HIGHER EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION AMONG YOUTH IN ABIA STATE
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Abstract
This paper is set out to examine how Higher education can be used to reduce poverty among the youth in Abia state beyond 2020. It examines the conditions of the youth and what poverty actually signifies. It also considers the situations of higher education in Abia state. It eventually came out with copious views on how higher education can be used to reduce poverty among the youth by relating the curricula content to the needs of education in the practical sense into the curriculum and create a linkage between the outside community and the higher institutions.

According to the United Nations(2006), over one billion people in the world today live in unacceptable conditions of poverty. Mostly of these are in developing countries, particularly in rural areas of low income countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. Poverty has various manifestations like hunger and malnutrition, ill health, lack of access to education, increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments, social discrimination and exclusion affect the socio-cultural life of the people. The Millennium Development Goals singles out the youth as a target group that is focused on to develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

For several decades, development agencies have placed great emphasis on primary and more recently, secondary education. They however, have neglected tertiary education as a means to improve economic growth and mitigate poverty among the youth. Education for All in 2000 for example, advocated only for primary education as a driver of broad social welfare. It left tertiary education in the background(Lam2007).

The reason for de-emphasizing tertiary education was due partly to the earlier submission about whether there was evidence that higher education yields social benefits or not. Recently it has become a worldwide accepted facts that higher education is a determinant of income growth and can produce public and private benefits (UNIS 2000). Higher education create tax revenue, increase savings and investment and lead to a more entrepreneurial and civic society. It can also improve a nation’s health, contribute to reduced population growth, improve technology and strengthen governance. Bloom, Hartley and Rosovsky (2006) found a positive and statistically significant correlation between higher education enrolment rates and governance indicators, like absence of corruption, rule of law, absence of ethnic tension, bureaucratic quality and low risk of appropriation. In addition, youth education through higher education will boost high level of entrepreneurial skill (Lin 2004).

Higher education enrolment is generally made up of the youth and so higher education graduates are likely to be more aware of and be able to use new technologies. They are also more likely to develop new tools and skills themselves. Their knowledge can also improve the skills and understanding of non-graduate co-workers, while the greater confidence and knowledge inculcated by advanced schooling among the youth may generate entrepreneurship with positive effects on job creation (Fiona 2003).

The Condition of the Youth in Abia State
The global population of young people aged 12-24 is currently 1.3 billion. The youth population is projected to peak at 1.5 billion in 2035, it is likely to increase most rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia by 26% and 20% respectively. MOE(Ministry of
Education estimated that 55 percent of youth reside in rural areas, but this figure is as high as 70 percent in Abia state (Goodfrey 2006).

In outlining the issues and challenges facing youth in Abia state, Goodfrey (2006) asserted that youths make up over half of the region’s population. This youth bulge has profound and far reaching consequences in terms of development, growth and good governance. The perception and reactions to the youth bulge had been disproportionately negative focusing more on youth’s potential roles in fostering peace, security and development in the region.

Age definition of youth varies considerably. The United Nations defines youth as individuals between the ages 12 and 24. Traditionally, policy discussion concerning youth have been based on the premise that youth are in transition from childhood to adulthood and as such, have specific characteristics that make them a distinct demographic and social category. According to World Bank report (2006), it is estimated that currently 209 million young people or 18 percent of all youth, live on less than one US dollar a day, and 515 million young people, or nearly 45 percent live on less than two US dollar per day.

Most poor people in Abia state are concentrated in rural areas, especially among small farmers and landless families. Urban poverty in its turn is the consequence of rural deprivation and economic decline, which creates distress migration to cities. The youth unemployment both in urban and rural areas has been a persistent concern of politician and policymakers since the 1960s, youth development has remained at the margins of national development strategies in Abia state.

According to International labour organization (ILO 2008), the results of their findings indicated that of the 1.1 billion youths aged 15 to 24 world-wide, one out of every three of these figures is either seeking, but unable to find work has given up the job search entirely or is working but living on less than US $2 a day. The youth unemployment rate was far higher than the adult unemployment rate of 4.6 percent in 2005.

The condition of the youth in Abia state is characterized with poverty syndrome, which often resulted from high unemployment rate, in both pre and post-tertiary education. Most families believe that investment in higher education will bring economic benefits to them in return but things seem not to go the normal way, as most of the rural youth who had been to tertiary institutions still find solace only in the farm work, while majority of them prefer roaming about on the urban streets than going back to farmland (Goodfey 2006).

The Position of Higher Education in Abia State

According to Goodfey (2006) enrolment rates in higher education in Abia state are the lowest in the country due to high tuition and other fees attached. Moreover, the absolute gap by which it lags behind other states has increased rapidly. The World Bank, which exercises significant influence over developing country governments, has long believed that primary and secondary schooling are more important than tertiary education for poverty reduction (World Bank 2006).

The current unique under-funding of tertiary institutions and population of the youth outburst in Abia state has led to the development of alternatives means of the higher education, which was based on the colonial background, is now experiencing radical changes to cater for the unemployment problem among the youth in Abia state (Goodfey 2006).

Lack of the right type of higher education remains a key problem for many youth in Abia state, and even when youth were educated, it did not guarantee meaningful employment. Effort to break poverty and underdevelopment nexus is urgently needed.

Access to higher education by the youth is also inextricably linked to socio economic status, and unfortunately, most people, particularly in rural areas, are poor and socially excluded.


Poverty means more than simply low income. It includes lack of voice in determining what goes on in ones community, as well as vulnerable livelihoods. Skills development through higher education curriculum contributes to social and economic integration.

The curriculum of the higher education in Abia state should be more flexible and adaptive in order to solve the upsurging problem of poverty among the youth. The orientation should be towards jobmarket responsiveness, focused training in highly - sought - after specializations and vocational
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streams. The main streams of the higher education should be geared towards producing graduates that are relevant to their economy, which will be able to make use of the knowledge and skill acquired to shape their environment and create jobs, rather than seek for white-collar jobs all the time. There should be de-centralization of higher education governance and deregulation. This will allow them to operate youth programme to cater for the environmental youth problem. The informal and vocational education is still less catered for, this should be so that the youth can be more self-reliant after graduation (Lam 2007).

Youth as it was pointed out earlier can be defined, not only in terms of age but also as a social construct by a number of factors including culture, economic independence and responsibility. The type of higher education given to them should address all these areas. Since anything short of this will lead to deprivation of essential growth ingredients, United Nation Information Service (UNIS 2000). According to Haggblade, Hazel and Reardon (2002) there should be a link between the labour market and the higher institution to know the current demand by the youth outside the higher institution and what should be emphasized in the makeup of the institution.

All the higher institutions, both private and public should take it as a matter to get their students educated in the practical & theoretical aspects of Information Communication Technology (ICT). This will afford the youth the opportunity of securing employment elsewhere apart from their immediate environment.

The higher education curricular should be structured, to cater for the rural youth who may not want to go back to agricultural practices again after graduation. Such curricular should provide for income generating ventures like marketing and sale of raw, semi-finished and finished goods should be entrenched in higher education general studies (Bonnell 2007).

There should be integrating counseling evaluation, and career guidance initiatives in higher institutions. This process should commence at the beginning of a programme and should continue throughout the course duration. This will help the young undergraduate to know the purpose of that very education in a practical world scenario (Fiona 2003).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the issue of higher education and poverty reduction among the youth in Abia state ought not to be trivialized on the developed nations and IMF direction. Going to higher institutions by the youth is a way of avoiding agricultural practices, and coming out as a university graduate to go back to the farmland is like a curse to them, therefore, higher education curriculum should be made applicable to the need of the youth.

Poverty is more than an individual situation. Higher education reforms should be geared towards allowing the youth graduates to integrate very well into their communities. Giving preference to vocational, technical and modern marketing systems will invariably lead to increase in income and reduction in the instability of livelihoods of both the rural and urban youth.

The type of agricultural reforms through higher education, which will motivate the youth to go back to farm will be such that will allow for minimum input to bring out large output with less rigor. Without this, higher education youth graduates will prefer roaming the large cities, seeking for white collar jobs than taking one loan or the other, to get back to the land.
References


