

The Empowerment Needs of Selected Nigerian Youths for Becoming Market Entrepreneurs

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Abstract: This paper presents data obtained from in-depth interview and focus group discussions held with a random sample of youths involved in the services of the informal sector in Ekiti State. It made suggestions for actions and programmes that need be adopted to initiate and sustain the youths' interest in the informal sector's employment offerings. It viewed the roles of enlightening and encouraging them on acquiring skills and competencies that would serve them in the informal sector by guidance counsellors and vocational psychologists as a major empowerment need of the youths. It concluded on the need for the Nigerian government to back these up with policy formulations based on the on-going national economic empowerment development strategies (NEEDS) and other socio-economic and political reform programmes that emphasize free market, democracy and the entrepreneurial economy.

Key words: Empowerment % Political reform % Youths % Democracy % Rebuilding % Informal sector

INTRODUCTION

According to the New Websterster's Dictionary of English Language, International Edition (1995), to empower is to delegate legal and lawful power to. In the context of this paper, while the authors recognize and appreciate the legislations and actions against child labour, consider Nigerian youths, aged 15-18 especially, as requiring legal and lawful power to be involved in the job opportunities and descriptions in the informal sector as to be able to create sustainable wealth for themselves making them break out of the cycle of poverty and hence further the opportunities of the nation to advance her cause and sovereignty in the comity of nations of the World in the 21st century [1-3].

The Nigerian youths need be enlightened, encouraged and empowered to be involved in services that describe the informal sector derives from daily observations and the electronic and print media, news reports relating to: (a), their decreasing wish to be involved in skills and artisanship's training and their seeming indifference to the growing concern to fully engage their total being in the tasks of improving the standard of living and the deteriorated physical environment in virtually all Nigerian communities, (b) the emerging social pathology of street youths and children in both the urban and rural areas of the thirty-six states including the federal capital territory (front page comment of The Nigerian Tribune Friday 18th and back page comment of The Guardian Wednesday 27th Oct, 2004, [4] and (c) their apparent misunderstanding of the socio-political and economic implications of the foreign countries they daily troop out to in recent times.

These youths put at an estimate of 15 million are either roaming, idling or are being used for various criminal activities that had made the nation to be rated as being among the three most venal people in the world. The concerns had twice in the year (2005) alone, attracted the former Nigerian President's concern and comments. First on May 1st the workers day and the 29th of the same month that marks the Democracy day, The former Nigerian President, Chief M.A.O. Obasanjo,

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clearly spelt the helplessness of the youth in a world that emphasizes self help and determination against the orientation of the youths in depending on formal employment and salary handouts at month ends to people who are so employed in the formal sector or governmental jobs, these are the same jobs that both the as well as the state Governments complain of being in short supply as the civil service that offer them is already over-bloated.

Earlier on the former President had decried the influx of the youth population to countries in Europe to undertake menial jobs as well as some other illicit and criminal trades and activities that seem to create the impression before the world that Nigerians are venal and lazy. In other words there need be a serious view of the involvement of Nigerian youths in efforts to create and sustain wealth and their ability to manage the resources that generate the wealth or financial gains from involvement in the wealth generation efforts. Wealth generation has to do with work, vocations and careers that citizens of a society engage in [5, 1, 6].

Theorists in vocational psychology had been able to show through researches that factors such as: the satisfaction and satisfactoriness derivable from the source of employment, the knowledge of the availability and recognition accorded the job in the environment, the time spent in performing the details of the job in a day, financial rewards that comes to the practitioners and the extent to which the job meets the psychological and expressed needs of the practitioners goes a long way to determine the value, prestige and commitment that people have towards the source of employment [7, 5, 8].

It needs be highlighted that various government (both Military and Civilian) in the nation had in the past and through various programmes made efforts to create avenues for youths' interest in and involvement for gainful employments in jobs as offered in the informal sector of the Nigerian economy through such programmes as Directorate of Rural Roads and Infrastructure (DFRRI) National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP). However, according to [9] and [10] these kinds of services and jobs that describe the employment in the informal sector are those where the individuals or their groups so engaged operate as mini and micro enterprises through the production of goods and services on a small scale with lower quality and prices. For example, the efforts of the Sudanese government in rebuilding the nation through engaging the youths in small scale entrepreneurship (V.O.A. Newsnow, 20hrs UTC, Sunday May 19th 2005). Some of the fields of activities are vehicle repair, radio repair, watch repair, refrigerator repair, manufacture of bricks and aggregate building construction, money changing and in recent times computer operations and repairs. Also of the activities and those that are related to the basic raw material production as well as vegetable and green market transactions for family every day feeding.

In spite of attempts by successive regimes to improve the lot of Nigerian youths, the condition of the Nigerian youth still leaves a lot to be desired. A lot more needs are to be done to empower them, re-energize them and get them seriously involved, with the task of nation building and socio-economic development. Past attempts at addressing the problems of the youth were characterized by much rhetoric and little in terms of concrete action. Even the little that was being done lacked focus such that the result was marginal, when not counter productive, for example, the National Directorate of (youth) Employment (NDE), the NAPEP, the DFRRI etc, the products from who's efforts and transactions are not patronize by the government of any of her organs, instead, comparable importations that usually makes a mockery of the local efforts or products are embarked upon by these supposed local patronizers.

The nature of the socio-political and economic environment, which had prevailed in the nation, therefore seems to impose serious constraints in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the youth. Contemporarily, they suffer different kinds of socio-economic deprivation and afflictions. Thus, Government's efforts, when made, have generally tended to be little, or too late. The institutional framework for and plan implementation mechanism of public policy have been very weak, inefficient and ineffective, such that they hardly ever facilitated the actualization of desired policy goals.

It need be stressed that the large population of the nation, about one hundred and fifty million people, with near 40% of them being supposed productive youths aged between 15 through to 45 [11] may continue to be in want in the midst of plenty and their abundant strength to tap these natural endowments unless efforts are made to provide, understand and interpret some base line data and information on the status of these youths involvement in services that describe the informal sector. These would be in terms of the views and suggestions of a sample of these youths who appear to be engaged in a notable number of theses services in the informal sector.

Specifically, the Research Considered Possible Answers to Agitating Questions As:

- C What are the possible sources of informal employments?
- C How long in the day does the informally employed work per day?
- C What is the index of the average income of the informal worker: weekly / month?
- C What access to, utilization of and satisfaction with the services of the informally employed do the people engaged in informal employment experience? - Would their supposed customers prefer other of kind to them in procuring services?
- C Do the youths desired to be self-employed?
- C What are their expectations in being self-employed?

Purpose: The vision of this research is one of searching for and suggesting a positive contribution of the youth in state and national socio-economic development. It is the vision to empower the Nigerian Youth of fully realize their potentialities and positively contribute to the overall development of the nation. Further more to provide data that would initiate actions that would build a youth full of the spirit of entrepreneurship, self reliance, mutual co-operation, understanding and respect; youth who are not corrupt and self-serving; youth with equal opportunity, free from gender and other forms of discrimination. One looks forward to seeing male hairdressers and female mechanics and with patronage and respect from the members of the society.

MATERIALS METHODS

The study is a descriptive aspect of the available informal job opportunities for youths in Ekiti State adopting focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. These methods afford the opportunity to collect baseline and comprehensive data about the subject matter of the paper.

Six Local Government areas were randomly selected from the sixteen (16) from the three senatorial districts in the state. This shows that two Local Government areas were randomly chosen per senatorial district, namely: North Senatorial District (Oye and Ilejemeje, Central Senatorial District (Ado-Ekiti, Ijero - Ekiti) and South Senatorial District (Ikere, Ilawe).

Population and Sample

The Four Categories of People Who Are Involved in this Survey, Are:

- C Artisans
- C Secondary school leavers
- C Youth-in-street

In each of the Local Government areas, samples were from each of the political wards available. Fifty (50) housing units in each ward were made to touch all the political wards, in the LGAs, the alternate building method for the household to be selected and the use of alphabetical order in terms of who to interview at the selected sports was adopted.

The total number of interviewees is five hundred and fifty in each local Government area i.e (50 x 11ward) and three thousand, six hundreds and thirty 3630 for the six Local Government areas i.e. (550 x 6 LGAs).

The second instrument is the FGDs mainly among the youth in the street in each of the Local Government areas. The classification of the groups is by: Age, Sex and Occupational distributions.

Ten FGDs were conducted in each of the Local Government, five per sex distributions (male and female). This makes sixty (60) FGDs in all the six Local Government areas.

Table 1: Analysis of Respondents By Gender Distribution

Sex	N	%
Male	2121	61
Female	1375	39

Table 2: Existing sources of informal employments available in Ekiti State

Jobs	N	%	Jobs	N	%
Civil servant	245	6.9	Farming (fadama)	24	0.67
Saw-milling	69	2.0	Tailoring	234	6.50
Carpentry	168	4.7	Cloth wearing	53	1.50
Mason (bricklaying)	79	2.2	Cloth dyeing	12	0.34
Plumbing	54	1.5	Weaving (mat)	2	0.056
Painting and interior decoration	21	0.6	Weaving (basket)	8	0.220
Photography	55	1.5	Weaving (broom)	9	0.300
Motor mechanic	77	2.2	Pot making	3	0.080
Vulcanizer	32	0.9	Gold smiting	10	0.300
Vehicle rewire	21	0.6	Blacking smiting	16	0.450
Electricians	75	2.1	Shoemaking	42	1.200
Electronic repair	28	0.8	Secretarial service	39	1.100
Trading (cloth)	51	1.4	Laundry	21	0.600
Trading (medicine)	48	1.3	Transportation (tax)	92	2.600
Trading (stationery)	2	0.056	Transportation (Okada)	73	2.10
Trading (general)	322	9.000	Caring	0	0.00
Hunting	33	0.900	Bulk food mating	21	0.60
Farming (planting)	162	4.500	Butcher	9	0.30
Farming (poultry)	30	0.800	Metal fabrication	41	1.20
Farming (bee keeping)	12	0.340	Brick	18	0.50
Farming (annual)	4	0.100	Hairdressing	155	4.30
Barbing	54	2.200			
Shop-tending (for another)	23	0.600			
House-tending	0	0.000			
Restaurateur / snacks	66	1.800			
Musician / Entertainment	5	0.100			
Others (specify)	147	4.100			

Data Analysis: Method of data analysis is descriptive and aimed at providing answers to the research questions, it therefore involved the use of simple frequencies and their percentage conversion with tabulations and content analysis.

A breakdown of the participants in the household interview reveals that 61% (2121) were males while 39% (1375) were females. More males were interviewed than the females.

This research identified 46 sources of informal employment in the state. It also noted that these sources have identifiable groups and associations. The interesting thing is that, Farming that the people are known for, have no local identifiable group, except for the effort of the government in recent times to create an umbrella and a forum where they now meet and coordinate their activities (the Farmers' Congress). However, there are few large scale farmers (about 3%), who could even be named cocoa and other cash crops and to who most of the other subsistent farmers subscribe in terms of who purchases their farm produce and who for the group's negotiation purposes constituted themselves into the farmers' associations that exercise a notable control over the actions and practices of their members who practise the trade.

In Ekiti State, a larger percentage (64) of people engaged in informal employment spend between 6 to 8 hour on their jobs.

Table 3: Analysis of time spent per day on the work

Time in Hours per day	N	%
3-5	778	22
6-8	2262	64
Above 9	495	14

Table 4: Analysis of average earning from these works / Month

Earning in Naira	N	%
1000 - 3000	1980	56
3500 - 8000	884	25
8500 - 15000	459	13
Above 15500	212	6

Table 5: Utilization of the services of the informal sector by the people

	N	%
Frequently	955	27
Regularly	919	26
Rarely	1661	47

Table 7: Analysis of Level of satisfactoriness as expressed by the respondents

	N	%
High	742	21
Medium	1167	33
Low	1626	46

Table 8: Analysis of satisfaction that people that have ever been served claim they derive

	N	%
High	495	14
Average	1343	38
Low	1697	48

These clearly show that 56% of the youth (708,833) in Ekiti earn between N1,000 - N3,000, 25% earn between N3500 - N8000, 13% earn between N8, 500 - N15,00 and 6% earn above N15, 500. In clear understanding, Ekiti youths live in poverty.

From the table above, only 27% of the participants claim that they are frequently utilized, 26% are utilized at some time intervals while 47% claim they are rarely utilized in the services they render to the people.

Level of Satisfaction: The level of satisfactoriness (the extent to which the engagement fulfills psychological needs) reported is low, i.e. a greater percentage of the respondents in informal employment in Ekiti State report a low level of satisfactoriness. This they related to the low social recognition accorded them in the society. Many of them gave the reasons for this as their low level of schooling. Also they adduced it to the lack of structure in their mode of training, that is, no specific syllabus or curriculum for their training and they claimed that the level of their competence depends on the dexterity and cleverness of the bosses who trained them.

As reported by the FGDs, a low (23%) of the people involved in informal employment reported being satisfied with their kind of employment. The satisfied group explained that their employment remained the source by which they possess the identify the have in the society and that it has been their main stay in social transactions, though, their patronage was not as much as they expect.

Table 9: Analysis of work meeting the needs of the people involved (i.e. the workers)

	N	%
All my needs		-
About 70% of my needs	424	12
About 50% of my needs	1308	37
About 30% of my needs	1803	51

Table 10: Expectations of the practitioners in being self-employed: Excerpts Report From In-depth Interview

- To be known for particular contribution to the society
- To be prosperous and influential
- Social respect
- To be able to produce goods and services
- Government patronage
- To be able to develop appropriate technique for handling things in the environment
- Access to funds
- To be able to perform specialized activities for people
- Meeting specific needs of the people

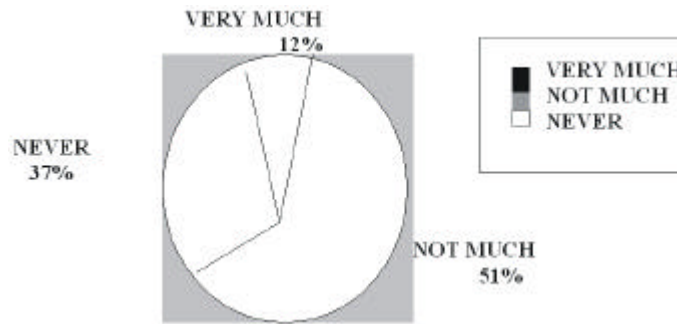


Fig. 1: Analysis of the respondents' psychological orientation toward informal employment Chart 1

From the transcription of the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews, the research participants believe that the services they offer as well as their attitudes and commitment to the services compared favorably with the ones offered in the cities and other highbrow places.

According to the table above, only 14% of the respondents claim that the people they had served in the past were highly satisfied with their services, while the other 86% reported that their customers had only been either averagely satisfied or out rightly unsatisfied.

In the interviews that followed the responses to this question, transcription reveals that the informal workers considered the services they render as comparable to the ones obtained in other places but that people are known to always complain about the services of Nigerian artisans and workmen, forgetting the poor strength of the tools they have and their expositions to standard practices of the foreign experts.

According to the respondents in the in-depth interviews, meeting needs is based on how well individuals are willing to cut their coats according to the piece of cloth they have. They claim that, renting houses, choosing what to eat, the dresses to put on, the kind of schools that one's children and dependants attend are issues relating to needs of the people. They claim that the monetary gains from these sources do not allow for going or demanding beyond what the public facilities provides. They only wish that the Government that provides these things would only be sincere in providing standard ones.

With the present economic situation and employment status in the state, 12% of respondents interviewed in the household agreed with the fact that their jobs meet 70% of their needs, while 37% believed that jobs in Ekiti meet 50% of their needs and the large percentage (51%) submit that the work they are doing is for people not to see them as lazy human being and to get money to manage their family that if there are other opportunities outside their employment they are ready and willing not only to participate but they will be fully involved. 12% of the respondents expressed being very much oriented toward informal employment in terms of its meeting their life goals and social expectations.

Among the larger 51% who claimed that youths are no longer oriented towards informal employment are from jobs like motor mechanics, masons, plumbing and blacksmithing to mention but a few of the 40 sources. They claimed that they no longer have apprentices and that the ones who grudgingly come are too impatient to learn and understand the basics of the art. Also, they claimed that because the sources do not bring in large sums of money as reward for serving customers, it could not meet the youths' high and social aspirations.

DISCUSSION

The data from this study clearly shows how the nation had by some act of commission or omission been under-utilizing the potentials of her teeming youth population. Many of the respondents who are involved in these informal jobs report of their under-employed and many times being underutilized. Some of the master trainers reported on a dwindling number of apprentices claiming that youths these days seem not interested in acquiring skills that their jobs offer, for example, auto-repairers, mason and carpentry. Further they claimed that the youths are more interested in the flashy things of life that they think being involved in jobs that needed their acquiring manual skills can never help them to. They claimed that many of them that had been so signed on display their unwillingness by acts of absenteeism, dropping out, drug use and violent behaviours. This clearly shows that something is either wrong or missing in this alternative options to their schooling or continued skills acquisition programme. The researcher think of this in terms of a governmental intervention in terms of clearly stated policy statements.

Hence, the Perspective of the National Youth Employment Policy Needs Focus and Brings into Play Factors Such As

Recommendations: Involvement and use of skills training centres (the nation has about 35 of them) that would not only train but also certify the recipients capabilities

- C Focusing the skills training centres to meeting the local needs and relevance of the people
- C Developing/adopting skills training strategies periodical for the people in identified or new areas, especially at the secondary school level. Also would there a need to work out an arrangement between the skills training centres and the practitioners on the field as means of fine tuning the syllabus of training on this there may need to be a need for a reconciliation of programme of the regular secondary schools and the technical colleges as well as the skills training centres to have among themselves a programme of visitations and excursion for their students.

Along this line vocational psychologists and counsellors would need to come up with a curriculum of teaching the youths the basics of starting their own businesses while they are still in school. The Government along this line of thought would have to make available some beginning investment funds in the schools as initial starting point for both the school and the students. Knowing the antecedents of such programmes in the country, it need be stressed the need for such funds to be monitored and the recipients followed up for the needed assistance, support, patronage and counselling until they would be able to stand and survive on their own.

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