

**THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN BENUE STATE ECONOMIC  
EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY  
(BENSEEDS)**

**Onwuegbuna, Joy O. And Ater, L. L.**

**Abstract**

The lingering poverty in Ben Lie state is so tense now that the state government is poised to take action towards empowering the Benue populace. The strategic action of supplying seeds and seedlings only may not arrest the ugly situation, rather a more comprehensive vocational agriculture is needed, hence, the present realities are beyond traditional agriculture. Vocational education, if properly utilized is capable of satisfying the need of the society for effective economic development of such country and also equipping the individual to find a satisfying position in occupational structure. A transformation from traditional agriculture to industrial type needs a corresponding transformation of human resource. Therefore, vocational education should be incorporated in the Benue state socio-economic empowerment and planning.

**Introduction**

The success story of development of any nation depends on the expansion and maturity of vocational education of that nation. Vocational education when properly implemented and utilized is capable of turning around the fortune of any nation, hence it prepares the minds of the participants towards productive education, which results to effective employment.

Any economic policy that is devoid of utilization of available natural resources, commitment of the citizenry towards productive manipulative skills has a shaky base that may not stand the test of time. The importation of finished products only makes a country "a consumer nation" but what one needs to launch himself to an enviable economic development is production; not mere consumption, Vocational education therefore emphasizes production through manipulative skills.

**Causes of Poverty in Benue State**

The incidence of poverty is prevalent in Benue state. Poverty which can be described as lack of well-being encompasses not only income, but the whole range of factors which influence human capabilities. Poverty is a multi-faced affliction, a ravaging economic and social phenomenon that manifests in the inability of the victims to acquire the basic necessity of life (Community Action Programme on Poverty Alleviation, CPPA 1995). SEEDS Drafting Committee (2004) asserts that poverty is severe in Benue state, wide spread and multi-dimensional, and has increased considerably in the last two decades. Poverty is predominantly, but not exclusively, a rural phenomenon and affects women even more seriously than men. Particularly, vulnerable groups include children, the aged, victims of HIV/ AIDS and persons displaced by communal and military violence.

**Poverty Incidence in Benue State**

	Extremely poor	Moderately Poor	Non Poor
1980	2%	21%	77%
1985	14%	29%	57%
1992	15%	26%	59%
1996	25%	39%	36%

Source: BENSEEDS Drafting Committee 2004

Benue State is the eight poorest of the thirty six states of the Federation (BENSEEDS, 2004). The reasons for this are complex but may in part be explained by the dependence of the state on traditional agriculture. Neglect of the agricultural sector is compounded by the extreme lack of infrastructure in the state, and this under-development has promoted out-migration of both skilled and un-skilled -labour. Poverty also has gender dimension. Women are socially, and economically disadvantaged. While more likely to be engaged in crop production than men, women rarely own or control farmlands. They are largely responsible for fetching water and firewood, cooking and other household work. Men often control the proceeds of farm sales and men dominate access to other resources like credit and agricultural inputs.

Worse still, a recent report prepared for SLOP notes the major environmental problems in the State as declining soil fertility, soil erosion, bush burning, flooding, deforestation, pollution and waste management. These environmental costs bedevil the poor, especially fanners and rural dwellers.

## **Economic Empowerment Strategy in Benue State**

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is responsible for a number of schemes, including youth empowerment scheme, which aims to give University and school leavers job training opportunities. Other NAPEP programmes include: The Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme, The Social Welfare Service Scheme and The Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme.

In the same vein, Benue State established Poverty Eradication Council with the mandate to sensitize a broad range of stakeholders about Poverty and its characteristics and impact; produce a poverty Reduction Scheme Policy for Benue State; and also to oversee the development and subsequent implementation of a Poverty Reduction Scheme Policy (PRSP). The Poverty Reduction Scheme is to be achieved through the following strategies: j. Provision of food sufficiency and increase in food yields, by securing and distributing improved

seeds/seedling to farmers, ii. Provision of agro-based raw materials, quick and timely delivery and distribution of fertilizers and

farm inputs, and sourcing of viable markets within the state. iii. Establishment of factories for processing and storage of products; developing and encouraging

foreign and local investment; provision of infrastructure and enabling environment, iv. Establishment of Agro-based industries and stabilization of the market system by standardization of weights and measures, provision of processing facilities for citrus, tomatoes, fish and removal and dismantling of anti-competitive unions.

According to State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS 2004), empowerment distribution shows that 75% are farmers, 10% traders, 6% civil servants and 9% others. The high level of participation in farming activities and vicious poverty on the ground indicates that what the people need is not mere distribution of seeds/seedlings or quick and timely delivery and distribution of fertilizers, but vocational agriculture for farming. According to Okorie (2001), the purpose of vocational agriculture for farming is to educate farmers, and those who would want to be farmers on the necessary skills in farming. This should include; classroom activities, supervised farming, mechanics activities and school sponsored farmer organizations. This vocational agriculture could be channeled through Adult Farmer Courses for persons engaged in farms; youth farmer courses for out-of-school youths becoming established in farming; courses provided in vocational schools for primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary school leavers preparing for farming. According to Osuala (1998), the objectives of vocational agriculture are: (i) to develop agricultural competencies needed by individuals engage in or preparing to engaged

in production agriculture; (ii) to develop an understanding of and appreciation for career opportunities in agriculture and the-

preparation needed to enter and progress in agricultural occupations; and (iii) to develop the ability to secure satisfying placement and to advance in an agricultural occupation.

Osuala (1998) further identifies economic goals of vocational agriculture which include: (i) to maintain a profitable, viable and efficient agricultural production sector capable of meeting all food and fibre demands while providing satisfactory incomes to farmers for use of land, labour, capital and management; (ii) to provide for an efficient, profitable and dynamic agric-business sector consisting of both

supplies of inputs and handlers of agricultural outputs; and (iii) to conduct a food and fibre economy with the framework of a democratic society relying on the fibre market as much as possible with all proceeding goals.

## **The Role of Vocational Education in Economic Empowerment**

Vocational Education has to play a leading role in the economic emancipation of any nation. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1980) defines "Role" as a function or position or the characteristics and expected social behaviour of an individual. The role of vocational education, according to Calhoun and Finch (1982), is in two segments. Vocational education has the main role in satisfying the need of the society to fill required positions, so that the economic system will operate effectively. Also, vocational education plays the role of helping individuals to find satisfying positions in the occupational structure.

Ukpong (1999) reports that from Independence in 1960 to date, successive governments in Nigeria have repeatedly adopted policies and programmes aimed at empowering the Nigerian populace such as: Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Agency for Mass Education, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP).

These programmes could not break the vicious circle of poverty because poverty is not only economic income, but also intellectual, vocational skills necessary to generate the income and the ability to manage the income. As a matter of fact, the change from a predominantly traditional agricultural sector to a technological advanced industrial sector requires a parallel change of human resource i.e. vocational skills relevant for the change.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the above, vocational education should be seen as part of Benue socio-economic planning that should be integrated with social and political development policies for the purpose of alleviating poverty and empowering the Benue populace.

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