would make on national development. More importantly, the society needs competent auto mechanics, truck drivers carpenters, plumbers, electricians, medical technicians vocational nurses to function well for sustainable development.

## **Technical and Vocational Education for Sustainable Development**

Education in whatever form, is aimed at modelling a child or the individual into a better person relevant to his immediate environment. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without education. Development is a process where an economy undergoes social and economic transformation leading to a rise in the standard of living, access to basic amenities for all through knowledge. Sachs (2004).

It is in recognition of the above concept of development that TVET in empowering youth for poverty alleviation should be given utmost priority by government, having in mind the future consequence and task ahead for sustainable development. The future prospect and success of TVET would depend on the continuation and expansion of the existing training programmes, and strengthening the existing cooperation both national and international, as well as by starting non-formal training programmes for the unemployed youth and the community at large as part of government poverty alleviation efforts toward sustained welfare of the youth and development.

## **Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development**

Though TVET can be a decisive instrument for youth to participate in the work force and to improve their living conditions and social status, yet the current preoccupation with the university education in Nigeria reduces economic opportunities of those who are more oriented towards work than academe, not everyone needs a university education, but who would employ them if everyone became a university graduate?

Graduates of vocational and technical institutions are the empowered youths, they are highly skilled entrepreneurs, many of the so called "expatriate engineers" who are being paid huge sum of money in dollars to build roads and bridges in Nigeria are graduates of vocational colleges, yet Nigeria is not taking this sector seriously. Youth empowerment by TVET education is therefore a sure means to aid sustainable development if utmost consideration is given to the sector.

Integrating Skill Development in Education for All (EFA)

Ensuring that all learning needs of young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes is one of the six education for all (EFA) goals established at the world education forum in Dakar 2000. So the provision of vocational skills training youth empowerment should therefore constitute an important component in national strategies if the EFA goal is to be achieved. But developing countries including Nigeria tend to concentrate on universal primary education and literacy, but do not pay sufficient attention to skill training for youths, even though there are numerous initiatives focusing on providing education and training people. This in most cases are often small in scale and are not always recognized as part of a comprehensive national education strategy. There is the need for government to urgently consider redesigning the curricula with emphasis on skill acquisition, especially on youth empowerment, if the government target of reducing poverty by year 2020 is to be achieved.

In 2003, existing skills training programmes for the disadvantaged groups were reviewed, and policies and institutional environments were analyzed in four countries in Africa and Asia (Mali, Senegal, Laos and Nepal). The experience of these selected countries was shared with other developing countries at an inter-regional seminar held at International institute for education planning (Paris, 22-23 January 2004). Suggestions to a more comprehensive approach to EFA was discussed and all stakeholders to EFA are to implement some of the policies and strategies for efficient result and feedback. Incorporating TVET in the EFA programme is a necessity in all developing countries

because it advocates for flexible access to learning and training throughout life while downplaying the shortcoming of the beneficiary in order to accommodate a larger group for sustainable development and improve/enhance productivity (Hamza, 2005).

### **TVET Education and Poverty Eradication**

The way the production forces in the economy are organised, determines the development process of any country, for most countries, the development of industry depends greatly on the private sector, with entrepreneurship playing a major role. Entrepreneurship is the capacity and attitude of a person to undertake venture, with a risk or failure. It demands that the individual be prepared to assume a reasonable degree of risk and a good leader in addition to being highly innovative. Since entrepreneurship involves leadership, leadership abilities determine a person's or organisation's effectiveness, the entrepreneurship could become a major avenue to accelerate economic growth create job opportunities, many youths aspire to become successful entrepreneurs, but their ability to make use of their skills remain constrained if they are not empowered.

At the policy level, TVET plays a critical access and equity role in achieving employment for youth, managing work/life balance, and providing citizenship and parental skills for youth. Therefore, expanding TVET is integral for youth in crisis or post conflict situations, tackling poverty, and promulgating cultural inclusion for tolerant peaceful society. The youths through TVET education are encouraged to assume entrepreneurial position, as there is nothing that can surpass the effectiveness of hands on training. (Alwasi, 2002) Through TVET the youths who are full of fresh ideas ingenuity can build up confidence resourcefulness and experience early in life, so that these youths can begin to change the society into a bloomy economy thereby eradicating poverty.

### **Conclusion**

There is a need to establish a secure and poverty free nation for youth to become influential members of any society. Poverty, hunger, homelessness, sickness and lack of security are paramount issues that require immediate attention of the Nigerian government, if young people are expected to become leaders of the future. For many youths in Nigeria, these problems are daily challenges, when they cannot feed, clothe or shelter themselves or their immediate family, they surely cannot realize their full potentials, since the need for survival is so overwhelming a good number of young people have fallen victim to the pressures of survival and have ended up as arm-robbers, prostitutes scammers, or militants fighting whatever cause, give them a glimmer of hope. The failure of the government to revitalise the technical and vocational training (TVET) education with emphasis to empower the youth for self-actualization and employment to satisfy basic social needs, exacerbates these problems. It is therefore imperative to note that, the world needs educated and skilled workers with Nigerian youths at the core, and technical and vocational educational training (TVET) could fill the void.

### **Recommendation**

- To reduce the burden of unemployment and poverty on the youths, the government should improve funding in the TVET sector to increase access to technical and vocational education for the ever growing youths. And the National Board For Technical Education (NBTE) and TVET teachers should take up the campaign for more funds and launder the image of TVET in the society.

- Government should provide strategy and implement plans for increasing TVET opportunities for youths with disabilities.
- TVET should provide a world class skill and knowledge for all youths.
- TVET education should be incorporated at all levels of the educational curricula, youth education centres expanded and equipped properly.
- A flexible learning environment and framework should be provided for the would be beneficiaries.
- Government should focus on poverty eradication through revitalizing TVET education while providing basic literacy for youths.

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