

**THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF
YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The success of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in any country can be considered a key indicator of the country's advancement in technology. For a country to evolve into a technologically advanced one, TVET must have played an active and vital role. With a growing population like Nigeria, youth placement in education and/or work is very critical. Studies have revealed that youth participation in education and skills training in Nigeria is inadequate, hence their vulnerability in terms of employment. In view of these situations the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector which has the potential to generate job opportunities for the youth needs to be promoted. The regulatory body in the TVET has to be strengthened and given the necessary independence to provide an enabling environment for private participation in the sector to develop and create the much needed jobs for the youth. In view of the above, this paper discusses consequence of youth unemployment, state of the youth unemployment, TVET and employment prospects for the youth, employment problems of the youth and TVET sector as job creation opportunity for the youth

Keywords: Youth, Unemployment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training

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INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an education and training to "acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation, trade or group of occupations or trades" (UNESCO 2001). This conceptual definition of TVET cuts across education levels (post- primary, secondary, and even tertiary) and sectors (formal or school-based, non-formal or enterprise based and informal or tradition apprenticeship). The World Bank (2005), International Labour Organization (ILO) (2002), United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002), and other organizations have recently shown drive towards actively recognizing a new role of TVET. However, UNESCO who is at the vanguard of TVET promotion had the following objectives established at the Seoul Congress (UNESCO in Abdullahi 2001):

- To provide TVET for all;
- To orient TVET for sustainable development;
- To strengthen TVET as an integral component of lifelong learning

Youths represent the future and hope of every country, today's youth are tomorrow's workers, entrepreneurs, parents, active citizens and leaders. In light of these great functions that youth is liable to play; it can only be achieved if they are empowered through active and powerful approaches. As economic and technological change gathers pace, youth people everywhere need to develop their knowledge and skills, on a continuous basis, so that they can live and work meaningfully in the knowledge society especially in the era of the current global economic crisis (Linda 2009). As noted earlier, Vocational and Technical Education and Training contribute to an individual's personal development, increase his/her productivity and incomes at work, and facilitate everybody's participation in economic and social life. In addition, TVET can also help individuals to escape poverty by providing them with the skills and knowledge to raise their output and generate income. Investing in TVET will be therefore an investment in the future. This is because knowledge and skills are the engine of economic growth and social development.

According to UNESCO and ILO (2002) that the effort to provide Vocational and Technical Education and training for all youth and adults will underpin the economic and social

development of countries by ensuring the capacity of people to learn and provide the foundation for their employability and access to decent work. This is also one of the key policy challenges in the ILO's Global Employment Agenda; Education (2002). UNESCO and ILO (2002) further reported that in a time of continuous economic, social and technological change, skills and knowledge become quickly out-of-date. As such youth who have not been able to benefit from formal education and training must be given opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge that will give them a second chance in life and at work.

CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The youth population is increasing explosively particularly in developing countries as a result of rapid urbanization (Hopenhayn 2002). This increases the number of social and economic problems in a society. For instance the impacts of job and training availability, and the physical, social and cultural quality of urban environment on youth are enormous, and affect their health, lifestyles, and well-being (Gleeson and Sipe 2006). Besides this, globalization and technological developments are affecting youth in urban areas in all parts of the world, both positively and negatively (Robertson 1995).

Unemployment and lack of economic prospects of the youth are pushing many of them into criminal acts, excessive alcohol use, substance addiction, and also in many cases resulting in processes of social or political violence (Fernandez-Maldonado 2004; United Nations 2004). Long-term unemployment leads young people in a process of marginalization and social exclusion (United Nations 2004). Unemployment in Nigeria has caused a lot of hardship to the youth, commenting on this effect Uyanga (1990) in Yalams & Bangalu (2005) lamented that unemployment had brought untold hardship to its many victims to the extent that youth were reported to have either contemplated taking their own lives or actually succeeded in committing suicide. The sustained high rates of long-term youth unemployment have a number of negative effects on societies mentioned as follows (Tan & Scott 2006 & Hopenhayn 2002):-

- 1 It results in countries failing to take advantage of the human resources to increase their productive potential, at a time of transition to a globalized world that inexorably demands such leaps in productive capacity.

- 2 Second, it reinforces the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- 3 Third, owing to the discrepancy between more education and exposure to the mass media and fewer employment opportunities, it may encourage the spread of disruptive behaviors, recourse to illegal alternatives for generating income and the loss of basic societal values, all of which erode public safety and social capital.
- 4 Fourth, it may trigger violent and intractable political conflicts. And lastly, it may exacerbate intergenerational conflicts when young people perceive a lack of opportunity and meritocracy in a system that favors adults who have less formal education and training but more wealth, power and job stability

STATE OF THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

According to a recent report by the International Labor Organization, 85% of the world's youth live in developing economies and the proportion is not likely to change much in the near future given the demographic trends in these economies (ILO, 2004). Unfortunately the youth in these countries is relatively deprived in terms of employment. They are 3.8 times more likely to be unemployed than adults, as compared with 2.3 times in industrialized economies. The report also says that labor force participation rates for young people decreased in the world as a whole by almost four (4) percentage points over the last decade, partly as a result of young people staying in education but because many young become so frustrated with the lack of employment opportunities that they simply drop out of the labor force. The report further claimed that young people represent some 130 million (24%) of the world's 550 million working poor who work but are unable to lift themselves and their families above the equivalent of US\$ 1 per day poverty line. These young people struggle to survive, often performing work under unsatisfactory conditions in the informal economy.

The potential for any country is its youth which if developed could increase the GDP of the country Linda (2009). Achieving this assertion however is determined by the kind of investment that goes into the development of the human and social capital of the nation. The greatest challenge Nigeria might likely to face if the proportion of unemployed youth continues to grow and school enrollment and job creation do not increase significantly and simultaneously it could

create problems for parents and the nation since the idle youthful energies and minds could be channeled into crime and political agitation. Researchers such as alarms & Bangalu (2005) lamented that with the increase in level of unemployed youth and if the situation continues to be as it is from 2005 – 2015, it could derail the development process of the country. This is based on the fact that on one hand a youthful population could become a social burden with huge expenditure budgets in areas such as education, training, health and other social services at both the household and national levels. On the other hand, Sherman, (2006) & Uyanga (1990) reported that if the potentials of the youth are properly harnessed it could provide a rich resource pool from which the needed human capital for rapid socioeconomic development could be harnessed. However failure to do this, will translate into a highly underutilized asset in subsequent years. The lack of economic empowerment and active engagement in social development, generally increases the vulnerability of the youth to social vices such as armed robbery, drug trafficking, prostitution and teenage pregnancy.

The government has made several attempts to address the problem of inadequate decent job opportunities for the youth in the country. A panel of eminent persons, set up by the UN Secretary General as part of a Youth Employment Network Initiative, has specifically recommended a focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a means of creating more jobs for young people (United Nation, 2004). In this regard, provision of program schemes across all TVET levels throughout the nation is up highly significant, especially in the era of this global economic recession

The youth faces discrimination in the open labor market. Employers will always go in for experienced and skilled people and these are often people who have worked on the job for a number of years. There is therefore a high probability of employing adults who have some working experience than the youth. In such cases, the youth are forced to enter the temporary work where evidence shows that "temporary work is disproportionately filled by younger, less educated workers" (OECD, 2002 cited in ILO, 2004).

Due to the vulnerability of the youth in the labor market as many remained unemployed. The challenge of addressing this undesirable youth unemployment is to create descent job opportunities for them or to engage them in some form of skills training to improve their chances of employment.

TVET AND EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS OF THE YOUTH

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) refers to education and training that prepares persons for gainful employment (Finch and Crunkilton 1999). In other words, TVET refers to deliberate interventions to bring about learning which would make people more productive (or simply adequately productive) in designated areas of economic activity (e.g., economic sectors, occupations, specific work tasks). TVET has the potential to enhance human capabilities and enlarge peoples' choices. The benefits of TVET need to be more equitably distributed between men and women, and between rural and urban areas

Evidence from the global trends of youth unemployment; one may likely ask; does technical and vocational education (TVET) in a school setting payoff in facilitating the transition to work? The answer from rigorous evaluations controlling for selection bias is that it can, under the right conditions (Adams 2007 & Uyanga 1990). Building strong links between schools and employers is important to realizing this payoff. TVET alone, however, is likely to solve the social problems of restructuring gender-biased patterns of employment or meeting all the needs of disadvantaged youth. Strategies that push vocational content earlier in the curriculum and vocationalize the curriculum with "lite" offerings of TVE amidst general education do not show evidence of connecting youth with jobs or improving their earnings prospects. However, they may lead to higher educational attainment that has to be valued for its own benefits apart from those of immediate employment.

Good quality TVE that is closely linked with strong employment growth and aligned with the skills in demand in labor markets can pay off for youth (Finch and Crunkilton 1999). The payoff is more assured for obtaining employment than for higher pay, but pursuit of advanced vocational skills can lead to both. Building TVE on a strong foundation of general education by pushing vocational content later in the secondary and post-secondary curriculum shows evidence of higher benefits in relation to the costs. Ending labor market discrimination will be important to assuring equal benefits to young men and women.

TVET SECTOR AS JOB CREATION OPPORTUNITY FOR THE YOUTH

The direct beneficiary of any skill development programs is the youth. They should be trained to acquire skills and competencies needed to lay a foundation for their future. Adams (2007) & Nkoyo (2008) highlighted that Technical and Vocational Education at any level is designed to help the learner acquire and develop skills knowledge and attributes necessary for effective employment or succession in specific occupations. Vocational and technical education is sub-field of total education, which contributes to national developments.

Braimah and Godfred. (2004) observed that TVET accounts for over 60% of total education contribution to the nation economic growth, and that Technical and Vocational education plays a critical role in training of skilled youth for national development. The position became absolutely clear in the wake of the Nigeria enterprises promotion Decree in 1972 when the problem of adequate manpower to replace foreigner became an issue. Technical and Vocational education created awareness among Nigerians for the need for skill acquisition in vocational occupation. For example, primary school leavers should learn a trade which does not require much reading, such as shoe making /mending, Secondary school dropouts should learn mechanical works, woodwork, Auto mechanic and so many others. While unskilled university graduates should undergo training on computer and secretarial studies and so on. In this regard, if one is not trained to acquire saleable skill at his youthful age, he may enter into various undesirable activities such as heavy drinking and smoking. And such saleable skills are gotten from vocational and technical education. These trainings can also prepare individuals to be employers of labor, with these skills any beneficiary can function effectively in the community for economic development.

The purpose of TVET as earlier stated as the provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development; the provision of training to impart the necessary skills leading to production of craftsmen, technicians, technologies, engineers and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self reliant (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). With TVET, advancement is quick and faster results with greater productivity which is achieved. With this education, the entire country will ultimately be having much benefit far better position to and sustain our environment. The overall benefit of technical and vocational education is that life of a greater number of people especially in the less developed countries particularly Nigeria would be enhanced in term of youth economic development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The global youth unemployment trends revealed that the proportion of the youth in the total population of the country was on the increase. In 2000 the size of the youth was 3.8 million and it is expected to increase to 5.5 million by 2015. The implication of this trend is that plans must be made to engage this 5.5million in school, skills training or in gainful employment if the nation is to tune the size of the youth population into an asset.

There are prospects for the technical and vocational education sector to be used to reduce the vulnerability of the youth due to its multifaceted roles in employment creation, job placement, skills training and enhancement among others. These prospects however depend on the deployment of TVET as well as the level of its application in all sectors of the economy. Sustainable TVET policy and enabling environment for smooth implementation of the sector is necessary. This could boost youth employment significantly and contribute greatly towards the overall growth and development of the economy which will ultimately lead to a sustainable management of the momentum of the youth.

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