Youth Empowerment as Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Nigeria
El empoderamiento de los jóvenes como catalizador para el desarrollo sostenible en Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The field of youth development sits at the frontier of new opportunities for research and practice. Likewise, sustainability of development has remained an area of interest and attracted debates among academia. In advanced economies, development has been successfully sustained over a long period of time but has proofed difficult in developing economies. Though different strategies to empower youths have been put in place in Nigeria, the resulting effects are not sustainable with the rate of poverty and unemployment still on the high side. Thus, there is the need to review the application of sustainable development concepts and its practicability in Nigeria. This paper is an attempt in this direction. To this end, this study reviews youth empowerment programme in Nigeria with the view to identifying the challenges militating against its success and proffer solutions. Primary data was collected through personal telephone interview with the commissioners of industries, commerce and trade in twenty-two states (out of 36 states) in Nigeria and secondary information was extensively gathered through research reports and academic publications. Analysis of data collected was done in frequencies and percentages. The paper found that youth empowerment is hinged on the fact that more than half of the Nigerian population is youth, about 70% of the population are poor with more than 29.5 per cent unemployed. Youth empowerment programmes were coordinated through Federal Ministry of Youth Development in Nigeria. Such programmes include Youth Empowerment Educational and Vocational Training, Youth Empowerment Agriculture (YEAP) and Job creation programmes such as SURE – P; CSWYE; YOUWIN; NAPEC; NAPEP together with Youth Empowerment Financial Intervention which were done through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Government, Philanthropists and Financial Institutions. All these programmes were found not to be successful because of some identified challenges: poor implementation of po-

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licies, misappropriation of funds, youths not being adequately involved in decision making process, and corruption among others. The paper affirmed the benefits embedded in the adoption of youth empowerment programme as a strategy for sustainable development and thus advised government to focus attention more on the youth empowerment by involving them more in the decision-making process.

Key words: Government Policies, Corruption, Decision-making, Youth-Blot.

JEL codes: J13, O13

INTRODUCTION

The fields of youth development and sustainable development sit at the frontier of new opportunities for research and practice, especially in developing nations. Sustainable development in simple term refers to the development that is stable, durable, consistent and sustainable. Historically, Sustainable Development originated from the concerted efforts of local and international community to protect the human aspect of this earth planet. It is an update of the Millennium Development Goals declaration of the United Nations. The concept of sustainable development assumes that development must first occur before it could be sustained. While development depends on growth, its sustainability has remained a myriad and attracted debates among stakeholders of development, resulting to studies and quest for new approach to sustainable development (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2014).

In recent years, the National Health Mission (NHM) was introduced by the government of India as an umbrella of Health programs to cover reproductive and child health programmes. These programs were given a mandate to accelerate the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. However, Prachita, Akshay Dhume & Subramanian (2019) noted that though a considerable progress towards realizing the MDG objectives has been achieved, an overall appraisal of the status of the indicators in 2015 revealed that many of the targets remained to be achieved. The paper attributed the failure to the flaws in Indian health policies including long delays in implementation and non-involvement of all the stake holders including the youth. Other reasons included infeasible targets, delays in planning, poor execution of the policies and economic, social and political disparities within the country. The paper suggested better organized and more innovative approaches that include youths at the state level.

In the same vein, Barbara Crossette (2019) asserted that the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are meant to improve the lives of everyone universally as a follow up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but serious flaws (resulting from politics and heavy reliance

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on metrics- numbers- based often on dubious/unrealistic data in the United Nations (UN) system for tracking progress on SDGs), have been responsible for non-achievement and attainment of both SDGs and MDGs in many developing nations.

In Nigeria, though different strategies, including youth empowerment have been put in place over the years to sustain economic development, yet the resulting effects are not sustainable with the current high rate of poverty and unemployment (Hart, 2010). Fasola (2019) observed that in Nigeria, we have trained artisans, but haven't created an economy for them. Likewise, McDonald, Iloanya and Okoye-Nebo (2014) had earlier posited that weak leadership, social conflicts, environmental factors, discrimination against female youth, debt burden and population explosion are factors that hindered the success of Youth Empowerment Program in Nigeria. Thus, there is the need to review the application of sustainable development concepts and its practicability from time to time in Nigeria; more so, that little or no academic paper is available in the recent years on this topic. This study is an attempt in this direction. The study attempts to review the application of youth empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development in Nigeria. It also attempts to identify the challenges militating against its success and finally offer solutions to the problems of youth empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Generally, development is seen to possess a positive connotation and is associated with a better future. The value and judgments of development has often been difficult to define because what is considered to be positive or negative changes over time and is subject to different interpretations due to differences in perspectives (United Nations, 2008; Odu, Ayodele & Adedayo, 2014; OECD Net FWD, 2014 and Omiunu, 2014). Although traditionally, economists have measured development either in terms of increasing per capita income or gross domestic product; Nevertheless, when the distribution of income is skewed and the large percentage of the population is getting poorer even while average income increases, many people would hesitate to label this as "development". Further to the United Nations, (2008) definition of development as a process that increases people's opportunity of choice; an area of interest to scholars/stakeholders of development in this dispensation is 'Sustainability of such Development'.

Merriam- Webster Dictionary (2010) defined sustainable as;
a. Able to be used without being completely used up or destroyed;
b. Involving methods that do not completely use up or destroy natural resources; and
c. Able to last or continue for a long time

Rogers, Jalal and Boyd (2008:22), opine that sustainability is the term chosen to bridge the gulf between Development and Environment and that, the term originated from; forestry, fisheries and ground water disciplines;

having to do with 'maximum sustainable cut," maximum sustainable yield," and maximum sustainable pumping rate." Rogers et al (2008) argue that the major discussion initiating Sustainable Development is found in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), a body created by the UN General Assembly in 1983. The Commission's 1987 report often referred to as the Brundle's Report was the first to define "Sustainable Development" as development that "meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs."

Studies have shown that sustainable development hinges on three major pillars which include economic, social and environment. Many nations have adopted these three pillars and youth empowerment to sustain growth and development (Obadan, 2008; Odeh & Okoye, 2014). In line with the assertions of Sachs (2015) and This day Newspaper (2016), economic growth and Poverty Reduction which are the indices of sustainable development have been hampered by three giant national hurdles which include: growing income inequality including social exclusion, continued rapid population growth and growing environmental crises. In Nigeria, other challenges known to militate against the achievement of sustainable development include youth unemployment, poverty, mortality rate, security issues population bloat among others.

Obi and Nweke (2010) asserted that sustainable development in its actual meaning denotes the actions and initiatives taken to improve the socio – economic conditions of the people. The picture would be clearer if conceptualised by bridging the problem of population increase with bad leadership and unequal access to limited resources available to Nigerians. Increase in population has been identified by several scholars as a major problem to the impoverishment state of Nigerian youth. To this end, measures to improve the social and economic status of Nigerian youths have been taken through policies to addressing existing inequity; thus introducing various youth empowerment programmes.

Poverty reduction and economic empowerment strategies have been part of measures deployed by the Federal Government of Nigeria to attaining and achieving sustainable growth and development in Nigeria (Ayedun, Durodola and Akinjare, 2011).Using the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2014) indices, it is important to acknowledge the fact that good governance is sine qua non to the achievement of the three dimensions of sustainable development which are; economic, social and environmental. Youth empowerment is a significant strategy deployed at national, state and local government levels to achieving and attaining success as regards sustainable development. Consequently, much emphasis is increasingly being placed on empowerment policies in line with poverty reduction and increasing wellbeing in order to better the life of the citizens at large including the disadvantaged youth.

Investing early in disadvantaged youths is more beneficial, both economically and socially, Burchard, LeGrand and Piachaud. (2002) posited that

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investment in human capital stimulates national growth and development. Furthermore, youth empowerment is indeed a key strategy to tackle the challenges created by rapidly changing social, economic, technological and demographic environments in Nigeria. Empowering young people as a promoter, has a greater effect and more long lasting impact on the communities and national development (Fajana, 2000 & Garduño, Sawyer & Sawyer,2013).

The consequences of the long years of neglect in Nigeria has reflected in the various regional insurgences which to mention a few are; Niger Delta militant, Boko haram, and New Biafra agitation. Gribble (2010) clearly noted that ignoring the youth population and the major problems faced by this group of individuals in a nation such as Nigeria will have dire global consequences for decades. Thus, to achieve real sustainable development, the youth population must be given attention and they must be empowered in order to meet their needs responsibly, provide for their dependants and contribute their quota to national development.

Conceptualizing the assertion of the UNDP (2014) with respect to the Nigeria scenario, achieving sustainable development would remain a mere wish that may never be achieved if youths are neglected as they are needed to play a major role in development process towards achieving the goals of sustainable development. Collaborating with youths and making them initiators of change require attention in their wellbeing which cuts across security, basic materials for good life, freedom of choice and actions, health services, and good social relations. However, it is also important that the provision of these essentials of wellbeing is approached from their socio-economic levels as they possessed different socio-economic backgrounds.

Nnachi, Nwigwe and Nkoma., (2013); Idaka (2013), Odoh and Innocent (2014) had earlier indicated that about 60% of Nigerian population consisted of youths and children and that it has been recognised globally that the involvement of youths is the key to achieving sustainable growth and development. In the same vein, Koripamo-Agary, (2010) and United Nations (2015) asserted that the issue of youth empowerment is a global phenomenon and it is the greatest challenge in this dispensation so much so that discussions and debates on it are ongoing as old convictions and ideologies have failed to yield the desired results. Roy and Tisdel (1998) posited that the possibility of good governance depends on institutional structures and economic resources available for ensuring governance. Sodipo (2014) explained that, the high incidence of crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, terrorism (Boko Haram and Al- Quaida menace), prostitution, drug peddling and other social vices that are been exhibited in the country are as a result of high rate of unemployment thereby making the youth populace to be hopeless and subjecting them to aggression. Akintayo and Adiat (2013) affirmed that the nefarious practice of policy formulators is a major factor to policy failures, as policy makers in Nigeria formulated policies and programs with inherent flexibilities to allow

loopholes for unwarranted gains- thus corruption institutionalizing corruption. McDonald, Iloanya and Okoye-Nebo (2014) also posited that weak leadership, social conflicts, environmental factors, discrimination against women, debt burden and population explosion are factors that hindered the success of 'National Economic Empowerment Development' program in Nigeria. No wonder, with all these failures, Odoh and Innocent (2014) mentioned that a major challenge faced by governments and policymakers in Nigeria, is how to provide opportunities for the continent's approximately 200 million youths so that they can have decent lives and contribute to the economic development of their countries. No wonder, Udoma (2019) noted that having observed that most Youth Empowerment Programmes established by the Federal Government in the past have failed to meet the objectives for setting them up, especially in the northern part of the country due to high rate of terrorism, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) had recently approved N5.5 billion for further training and provision of devices to 12,000 youths in N-Power Knowledge Multi-Track Youth Empowerment Programme.
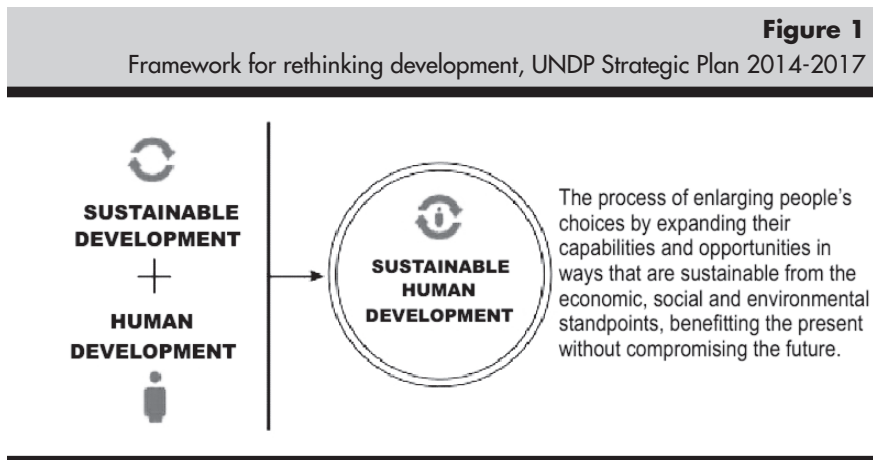
METHODOLOGY

The study area covers all the 36 states in Nigeria. At the Federal level, the target population comprised of the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development and at the state level, the Commissioners of Industries, Commerce and Trade in the 36 states of the Federation. At the Federal level, the Minister is solely charged with the responsibility of initiating Youth Empowerment Programmes on behalf of the Federal Government in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while the Commissioners are at the receiving end coordinates the implementation of such programmes in harmony with the policies for the attainment of the MDGs. The Commissioners also have the right to initiate Youth Programmes that are peculiar to their local environment and also helpful for the fulfillment/attainment of the MDGs. Both the Minister and all the Commissioners are responsible for initiation and implementation of Youth programmes that are consequential to the attainment of the MDGs in Nigeria. Primary data was collected through structured personal telephone interview with the Federal Minister and 32 Commissioners leaving 4 Commissioners that could not be reached. 10 commissioners failed to respond correctly to our questions on telephone, hence their responses were discarded. The Responses from the Minister and the 22 Commissioners in 22 states were reliable and as such used as data for this study. Secondary information was extensively gathered through research reports and academic publications on sustainable development programmes in Nigeria.

Many studies have been conducted in developed countries on youth empowerment and role of youth in economic development but unfortunately,

only very few studies are available in developing countries. Lerner (2019) once wrote that the field of youth development sits at the frontier of new opportunities for research and practice especially in developing nations. These opportunities are enabled by innovations in theory and in theory-inspired research methods that emphasize the potential in every youth to change positively by aligning specific individual strengths and contextual resources that, together, can optimize the life paths of a young person. The evidence derived from theory-predicated use of these methods may be used to create innovations in youth development programs and policies that promote lives of personal thriving and social contribution among the diverse young people of our world.

The theoretical framework adopted for the paper hinges on UNDP (2014) concept of youth empowerment which state that youth have ability and potential to be positive agents of 'change' that can help address and solve the problems that surround the planet at present and in the nearest future. Youth are very rich in ideas and have been proactive in identifying solutions to development challenges (Lerner, 2018). They have also shown their ability to build bridges of dialogue across cultures, by easily yielding themselves available for human development in ways that are sustainable from economic, social and environmental standpoints thus ensuring sustainable human development (See Fig. 1).

Figure 1
Framework for rethinking development, UNDP Strategic Plan 2014-2017

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The process of enlarging people's choices by expanding their capabilities and opportunities in ways that are sustainable from the economic, social and environmental standpoints, benefitting the present without compromising the future.

Source: UNDP (2014)

Achieving sustainable human development would remain an aspiration without the inclusion of all segments of society in holistic, consultative and participatory way; taking to consideration that they are the leaders of tomorrow (Youth Power Learning, 2017). Unfortunately, the Youths are often sidelined from formal decision-making processes and this is hampering development especially in developing nations. Safeguarding the rights of young people and investing in quality education, decent work and employment op-

portunities, effective livelihood skills, and access to health and services and participation through empowerment are essential strategies to achieving development and a sustainable future (UNDP, 2014).
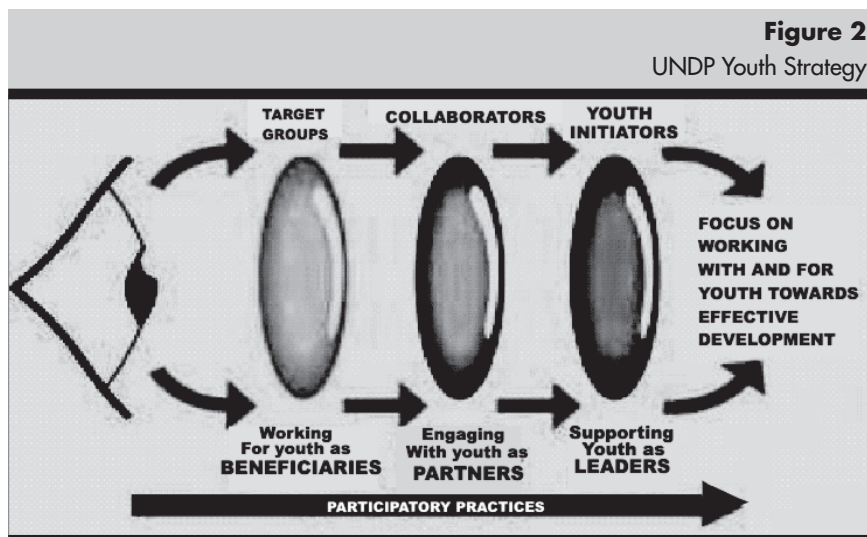
Figure 2 illustrates the strategy which directly contributes to areas of work that support the UNDP Strategic Plan: 2014-17 outcomes. These areas of work focus on

- how to adopt sustainable development pathways;
- how to build and/or strengthen inclusive and effective democratic governance; and
- how to build resilience.

It is believed that young people have the potentials to respond positively to life challenges and could act as positive agents of transformational change, as collaborators and as leaders. Given these dimensions, the strategy takes a three-lens approach:

- working for youth as beneficiaries (target groups);
- engaging with youth as partners (collaborators);and
- Supporting youth as leaders (initiators).

The diagram in fig. 2 is illustrated with lenses that focus on achieving a development that can be sustained over time. Thus achieving sustainable development, through the empowerment of youth in any nation, is a key to attaining success.

Figure 2
UNDP Youth Strategy

Source: UNDP (2014)

According to United Nations (2008) the strength of the linkages between various ecosystem services and different elements of human well-being can indicate the extent to which socioeconomic factors can mediate these linkages. The strength of the linkages and the potential for mediation differ in different ecosystems and regions. Wellbeing can be captured using some important variables such as; security, basic materials for good life, freedom of choice and actions, health services, and good social relations.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

Successful structured telephone interview with the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development and the Commissioners of Industries, Commerce and Trade in twenty two states (out of 36 states) in Nigeria showed that youth empowerment programs have not achieved the desired targets. These programs include:

a. Youth Empowerment Educational and Vocational Training: This is targeted at skill acquisition for formal and informal sectors and entrepreneurial activities to promote initiatives for private businesses among the Youths. This also includes award of scholarship and grants to Youth beneficiaries.
b. Youth Empowerment Agriculture programme (YEAP): This program is designed to encourage the Youths to venture into commercial agriculture as entrepreneurs.
c.   Job creation programs: SURE – P; CSWYE; YOUWiN; NAPEC; NAPEP are all empowerment programs aimed at job creation and skill development including   Community Service Scheme which is a plan directed towards engaging the youths; both skilled and unskilled intensively in public works.
d. Youth Empowerment Financial Intervention: this is done through NGOs, Government, Philanthropists and Financial Institutions. It affords the beneficiaries the opportunity to take responsibility for their own business and assist owners of local business activities to become managers and employers of labours for sustainable   economic development.
e. In an attempt to facilitate development through wealth creation, empowerment, employment generation and poverty reduction; all of which focus on sustainable development in Nigeria, the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development claimed that the Obasanjo regime formulated the policy of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as a policy to boost the economy of Nigeria. The overall objective of this policy is in all ramifications to attain sustainable development encompassing the three tiers of government in order to alleviate poverty and improve the total wellbeing of citizens. Ironically the policy was not implemented with all sincerity as revealed through telephone interview in 2018.

According to Kolade, Towobola, Oresanya, Ayeni, and Omodewu (2014), youth empowerment is broadly employed to explain efforts aimed at providing skills and an enabling environment for youths to lead decent lives and contribute meaningfully to national development. According to the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Youth Development, the national policy for the youth development programme is contained in the Federal Ministry of Youth Development (2009), which is an official document that stipulates broad guidelines for the implementation of empowerment programs and projects of youths in Nigeria states with its goal as follows:

"The overall policy goal is to provide an appropriate framework that will promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all young men and women in order to enhance their participation in the overall development process and improve their quality of life."

Contrary to this statement, one of the Respondents in a telephone interview affirmed that it is now (in the year 2018) evident that the Nigerian Youths are probably the most neglected by their government compared to youths in other countries and continents. He illustrated this point by the growing rate of unemployment and underemployment of the youths which heightened involvement of youths in crimes, delinquencies and increase of communicable diseases and other health related problems as well as declining school enrolment and high dropout rates.

f. According to Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2014), other measures   introduced by the federal government at the national level to ameliorating poverty amongst the citizenry include the:
•   Introduction of National Health Insurance Scheme for the needy
•   Community Banking Scheme by way of Micro financing scheme to strengthening the financial capacity of the people
•   National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) introduced in 2003.The NEEDS targeted four key strategies, these include re-orienting values, reducing poverty, creating wealth and generating employment (NEEDS, 2006)

g. The Federal Executive Council (FEC), in 2018 established "N-Power Knowledge Multi-Track Youth Empowerment Programme" with the aim to provide training and devices to 12,000 youths aged between 18 to 26 years old. Unfortunately, no one has benefitted from this program, 10 months after it was established.

All the Respondents agreed that despite the youth empowerment schemes, poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria are still high with approximately

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70% of Nigerians being poor; and unemployment rate has maintained two digits in the year 2017. Earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria (NBS, 2015) reported that unemployment rate keep rising and the majority of those affected are the youths between the ages of 15 and 34. Furthermore, the report recorded a rise of 9.9% in the third quarter of year 2015 and by the last quarter of the same year the unemployment index rose to 10.4%. Before then, UNDP (2012) report stated that, Nigeria economy grew at an average of about 6.2 per cent annually between 2002 and 2011 but, there is an apparent disconnect between Nigeria's economic growth and human development and this has attracted the concerns of the government. Table 1 showed the current challenges militating against the youth empowerment program in Nigeria as perceived by the Respondents.

Generally, there is a growing concern that youth blot in Nigeria is a major factor contributing to the problems of youth empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development. In table 1, all the Respondents claimed that youth blot still posed a serious challenge to the adoption of youth empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development. Table 1 also showed Respondents claiming that the major challenge to the sustainable economic developmental using youth empowerment strategy is the fact that the empowerment schemes are not directed at the target population especially the youth and also could not stand the test of time.

Table 1

Problems of Youth Empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development in Nigeria

Challenges/Problems	Frequency Distribution	Percentages
Youth blot		
Yes	22	100
No	-	-
Total	22	100
Scarcity of Business ideas/innovativeness among youth		
Yes	22	100
No	-	-
Total	22	100
Political, ethno-religious crises & security problems		
Yes	22	100
No	-	-
Total	22	100
Bad Governance/Youth not in decision-making process		
Yes	22	100
No	-	-
Total	22	100
Programmes not directed at the target group		
Yes	21	95
No	1	5
Total	22	100
Weak Institutions/Structures		
Yes	18	80
No	4	20
Total	22	100
Misappropriation of funds		
Yes	18	80
No	4	20
Total	22	100

Inadequate funding of youth empowerment programme		
Yes	14	64
No	8	36
Total	22	100
Lack of Human Capital Trainers among public servants		
Yes	11	50
No	11	50
Total	22	100
Poor Education System/high illiteracy level		
Yes	12	55
No	10	45
Total	22	100
Health problem and so forth		
Yes	14	64
No	8	36
Total	22	100

Source: Field work, 2018
Key: Yes – Indicating strong agreement with the item as a challenge/problem
            No – Indicating strong disagreement with the item as a challenges/problems

Also 20% and 100% of respondents claimed that weak institutions and bad governance respectively are the bane of national development. This involves bad formulation and implementation of policies and policy inconsistencies. In other words; good governance is sine qua non to development in any nation. In essence, good governance depends on appropriate institutions but contrary to this; corruption, bureaucratic lapses, inefficient and ineffective law enforcement are what is in place in Nigeria. Also, both centralized and decentralized governance structures have not been impressive. In the words of Hofman (1995),

> "Everyone knows an underdeveloped country when he sees one
> It is a country characterized by poverty, with beggars in the cities
> And villages eking out a bare substance in the rural areas. It is
> a country lacking in industries or factories of its own, usually
> With inadequate supplies of power and light, it usually has
> Insufficient Roads and rail roads, insufficient government services,
> Poor communications and insufficient social infrastructures"

This allusion is a clear description of the present Nigeria as several debates about past, present and future of the Nigerian state is related to governance crises and failure of government which has been a subject of attraction to the international community.

Table 1 also showed that all the Respondents claiming that the prevailing economic, political and ethno – religious crises in Nigeria and their violent expressions are all to question the entire process of statecraft and culture of governance by successive governments. Nyewusira and Nweke (2014) had earlier mentioned this phenomenon as a challenge obstructing youth empowerment program in Nigeria. All the Respondents also claimed that scarcity of business ideas/innovativeness is a major challenge confronting the success of youth empowerment program in Nigeria. 95% of the Respondents expressed

dissatisfaction at the way and manners that government officials handled youth empowerment program as many of the activities were not directed at the target group. 18% complained of misappropriation of funds, corruption and inability to follow due process in implementing policies. Other challenges mentioned by the respondents include: lack of qualified resource personnel for training programs and also inadequate funding. Other problems and challenges are poor education and literacy level and health problem among others.

DISCUSSIONS

Alost 80% of the Respondents agreed that misappropriation of funds is a major problem facing youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. Some of the Respondents affirmed that the nefarious practice of policy formulators is a major factor to policy failures, as policy makers formulated policies and programs with inherent flexibilities to allow loopholes for unwarranted gains-thus corruption institutionalizing corruption. For instance, majority of the empowerment and developmental programs do not get to the people at the grassroots where most of the poor people reside. The agents of these policy makers often hijack the benefit of such programs. This does not ensure efficient youth empowerment and account for one of the reasons why the various empowerment programs in Nigeria have not achieved its major purpose in enhancing development. Other identified problems included corruption in government circles, non-involvement of the youth in policy making process, refusal of older politicians to resign and give way for younger politicians with fresh innovative ideas to join Federal Executive Council which is the highest policy making body in government, weak leadership; social conflicts, environmental factors, discrimination against youth; debt burden and population explosion are factors that hindered the success of Youth Empowerment programs in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has reviewed youth empowerment programs in Nigeria and examined those problems militating against its success as a catalyst for sustaining economic development. It has been found that youth empowerment programs have not yielded much positive outcomes as poverty and unemployment rate are still high in Nigeria, making sustaining development unrealistic. Even though there is increase in the GDP and average income of Nigerian increased in the past decade, however, such development has not been spread to other areas of the economy especially in the area of human development which is empowerment; thus sustainable development is fast becoming a mirage. Challenges militating against youth empowerment programs include corruption in government circles, non-involvement of the youth in policy

making process, refusal of older politicians to resign and give way for younger politicians with fresh innovative ideas to join Federal Executive Council which is the highest policy making body in government, weak leadership; social conflicts, environmental factors, discrimination against youth; debt burden and population explosion are factors that hindered the success of Youth Empowerment programs. This paper found that youth empowerment and development programs offer young people opportunities to develop important life skills and participate in the community development schemes, along with shared leadership, support positive youth outcomes which include: increased likelihood of high school completion, attainment of higher education and decreased likelihood of engaging in risk-behaviors. Youth participation is indispensable for the simple fact of fashioning out problem areas of concerns to young people and identifying appropriate solutions to the problems which could include individual, community and national problems due to the strength and energy possessed at this stage of life thereby accounting for confidence and high self-esteem.

This paper firmly suggest that youth should be involved in the decision making process in matters that affect them. The paper also agreed with Odu, Ayodele, and Adedayo (2014) that to prevent social exclusion, the youths should be given priority as this will help the young people develop the confidence, resilience and skills needed to be involved and be a productive citizen. Capacity building (Youth Empowerment) is regarded in this paper as a major element of sustainable development and also addresses the social aspect of sustainable development which affects human capital formation. Human capital formation has economic benefits in increasing employability, in private earning and social benefit in increasing civic participation. Investing in social capital increases the productivity of an individual and a group- thus achieving development.

Government may want to focus more attention on the fast-growing population increase, poor education and literacy level, health problem, security issues, and the selfish ambition of policy makers. Youth empowerment, if well-coordinated, can solve the unemployment and poverty problem militating against sustaining development in Nigeria.

In as much as the youth population constitutes a major percentage (more than half) of the Nigeria population; neglecting them would have grievous effects on national development. To achieve sustainable development, the youths should be treated with preference by giving more attention to their wellbeing and providing them with necessary information for sustainability through the following: Security, Basic and Adequate Materials for good life, Freedom of Choice and Actions, Health Services, and high-quality Social Relations. The economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the youths are also important areas of focus for youth empowerment in achieving sustainable development. Government should put in place structures that would enhance quality of work which would be sustained over long periods.

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