

THE ROLES OF ACQUISITION OF VOCATIONAL SKILLS IN THE REALIZATION OF SEVEN (7) POINT AGENDA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The seven point agenda as outlined is a wheel of progress with the epicenter being vocational skills. The interrelationship of vocational skill with each of the points of agenda is provided and related to how the citizenry can be empowered to contribute to National Development. The seven point agenda as conceived has been presented to have some drawbacks which include the non full awareness and participation of the majority of the populace. Suggestions have been offered on how to promote vocational skills, popularize the seven point agenda to ensure the fuller realization of the goals of the Federal Government from the strategies of the policy agenda.

Introduction

It is a common feature of any organized entity to set out goals for achievement depending on philosophy, focus, vision and mission laid down for or by the entity. On the larger, frontier a sovereign nation can adopt this organized arrangement to carry a nation to higher heights. Such is the case with Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of Mr. President, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'adua. After assuming the role of leadership of the country in May, 2009, the presidency spelt out a seven point agenda aimed at solving most of the perceived national developmental problems. According to Federal Ministry of Communication, the objectives of these seven point agenda are in the long run aimed at generating employment and reducing poverty rate in the citizenry (FRCN and NTA, 2009).

Since independence, Nigeria as a nation has been striving to attain a befitting status among comity of nations and improve on the welfare of her citizenry through several developmental efforts (Gambo, 2005). Among such efforts are strategies like National Orientation Agency (NAOA), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS), Rolling or National Development Plans, Rebranding Nigeria etc. However, as a nation in a haste for rapid national development, a greater percentage of the populace are genuinely concerned that not much have been realized. Probably, such disposition did inform the present administration to consider some categorized strategies christened 7-point agenda to satisfying the yearnings of the populace.

The Seven Point Agenda of Federal Government of Nigeria

POINTS	AGENDA
1	Power and Energy
2	Agriculture and food security
3	Mass transportation
4	Land reform
5	Qualitative and functional education
6	Wealth and gainful employment
7	Security and Niger-Delta

Critically examined, it can be seen that if the agenda is properly implemented, it may provide some solutions to critical areas of needs for Nigerians. It is therefore the interest of this paper to look at the roles of acquisition of vocational skills in the realization of the goals of the agenda. The idea is equally to relate the main issue of the paper with all the points as outlined in the agenda profile.

The Vocational Skills

The American Heritage digital Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionaries (2001) and Microsoft Encarta Dictionaries (2010) variously defined skills as an ability, a proficiency, trade, technique or an art of doing something well. On the other hand, Okomanyi (2003) viewed vocational

skill as an educational vehicle providing forms of special education in agriculture, business, industrial technical, home economics, computer and fine and applied art, and

agricultural education is that form of vocational education which fits individuals for the occupation connected with tillage of the soil, care of domestic animals, forestry, fishery and other useful farming activities. Business education on the other hand, is the field of vocational education designed to meet the needs of the wage earner, employed business and commercial ventures focusing on book-keeping, stenography, typewriting, clerical work and salesmanship. The industrial technical education gives special skills in plant engineering in the fields of electricity, mechanics, civil engineering, carpentry, mining, hydraulic, and chemical admixture for the benefit of man.

Similarly associated with the home front is the home economics education which the author equally defined as

a form of vocational education which fits individual for occupation connected with house keeping. The main areas of concern are cookery, serving, craft, textile (weaving), health management and child care.

The present computer age calls for skillful development in the manipulation of computer and its hard wares. This focus of computer education is also aimed at expanding the know how in information technology.

The Fine and Applied Art education focuses on the development of human intellect in mastering the dexterities in the use of hand and brain to create values and appreciations. The core practical demands of Fine and Applied Arts are in ceramics, painting, sculpture, graphics and drawings.

Unique Attributes of Vocational Skills

When critically examined, every day life activities of man is vocational. In other words, vocation is a way of life therefore, all trainings through vocation education is a general refinement on our ways of life. Acquired skills have positive impact and wide bearing on our everyday chores and survival. Vocational education has a great departure from other forms of education. It is a form of education where recipients are specialized, functional, productive and are easily more gainfully employed. This class of individuals apart from being capable of self-employment, do generate employment and therefore, are of great value to the society. The uniqueness of vocational education is appreciated along the following perspectives:

- It is taught and acquired in relation to specific occupation.
- It is of more value to the recipient than any one else.
- The skill acquired is easily transferable to other candidates.
- It is highly amenable to apprenticeship
- It is gender and working friendly.

The sure vehicle through which vocational skills could be conferred on the citizenry (youth and adult) is Vocational Education. A conscious and vigorous drive to improve and expand on our forms of Vocational Education would help greatly in the realization of 7-point agenda.

If vocation is viewed as a way of life and the 7-point agenda is targeted at improving the ways of life of the Nigerian populace, then the areas of interrelationship between the two concepts become highly obvious.

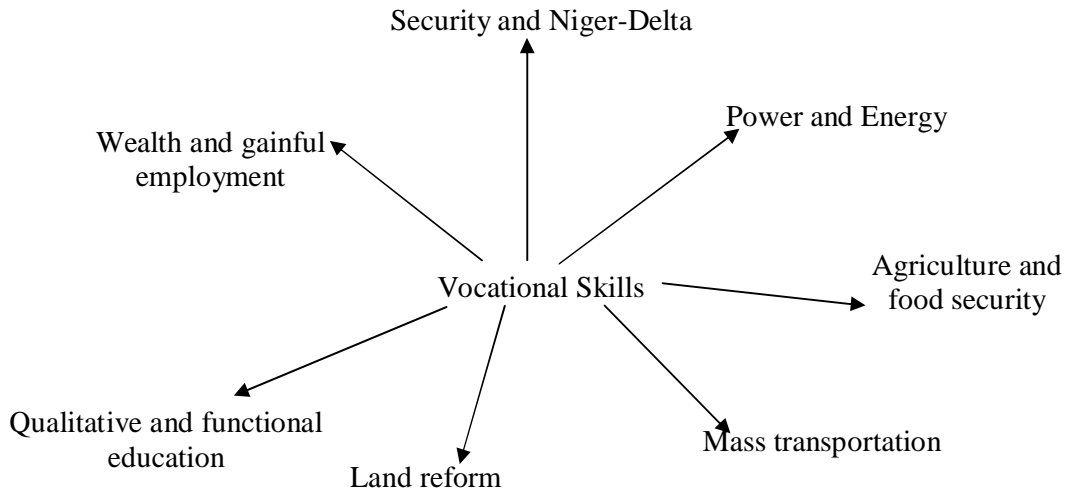


Fig.1: Interrelationship of Vocational Skills with 7-point Agenda.

i. Vocational Skills and Power and Energy

The driving force to provide the much needed manpower in the power and energy sector of the economy in terms of managing the hardware and energy resource of the sector depends on the proficiency of skills of the work force. The skills of those, already in operative and others that may be needed from time to time in boosting the work force can only be sharpened through gainful skill acquisition education. These are areas of providing engineers in the fields of current generation and distribution, dams and thermal management, information and communication technology (ICT) and other social, personnel and industrial management expertise. Deficiency existing between power/energy demands and supply faced by the nation would greatly be remedied when appropriate skills are employed in the execution of power and energy projects. Unfortunately, these important skills are not available for the required manpower input.

ii. Vocational Skills and Food Security

Food security entails accessibility to and availability of food in both quantity and quality (Obiageli, 2005). Relatively, the nation has been positioned as a nation that is yet to meet the demands for food sufficiency. A nation in such a state is known to be highly vulnerable to global intrigues and threats i.e. insecure economically, socially, politically and even health wise. Food sufficiency has a direct relationship with increased health status and longevity. Human resource is utilized up to maximum capacity in a nation whose citizens are properly fed. Since agriculture is universally accepted as the major employer of labour and a key contributor to wealth creation and poverty alleviation, any attention paid to this sector of our economy will yield the desired dividend of uplifting the welfare of the citizenry. In the views of Obiageli (2005), “to be able to achieve food security and avert national food crisis, our present and future must be trained and retained in modern skills of agriculture”.

iii. Vocational Skills and Mass Transportation

Availability of sufficient, efficient and cheap transport facilities impact greatly on the social wellbeing of any group of people. Apart from easing mobility of people, it is a key to vital locomotion of food materials from areas of production to other locations of need. Maintenance and the running of mass transportation facilities demand qualified skills of operation. Appropriate education in science and technology is a necessary ingredient for agricultural, commercial, and economic development.

iv. Vocational Skills and Land Reform

Land, a natural resource has never being in abundance for human needs. Naturally, the earth surface is occupied by 71 percent water and the remaining 29 percent available for human utilization is usually a source of conflict. In most countries, increasing pressure to use land for economic development have led to conflict. Developing countries Nigeria inclusive, are in dilemma of how to utilize lean farm lands or other lands close to cities that are needed for motor ways, housing and other social services. More of these problems are how to conserve most of the ecosystems to guarantee resources for future. It is therefore obvious that only trained personnel with the skills of land conservation would be able to balance the dare needs for land by man and the challenging conflicting factors.

v. Vocational Skill and Functional Education

Education generally is aimed at transforming an individual into virtuous, literate citizens that will contribute to building a distinctive nation that would be better equipped to compete with other countries. Policy makers in education fashion out several policies regarding different forms of education to meet with national yearnings. Out of these, is the Technical and Vocational Education which is designed to make the recipients employable. The dynamic job market is changing very rapidly that only those who have acquired new skills will be favoured. To realize the 7-point agenda through the national education goals, concerted efforts must be made to inculcate new skills in educational modules and programmes.

vi Vocational Skills and Wealth Creation/Gainful Employment

Since special skills are prerequisite for gainful employment and generation of employment, wealth creation becomes a complementary attribute. The acquisition of vocational skills becomes a sure source of wealth creation if properly channeled. Entrepreneurship is bound to assume the status of prominence and most of the unemployed individuals saturating the labour market stand the advantage of being mopped up.

vii. Vocational Skills and National Security

Insufficient food supply, high rate of unemployment, and dearth of social amenities among other unsatisfactory acts of governance do create bottled up pressure that lead to unavoidable crises. All these culminate into internal insecurity and may result in weakened national sovereignty. In Nigeria and particularly in the Delta region where enormous quality of fossil fuel is explored and utilized as main stay of national income, there are pockets of reaction to government's unfair and inequitable share of the resource, hence, the instability, heated policy, high rate of crime, crises of all forms and over stretched poorly established security services which have all bedeviled our national life and psyche on the daily basis. All these could be ameliorated if most of the able bodied citizenry were empowered with skills and appropriate tools. Wealth would then be created and the nation would be better for it.

Perceived Draw Back of the Seven Point Agenda

Despite the propaganda by federal government machineries on the strategy, most Nigerians are yet to comprehend the entire context and how the goals of the 7-point agenda are to be achieved. Invariably, the citizens have not felt their levels of involvement and not to talk of feeling the impacts of the agenda. The scenario therefore, is that of the feeling that none of the set down agenda has been realized. Many are also doubtful of even the government functionaries understanding the philosophy of the seven point agenda; otherwise physical measures and other approaches could have been adopted for the citizens to feel the impact of the policy.

Conclusion

Challenges faced by the nation to ensure fast development and peer up with other developed countries of the world need the cooperation of all the citizenry in realizing all the nations' goals and aspirations. Such is the strategy of the seven point agenda that deserve the maximum participation of all the populace. A better and fuller achievement might be realized if skillful manpower is empowered with skills and tools to participate fully in the national economic development. Vigorous pursuance of

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vocational skills may provide the magic wand to lift the nation into the millennium targets of 20 – 20 – 20.

Suggestions

The seven point agenda as conceived is a laudable programme that if fully implemented, could lift the nation into greater strata of development. However, as shown in the drawbacks, the desired goals may not easily be achieved unless some measures are adapted to fine-tune the project. In this regard are some suggestions below:

- Elaborate programmes should be mounted to ensure the general awareness and participation of the citizenry.
- The national policy on education and particularly, the vocational technical education should be revised in line with the philosophy of the seven point agenda.
- Government at all levels should pay serious attention to vocational technical education in order to provide skills and empower larger members of the populace.

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