

I IMPROVING VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Developing countries like Nigeria needs to improve productivity throughout the economy if they are to compete successfully in this era of rapid economic and technological change. The level of competence of a country's skill worker and technicians is certainly important to the flexibility and productivity of its labour force and output. In this paper, attempts had been made to proffer strategies aimed at effective utilization of Nigerians human and material resources.

Introduction

A competent and flexible work force is one that can acquire new skills, as economics change is a necessary prerequisite for economic and social development. In a complicated and multi-lingual Society like Nigeria, society benefits in the form of higher productivity and the capacity to adapt to changing economic circumstances and opportunities (Foster; 1965).

In the modern wage sector, skilled workers and technician enhance the efficiency and quality of production and maintenance, facilitates the adaptation and use the new technologies and supervise and train workers with low skills. In the rural and urban informal sectors, the acquisition of skills can increase workers productivity in self-employment and in small enterprises. Alder (1983), Bishop (1989) and Demery (1987), collectively upheld these views.

Workers use a wide range of general and specific skills as the complexity and responsibilities of jobs increases. Specific manual skills become less important than higher order conceptual skills and theoretical knowledge. The content of vocational and technical curricula reflects this continuum. Initial training at the semi-skilled levels emphasizes specific manual skills.

Borus (1977) observed that in post secondary technical education, general theoretical and conceptual content receives more emphasis and occupy more than half the curriculum. The level of general education required for successful training also increases. Christopher (1988) maintained that with the level of skills being taught. More broadly, educated and trained workers are better prepared to learn new skills as production technologies changes and thus move up the occupational ladder and increase their earnings throughout a career.

This paper proposes strategies that can help government make the transition to a more dynamic and efficient use of public resources to ensure that skills needed to meet the challenges of economic change are developed and that equity objectives for the poor and socially disadvantaged are effectively addressed. Progress can be made by:

1. Strengthening primary and secondary education
2. Encouraging private sector training
3. Encouraging employer training
4. Improving effectiveness and efficiency in public training.
 - a/ choosing appropriate objectives
 - b/ improving institutional responsiveness to market forces
 - c/ using training resources efficiently, and
 - d/ diversifying the sources of finance etc.

1. Strengthening Primary and Secondary Education

Vocational training tends to expand the cognitive and theoretical knowledge required for productivity in skilled occupation, thus increasing the needs for workers to have a foundation of basic competencies to make retraining effective. The most cost effective use of public resource to improve the productivity and flexibility of the workforce is thus invested in general education at the primary and secondary levels. Another advantage of strengthening these sector, is that general education directly increases workers productivity and increases the access of the poor and socially disadvantaged groups to training and wage employment. Thus training in specific skills is more effective when it is built on a strong foundation of general education. Primary and post primary

education provides this foundation for many traditional craft and trades. Fallon (1986), Fields (1989) and Foster (1965).

2. Encouraging Privates Sector Training

Godfrey (1977) is of the opinion that private sector training can be expanded and improved by creating favourable policy environments. Others like Herschbach (1989) strongly believe that government can achieve this by reducing extortions in incentives and by establishing compensatory policies when incentives cannot be improved. Positive policies to encourage and develop employer training and to reduce the regulation of private training institutions can facilitate the responses of the private sector to a changing economy.

3. Encouraging Employer Training

Where employer training capacity is underdeveloped, government can assist by providing employers with information on external training opportunities as well as technical assistance for the training of trainers abroad. Dougherty (1987) when this done, it will definitely offset some specific market imperfections and re-imburement of the cost of training can stimulate firms demand to train their staff.

Bowland (1988) is of the opinion that workers in the informal sector and rural areas are increasingly well educated and this are better able to benefit from programs that seek to strengthen traditional apprenticeship, options now for the government include support for the provision of technical information, correspondence courses, textbooks and theory/practical classes.

4. Improving Effectiveness and Efficiency in Public Training

With strong support from international donor agencies, including the World Bank, developing countries government have built public training systems with skilled workers attending vocational and technical schools. In many cases, the record of public training was not satisfactory. Foster (1965) often because it is being expanded to address other objectives like reducing youth unemployment, creating a reserve of skilled workers, to attract new capital investment or diverting youth from higher education to trades and craft. This has led to too much training and low level of placement of trained workers in jobs that use their skills. Scarce public resources are wasted. Government must provide quality training for its citizen. It is a well-known fact that public training can be cost effective when it is able to respond to market force with good quality training.

a. Choosing Appropriate Objectives

Higher technical skills are important to growth in economically strategic sector or industries in which technological change is rapid. The long duration of such courses and the risk of losing workers with transferable skills make employers reluctant to provide this kind of training. The cost can also make it difficult for individuals to finance their own training. Hence, government support for private technical education in the form of scholarship must thus be needed.

Effectiveness requires that appropriate objectives be linked to demonstrated job availability or be integrated with effort to expand self-employment. Experience with developing countries like South Africa suggest that effectiveness is improved by decentralizing public subsidized training to local labour market through competitive contracting for service from employers and public training institutions. Fallon (1986) and Foster (1965).

b. Improving Institutional Responsiveness to Market forces.

The flexibility of public training systems needs to be substantially improved if they are to work efficiently to economic change. Flexibility is improved when training is separated from education. Institutions, which specialize in meeting the skills needs of different markets, should have the authority to adjust and should be accountable for the employment outcomes. There are the characteristics of most vocational training institute in Britain, which demonstrate that management processes and structures rather than ownership are the key development of success. Fields (1989).

c. Using Training Resources Efficiently

Improving the flexibility of training is currently under financed government schools will be costly. Ways must be found to deliver instructions at a lower cost. Lower cost per graduate can be achieved by reducing the duration of instructions and by improving the opportunity cost to trainees of being in training school instead of at work and they enable training institutions to achieve a higher rate of

use of equipments, facilities and expensive instructors. The same number of course hours provided on a part time basis over a three year period in a vocational school can be delivered intensively in one year or less. Kim (1987). Fallon (1986) believed that training can be reduced through occupational analysis to distinguish the skills needed for entry into a given occupation from those best learned on the job.

d. Diversifying Sources of Finance

Government budgetary financing has often been inadequate. The 1990 World Bank policy paper on primary education stressed the need to increase public funding in many countries for primary education. The case for government support for vocational education and training is very strong. Nonetheless the external social benefits of training " ill often testify government financing of at least such central activities as policy, planning and quality control, as well as for skills strategic to growth strategies.

Because of budgetary constrains and in the interest of efficiency, the employers and workers who receive its benefits should increasingly shoulder the cost of training. Encouraging enterprises and private institutions to provide training would help more in this direction. Additional option is payroll levies, which are levied on employer payrolls. It is a stable and effective way to finance training especially for national training authorities and to support technical assistance and financing programs to develop employer training.

e. Training as Complement to equity Strategies

Most of the poor in developing countries are found in rural areas and in the urban informal sector. Their principal asset is their labour, improving their productivity and earnings in the main highway out of poverty. Hallak (1981). Hallak (1981) further stressed that improved access for women to higher productivity and earnings require reduction in discrimination in employment and careful targeted training. Although government do try to provide training interventions for the informal sectors, Leven (1987) is of the opinion that most skills are developed through other mechanisms. Primary and post-primary education provides a initially important base of general skills, but traditional apprenticeship provides most of the specific technical and vocation training needed in the informal sector in many developing countries.

f. Attacking Discrimination in Employment.

Discrimination in employment remains a problem for women in some developing countries like Nigeria, Squire (1981). These does not only deny equitable access to earnings, but prevents a society from harnessing the talents of much of the labour force. More pervasive are the customary barriers to the employment of women in some given occupations because of an employers mistaken belief that these individual cannot perform productivity or will not be stable member of the work force.

Deeply held social attitudes and values changes slowly, but progress can be made through programs that actively involves employers in training and placing such workers appropriately. The success, of (his may or may not help the individual worker, but will establish a legacy for the future generation.

utilization of facilities and equipments. Shorter, more intensive training period should be considered because they reduce the

Recommendations

1. The federal government should strengthens the national training authorities by financing programs of staff development as well as the development of labour market and training monitoring and information systems.
2. Establishing a training fund as a source of targeted grant and loan assistance to employers, private and public training agencies to increase flexibility in responding to periodic training needs.

3. Consolidating small and underused training facilities, financing cost of conversion and staff retraining and redeployment, rehabilitating smaller systems and supporting government efforts to turn our excess institutions to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) or the private training sector.
4. Promoting quasi-private sector management practice combining autonomy and accountability for managing public training institutions.
5. Giving priority to center-based training modes for training skilled workers and supporting % curriculum reforms that reduce training duration and increase facilities use.
6. Seeking government approval to pay salaries adequate to attract and retain technically qualified instructors and to provide adequate financing for recurrent cost.

Conclusion

The training of vital skills in technical and vocational institutions requires concerted efforts of not only the government, but also the individual. This paper proposes ways that can help the government make the transition to a more dynamic and efficient use of the few resources to ensure that the skills needed to meet the challenges of economic change are developed and that equity objectives for the poor and the social disadvantages are effectively addressed.

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