**SUSTAINABLE EMPOWERMENT: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH IN NIGERIA.**

Skills Development and training is the process of acquiring, improving, and enhancing a diverse set of skills and competencies. It involves the deliberate and continuous effort to build knowledge, expertise, and capabilities in specific areas to meet the demands of one's work or to pursue personal and professional growth. Earning a respectable livelihood is crucial for individual’s household to make a living. It is also important to possess necessary skills that make one employable. For a large number of people, the livelihood skill training program does this purpose. It helps people in learning the appropriate skill and then finding a source of livelihood based on that.

One of the major Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which Nigeria aimed to achieve in 2015 was the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger with the target of encouraging the proportion of people who earn less than a dollar a day to engage in skills acquisition. Skills acquisition is recognized as a vital tool for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and creating opportunities for job and great wealth, contributing ultimately to the growth of the economy in the country. (Isaac, 2011). Gumbari, a member of the House of Representatives laid emphasis on the pivotal role of skills acquisition, being the instrument in combating hunger and poverty and even reducing crime rates in the society through effective engagement of youths.

Nigeria is rapidly expanding her roads network system to improve the movement of goods and services. This requires not only expert and dedicated workers, but skilled technicians that will be able to operate and service the equipment used in road construction. With the establishment of modern industries nationwide, there is a growing demand for skilled and well-trained workers to ensure the quality of goods manufactured in Nigeria matches those produced in developed and developing countries.

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**

The major problem confronting Nigeria Youths today is joblessness. Youth unemployment is a prominent developmental hurdle confronting Nigerian authorities and development stakeholders. These youths constitute greater fraction of Nigeria’s economically active population. According to Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), the statistics from federal bureau of statistics showed that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million representing 60 percent of the total population of the country. Also, 64 million of them are unemployed, while 1.6 million are underemployed. This signifies a considerable waste of energy that would have been used to generate revenues and improve the economy of the country. Youths, like other classes of the population have needs to meet (Nnabuife, 2009), but since 1980’s the important roles of the youths have continued to suffer some set back as they can hardly engage themselves in meaningful work (Davies, 2006). The repercussion of this situation manifest in frustration, leading to various vices that contribute to insecurity in the country.

The country suffers jobless growth, expanding population and unemployable youths. Despite decades of relatively consistent economic expansion, Nigeria has struggled to generate sufficient employment opportunities to accommodate its substantial and expanding youth demographic. The persistent high levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth, have been associated with various conflicts and agitation experienced in some regions of the country.

Between 2009 and 2011, the Federal Government deployed the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) to tackle the challenge of youth employment in the country achieving moderate success. The primary objective was to create a conduicive environment for youth unemployment. As the relevance of the Action Plan diminished in the face of changing realities, other policies, such as the National Employment Policy (2017) and the National Youth Policy (2019), replaced it. However, none of these policies has succeeded in addressing the problem in a sustainable manner that would lead to a significant decrease in the youth unemployment rate. According to the National Bureau of Statistics data, from 2014 to early 2020, the youth employment rate was at an average of 25.87 percent. However, with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, by the second quarter of 2020, unemployment rates spiked among all demographics. For the youth, the unemployment rate increased from 40.8% in April-June 2020 to 53.4% in October-December 2020.

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The origin of Women’s empowerment can be traced back to 1970‟s and the beginning of the international women movement. Women’s organizations worldwide established credit and saving components as a way of both enabling women to increase their incomes, and to unite to address wider gender issues. The micro-credit summit programme aims not only to reach women but also to empower them.

Women empowerment is not a modern concept. Women all over the world including countries in the south have been challenging many gender inequalities since the beginning of history. These struggles have not always received support from many men who have not been sufficiently outraged by injustices against women.

According to the United Nations Millennium Campaign to reduce world poverty by the year 2015, women work two-third of the worlds working hours. The overwhelming majority of the labour that sustain life-growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water is done by women, and universally this work is accorded low status and with little or no pay. The ceaseless cycle of labour rarely shows up in economic analysis of a society’s product and value. Women earn only 10 percent of the world income. In instances where women are employed, they are often confined to a limited range of jobs considered suitable for women, typically accompanied by low pay and low-status positions.

The primary challenge faced by women in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, is depriving them of their right to fully participate in religious, economic, political, and social activities, like their male counterparts. This restriction impedes their capacity to engage fully in the development of projects within their respective local governments.

Another major source of problem is the men controlling the affairs of their families, prevents or sanctions their wives from participating or partaking in some activities of women from the local government.

There is a necessity for women to attain independent financial means, enhancing their ability to contribute effectively both at home and in society.

**SCOPE OF THE PROJECT**

This project, Sustainable Empowerment: Skills Development and Training for Women and Youth is targeted towards Bwari Area Council which is a local Government Area and one of the six area councils in Federal Capital Territory in the North Central Nigeria. The aim is to promote skills acquisition in the rural areas. The focus on sustainability implies a long-term approach, ensuring that the acquired skills have lasting benefits for individuals and the community, fostering resilience and empowerment in rural settings. There is considerable evidence for the marginalisation of rural populations and the incidence of poverty within rural areas. Rural people in general are the most disadvantaged in terms of access to services, including education and training, and are the worst served by infrastructure of various kinds. Rural people are most likely in many settings to be amongst those who are not being reached in the drive towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, such problems are typically starker for rural women and girls, given their multiple burdens. Hence the scope of this study.

**OUTCOME OF THE PROJECT**

This project aims to promote the well-being of the underprivileged and poor population by providing employment and business opportunities, health care, and other forms of support. In addition, these programs aim to strengthen community capacity to manage poverty conditions. Below are some positive outcomes this project promises to bring:

1. **Gender Inclusion/Equality**: This can also be achieved when women are being provided with skills and training opportunities thereby putting them at par with their male counterparts, which can promote equal gender participation.
2. **Improving existing skillsets:** The main goal of skills development and training projects is to empower individuals, especially the women and youth, with necessary skills needed to thrive in the society. This may include improved knowledge, and capabilities in a particular field or industry.
3. **Sustainability**: A well-established training programs to ensure that the skills acquired by the participants remains beneficial to them overtime.
4. **Community Development**: The skills acquired by the participants can also place them in positions that will enable them to contribute to their communities.

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