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## **Youth Empowerment as a Strategy for Promoting Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The main focus of this paper is on youth empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper focused on such strategies as youth empowerment conscientisation strategy, youth empowerment leadership training strategy and youth skill acquisition empowerment strategy for promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. Appropriately, some of these recommendations are made as follows: (1) There should be adequate awareness creation in Nigeria on youth empowerment as a strategy for promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. (2) The government of Federal Republic of Nigeria should demonstrate strong political commitment to promote youth empowerment in the country where many youths are not gainfully engaged in meaningful economic ventures among others.*

The concept of empowerment is an essential element in any development process in the society. Ijah (2009) rightly stated that empowerment is an important factor in any development programme. Indeed, human empowerment remains a critical element or component of sustainable development initiatives in the contemporary global environment. Essentially, empowerment helps to empower people to acquire relevant knowledge and skills which will enable them to participate very actively in addressing issues of common concern in the society.

### **The Concept of Youth Empowerment**

The concept of youth empowerment simply means a teaching-learning process which helps to empower the youth with relevant knowledge and skills in order to prepare them to be able to meet the local, national and global challenges and competitiveness in the contemporary society. Essentially, youth empowerment encourages youths to think creatively in order to be able to face the contemporary local,

national and global challenges as it concerns their various localities in Nigeria. Indeed, the imperative of youth empowerment is basically to empower the youths with relevant knowledge and skills in an effort to prepare them in order to play active role in addressing local, national and global challenges and competitiveness in the contemporary global environment. Indeed, youth empowerment will certainly help to reposition the youths in addressing numerous socio-economic challenges that confront them as an important segment of the country's population.

Fundamentally, the concept of youth empowerment gives the youths an opportunity over their socio-economic disposition in life, especially in the contemporary competitive local, national and global environment. The idea for this is basically to enhance the status of youths not only in their local community settings, but also in the contemporary society. Consequently, youth empowerment as an intervention strategy to address socio-economic problems which confront the youths in the participating local communities will promote sustainable community development in particular and sustainable national development in general in the country.

The main reason in promoting youth empowerment is to stimulate consciousness among the youths to participate actively and effectively through collaborative efforts and engagements in addressing the numerous socio-economic challenges confronting people in Nigeria. Indeed, youth empowerment guarantees social freedom to youths in the contemporary society. Pratt and Boyden (1985) appropriately noted that considerable emphasis is placed on helping to provide the means that will enable people to achieve greater social freedom which will help them to enhance their capacity for self-determination. Ultimately, this is the main focus of youth empowerment in the contemporary society.

Interestingly, the social freedom of youths for self-determination tends to provide them with good opportunities to enhance their capabilities and potential as well as people's living conditions in the society. The realities of youth empowerment and freedom for self-determination have been widened by prevailing challenges locally, nationally and globally as clearly manifested in the high rate of unemployment and social injustice in the contemporary global environment. Maduka (1980) asserted that an individual's freedom for self-determination is, indeed, almost unlimited. This tends to indicate that the freedom of youths for self-determination through youth empowerment is not limited in scope in the society.

Essentially, the relevant stakeholders both in governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in setting up youth empowerment programmes or helping to promote youth empowerment programmes should not lose sight of the simple fact that for the youths, the main objective and goal

of youth empowerment is to improve people's poor living conditions in the society. Consequently, youth empowerment programmes will focus on employment generation and wealth creation in an effort to promote sustainable development. The relevant stakeholders should note that basic considerations of economic viability must, indeed, form part of the youth empowerment programmes. Pratt and Boyden (1985) clearly stated that such programmes must be economically sound. This certainly guarantees the sustainability of youth empowerment programmes in a developing economy such as that of Nigeria.

It will, obviously, be difficult to achieve sustainable youth empowerment goals such as promoting critical awareness among the youth, determining appropriate solutions to their problems as well as giving the youth more freedom to develop their own potential and lives unless the measures adopted are economically viable and rewarding. If this simple rule is not observed in youth empowerment programmes, such youth programmes may collapse as soon as the youth empowerment programmes are completed and commissioned for use. This will discourage participants from engaging in future development efforts in the contemporary society.

### **The Strategies of Promoting Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

The strategies of using youth empowerment to promote sustainable development in Nigeria are the followings:

1. Youth empowerment conscientisation strategy.
2. Youth empowerment leadership training strategy.
3. Youth skill acquisition empowerment strategy.

#### **1. Youth Empowerment Conscientisation Strategy**

Fundamentally, the strategy of using conscientisation approach as rightly advocated by Freire (1985) is very imperative to stimulate consciousness among all the relevant stakeholders to understand the enormous contributions of youth empowerment to sustainable development in Nigeria. The youths must be conscientised to understand their responsibilities in promoting an improved living condition of the members of the participating communities in the contemporary society.

Feuerstein (1988) suggested social awareness building where people at local community level attend orientation seminars. This affords people the opportunity to know very well about the problems in their local environment. Indeed, the conscientisation of Nigerian youths in this circumstance will ultimately enable them to understand the realities of their environment in the contemporary society which is largely characterized by high rate of youth unemployment, poverty, poor access to active participation in socio-economic development and poor access to decision-

making process among others in the country. The idea of conscientisation of people about youth empowerment is basically to help them to be aware of the existence of youth empowerment as a development intervention strategy to stimulate growth of the Nigerian developing economy. The conscientisation of youths will certainly help the youths to realize their full potential and work assiduously towards the growth of Nigerian developing economy at local community and national levels in the country.

## **2. Youth Empowerment Leadership Training Strategy**

Essentially, youth empowerment leadership training is an important empowerment strategy to develop leadership potential in youths in the society. The youth empowerment leadership training strategy enables the youths to develop their leadership potential in order to stimulate effective service delivery in youth organizations in particular and the society in general.

Understandably, a leader is simply a person in any social group who uses his ability to influence his colleagues in order to promote effective service delivery in the system. Indeed, regardless of your status in the society, if you have the ability to influence other people and use such ability to influence them in any social organization or setting and business establishment, you are regarded as a leader of the group. Fasel (2000) rightly stated that if a person can use his ability to influence his colleagues in a business partnering enterprise that such an individual is a leader. Fundamentally, it is appropriate for social organizations such as youth organizations, town unions, co-operative societies and business establishments among others to have a leader or leaders to pilot the affairs of such organizations. It is equally appropriate that other members of the group have to participate actively in the leadership training programmes in order to enable them to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills to pilot the affairs of the organization very well whenever the mantle of leadership is given to them to lead their respective groups in the society.

The election or appointment of youth leaders to pilot the affairs of various youth organizations in various local settings should be seen as the right step in the right direction to stimulate youth consciousness and empowerment at local grassroots level in the participating communities. This will obviously help to transform various local communities in the participating local government areas in Nigeria. This will, indeed, stimulate immense concerns in achieving the socio-economic transformation of the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. This readily reminds us of the imperativeness of youth empowerment leadership training which focuses on the development of the potential of youths for efficient performance of youth leaders and growth of the economy of the country at various levels.

Interestingly, the youths must be allowed to exercise their franchise to elect their leaders without undue interference of the leadership of their various local communities. The youth leadership should demonstrate clearly a high sense of humour and humility including integrity in promoting effective service delivery in their various local communities in the country. Okebukola (2011) identified integrity as an important quality of aspiring entrepreneurs in the society. The youths are, therefore, advised to embrace this virtue of integrity firmly if they are to succeed in their endeavours in life. It should be reiterated that the youths must be allowed to manage their local affairs without an undue interference of local community leadership that usually tend to subdue and dictate for the youths in their various communities.

Understandably, the local community youth organization certainly serves as a good platform for youth empowerment, especially in the areas of human capacity building, leadership training, peace education, community surveillance among others. Ultimately, the local youth organizations help the youths to acquire relevant knowledge and skills including leadership trainings in promoting effective and efficient management of their own segment in the local communities. The main reason is basically to enable the youths to manage their life challenges without necessarily the undue interference of the local community leadership. Additionally, youth empowerment in this regard encourages the youths to develop their full leadership potential in order to participate actively in meeting the challenges of their local communities.

### **3. Skill Acquisition Empowerment Strategy**

Fundamentally, youth skill acquisition empowerment strategy helps to equip the youths with relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to address the challenges of life in the contemporary society. This makes the youths to be self-employed in the society. Indeed, skill acquisition empowerment strategy helps the recipient youths to be job creators instead of being job seekers in the present global environment that is characterized with a high rate of unemployment and poverty, especially among the youths. Aruma (2011) noted that the promotion of employment strategy of entrepreneurship education is an important initiative to guarantee the reduction of high rate of unemployment in Nigeria. Britain (1989) observed that the employment strategy helps very greatly to promote an economic and industrial situation for business to operate very well through job creation in the society. Indeed, the focus of youth skill acquisition empowerment strategy is to enable the youths to acquire relevant knowledge and skills that will help to promote employment generation and wealth creation in the society.

The acquisition of technical and managerial knowledge and skills is very critical for sustainable development in the contemporary global environment.

Nwabueze (1980) rightly stated that it is appropriate for people to acquire management skills which will prove useful to them in other economic endeavours in the society. Essentially, the acquisition of relevant technical and managerial knowledge and skills will certainly help the youths to contribute their own little quota to sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria as a developing economy.

### **Conclusion**

Youth empowerment as a strategy for sustainable development is very important in the Nigerian developing economy in order to equip the youth population with relevant knowledge and skills that will certainly impact positively on sustainable development in the country. It becomes obvious that through the instrumentality of youth empowerment that people who acquire relevant knowledge and skills will participate very actively in addressing issues of common concern in order to stimulate sustainable development in Nigeria.

Additionally, it is obvious that re-orientation of the people and governments at local government, state and federal levels is very critical to ensure effective promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria. Apparently, without adequate youth empowerment leadership training and conscientisation of all segments of the people, especially the youths and the three tiers of government in Nigeria as well as other stakeholders it will not be possible to elicit the contributions of many youths through youth empowerment programmes in promoting sustainable development in the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussions on the strategies for youth empowerment in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be adequate awareness creation in Nigeria on youth empowerment as an effective strategy for promoting sustainable development in the country. The youths should be conscientised to understand that they have the right to means of livelihood by being gainfully engaged in meaningful activities that will promote sustainable development. This will certainly enable them to understand that it is counter productive to engage in destructive activities which do not in any way guarantee sustainable development in a developing country like Nigeria.
2. There is an urgent need for the government of Federal Republic of Nigeria to demonstrate strong political commitment to promote youth empowerment in the country where a good number of the young people are not gainfully engaged in meaningful economic activities. Indeed, the inadequate involvement of youths in meaningful economic ventures does not promote sustainable development in a developing economy such as that of Nigeria.

3. The youths should be empowered through appropriate training for empowerment at local community, local government, state and federal levels in Nigeria which will be sustainable to promote meaningful development. The youth empowerment through appropriate training of youths with the necessary economic incentives will reposition the Nigerian developing economy.

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