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**YOUTH RESTIVENESS AND EMPOWERMENT,**

**IMPLICATION FOR A DEVELOPMENT ECONOMY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Youth empowerment is pivotal to economic growth and national development. Developing countries like Nigerian that desires to develop coupled with cooperation of her citizens commit a sizeable proportion of resources to empowering the citizens most especially the youth if developmental objectives must be attained. This paper titled Youth Empowerment: A key to Economic Growth and National Development examines the conceptual meaning of Empowerment, the Nigerian environment, empowerment programmes and challenges of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. The paper concluded that if Nigeria must join the league of developed nations by 2020 as projected by the world bank in recent years, it must pursue youth empowerment programmes aggressively, ensure constant power supply and human capital development (skills acquisition) while the disempowered Nigeria should take responsibility for their own gains by becoming managers of their own development. it was recommended that government should pursue policies and programmes that will encouraged the growth and development of SMEs , reposition the power sector so as to stop erratic power failure and create acquisition centers where youth can acquire skills and lastly government should pursue policies that will make access to loans easy by the youth.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Between the 1950’s and early 1960’s, economic theory of development was based on having the right quality and mixture of saving, investment and foreign aid in other to proceed along an economic growth part that historically had been followed by the most developed economics. Development was seen as synonymous with economic growth. But in the 1970’s two competing economic schools of thought with the content of dependence theories replaced the linear stages of growth model. The first school of thought stressed the internal process of structural change that a “typical” developing country must undergo if it to succeed in generating and sustaining a process of rapid economic growth. The second school of thought stressed the external and internal institutional and political constraints on economic development. It emphasized the need to put in place major and new policies to eradicate poverty to provide more diversified employment opportunities and to reduce income inequalities (Egbon 2009).

Empowerment is at the centre of this aforementioned paradigm shift and attempt to re conceptualized and development strategies aimed at poverty alleviation. Therefore according to UNDP (1993) “The 1990’s paradigm shift in development thinking gave rise to a frame work that has an in-built understanding that development must be woven around people not people around development and it should power individual rather than disempowered than. This paper therefore attempts to examine the conceptual meaning of empowerment linked to the Nigeria economic environment empowerment programmes, and challenges of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria.

**Youth restiveness in Nigeria**

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has also been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like hostage-taking of prominent citizens and expatriate oil workers, as well as oil bunkering, arms insurgence, cultism, etc especially in the Niger Delta region. Nevertheless, youth restiveness is not a recent phenomenon. Various forms of youth restiveness that are economically, politically, or religiously motivated have existed for a long time. Elegbeleye (2005) vividly captures the landmark cases of youth restiveness in Nigeria. Young people all over the world are a vital and important segment of the society in which they live. A disciplined, focused, and law-abiding youth can create a bright future for any nation. Conversely, a lawless, indulgent, and violent youth is a great threat to a nation's peace and security.

**Definition of Youth**

The National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youth as people aged 18-35. They constitute about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. The total population of youth between 10 and 24 in Nigeria was 45.4 million in 2006, which is 34 percent of the total population. Elegbeleye (2005) defined youth restiveness as “a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths.” It is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities.

Information is new ideas or knowledge extracted from the environment for human use with the aim of modifying behavior, effecting changes, and enhancing efficiency in all human endeavors (Ajegbomogun, 2008). Information helps create enlightened and responsible citizens. The library is the gateway to information. It is a place where information is acquired, processed, repackaged, preserved and disseminated.

**Relevance of Youth**

Youth occupy a prominent place in any society. Apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged (Onyekpe, 2007). Besides numerical superiority, youth have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youth Development Policy (2001, p.1) asserts that: Youth are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labor power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation founds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.

The statement above acknowledges the role of the youth in the peace and security of a nation. As the most active segment of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2006). Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youth. Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place. The National Youth Policy (2001) affirms that the extent of the youth's “responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country.

**Causes of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria**

A number of studies have identified factors responsible for youth restiveness. Elegbeleye (2005) identifies three major factors: the peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation.

Another study carried out in Niger Delta region by Ofem and Ajayi (2008) identified lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of government officials, inadequate training programmes, unemployment, inadequate recreational facilities, lack of quality education, and so on, as the reasons for incessant youth restiveness. This implies that a catalogue of closely-related factors are responsible for youth restiveness.

**Bad Governance**

Good governance is required for the growth and development of any nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria bad governance is more common than good, resulting in disjointed development. The World Bank (1992) identifies the main characteristics of bad governance to includes failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources, inability to establish a predictable frame work for law and government behavior in a manner conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of laws and rules, excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirement and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking ,priorities that are inconsistent with development, there by resulting in misallocation of national resources; and exceedingly narrow base for, or non-transparent, decision making.

These and more are the features of most administration in Nigeria. For instance, Onyekpe (2007)observes that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the needs of the youth, and, worse still, the meager allocation are often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youth are restive and agitated when they perceive that resources meant for them are being wasted by those in authority.

**Unemployment**

Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among the youth in all developing countries. Experts believe that the number of jobless youth is twice as high as official estimate. Ozohu-Suleiman (2006) notes Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment. Zakaria (2006) believes that “the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocateurs”. These include aggrieved politicians, religious demagogues, and greedy multinationals that employ these youths to achieve their selfish

ambitions. Zakaria (2006) strongly believes that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences.

**Poverty**

Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes the poor. More than 70percent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty, living below the poverty line, and one- third survive on less than US $1 dollar a day (Zakaria, 2006). This figure includes an army of youth in urban centers in Nigeria who struggle to eke out a living by hawking chewing sticks, bottled water, handkerchiefs, belts, etc. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above

the poverty line. Disillusioned, frustrated, and dejected, they seek an opportunity to express their anger against the state. Aworawo (2000) and Zakaria (2006) agreed that there is a link among poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria.

**Inadequate Educational Opportunities and Resources**

Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The

knowledge and skill that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. Between 2000 and 2004, about 30 percent of Nigerian youth between 10 and 24 were not enrolled in secondary school (Population Reference Bureau, 2006). Perhaps the prohibitive cost of acquiring education is responsible. The aftereffect of this situation is that thousands of young people roam the streets in cities in Nigeria. Those who manage to complete secondary school have no opportunities for tertiary education. Having being denied the chance to reach their potential, they are disorientated and readily available for antisocial actions (Onyekpe, 2007).Worse still, some who struggle to enroll in various educational institutions drop out due to lack of basic learning facilities. This situation is attributable to the dwindling resources of government at both federal and state levels as a result of an economic meltdown.

**Lack of Basic Infrastructure**

Most rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria have no access to potable water, healthfacilities, electricity, communication facilities, industries and commercial facilities, etc. Behind socialunrest and youth restiveness in the country is the agitation for equitable distribution of resources.

**Inadequate Communication and Information flow**

Communication creates room for sharing information. It helps people express their thoughts andfeelings, clarify problems, and consider alternative ways of coping or adapting to their situation. Suchsharing promotes social cohesion.

People must have access to communication facilities, to communicate with the people making thedecisions that affect them. Sadly, rarely do people in Nigeria participate in decision-making processes onissues that affect their lives. Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005), in their study of Niger Delta, revealed thatinadequate communication and information flow is one factor responsible for youth restiveness in thearea.

**Role of Information in Curbing Youth Restiveness**

Information is a critical resource for individual and collective emancipation and advancement. Sokari (2006) agrees that information is necessary for people to be liberated from the shackles of ignorance, misconceptions, economic stagnation, social unrest, and political instability. Social cohesion cannot be achieved without timely, accurate, and relevant information. Information has been likened to a stimulus that can condition a person to a certain behavior (Curras, 1987). According to Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2006) information is “structured data that causes a human mind to change its opinion about the current state of real world and contribute to a reduction in the uncertainty of the state of the system”. Information is a change agent, a reinforcer of ideas and opinions. It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure that youth have access to information that will guide their actions. Clearly, most Nigerian youth who participate in protests across the country are uninformed. Information plays a vital role in wealth generation. Information is the critical economic resources in today's world (Sabaratnam, 1997). Youth must be economically empowered through access to business and economic information. They need information on employment opportunities in all nations and communities. Access to entrepreneurial information will make youth inaccessible to those who want to recruit them for anti-social actions. Nigerian youth as leaders of the future need access to a wide range of information which will help reposition them to take their rightful place in the comity of nations. Such information, according to Onyekpe (2007), should be geared towards creating the awareness that the future belongs to them and that it must not be destroyed by them sensitizing them to the fact that the future and its nature depend on the decisions and choices they make, creating in them a sense of history especially of the noble and heroic contributions of the youth in the past to the development of Nigeria, in comparison with the ignoble role of many youth today sensitizing them to embrace the rule of law and democratic ideals , liberating them psychologically and mentally from the control of self-seeking business and political elites. encouraging them to raise issues relating to unresolved problems of nation building and the problem of neglect of the youth in the development process at every form, mobilizing them against abuse of the system through sanctions and sensitizing them to seek greater employment and educational opportunities as a means of redirecting their energy and ideas from anti-social activities to creative efforts.

**EMPOWERMENT**

**Conceptual Classifications and Principles**

Attempts are made (here) to trace the link between the Nigerian economic environment and the youth activity on the one land and empowerment on the other.  
Empowerment: The new Webster’s dictionary says to “empower” implies ‘to give power to’ or ‘to enable’ someone. Also in the view of the BBC dictionary ‘when someone is empowered to do something or he or she has the authority or power to do it. Empowerment is linked to concept of self help, participation, networking and equity within the context of community development. Whereas it’s respectability within the vocabulary of development is not in doubt, its content is yet to acquire social agreement (Egbon, 2009).Within an organization, empowerment is viewed as critical in the process of change. This is because rather than forcing or pushing people to change, empowerment provides a way of attracting them to change since they own the change process. People are empowered the moment they feel an enhancement of their abilities to control, influence or cope with their social economic roles (Conger and Kamugo, 1988).

The motivational dimension of empowerment involves various factors:  
• People will not be empowered if they do not want to be. They have to believe in the merits and prospects of empowerment.

• Empowerment is about creating the condition conducive to enhancing motivation of performs. This implies developing the persons sense of self determination and enhancing his (her) belief in self efficacy.

Empowerment entails providing the individual with the ability to perform, in terms of having the necessary skills and knowledge and giving a fair opportunity to perform (Mogolori (1998); Sprieritzer, (2005). Within the context of the society, the fundamental goal of empowerment is to help individual to improve the quality of their own lives and share equitably in the benefits if economic growth.

Empowerment is about helping people realize their creative and productive energies to achieve sustainable growth and continuous improvements in their living standards. It involves engraining the relevant stakeholders in a given process by applying principles of inclusiveness, transparency and accountability.

Generally, there are two categories of power holders in any socioeconomic system:  
• The power of wealth or property

• The power of knowledge (the intellectuals)

Particularly in developing countries, the elite appropriate wealth for themselves by monopolizing power of the political level and through corruption at the administrative level. There is therefore, the need for empower people at the grassroots so as to create enabling conditions for a more equitable distribution of wealth and productive assets among citizens.

The holder of the power of knowledge are of the view that since both the market and the state have failed to provide for the poor and powerless, there is the need for new ideas and new leadership from the civil society to find a third alternative to capitalism and socialism. It is therefore clear from the aforementioned two views that power is to be given by those who have it to those who do not. Given that the powerful are not likely to be willing to give up power easily, the powerless most endeavor to empower themselves, rather than wait for the powerful to empower them.

Economic empowerment of citizen implies that disempowered people take responsibility for their own material gains on an on-going basis and become managers of their own development. Government cannot (and should not) impose empowerment from above (Egbon, 2009). Government should can (and should) ensure equal access to economic opportunities. It is however up to each citizen to take advantage of them or ignore them. The principle objectives of citizen economic empowerment should be expansion of income and employment, generating activities for as many people as possible, without sacrificing efficiency.

Therefore, economic empowerment strategies should generally include:  
• Financial intervention; in order to assist local business activities.  
• Enterprise development for citizens (increased access to skills, business and management training and improved production technologies).

• Marketing strategies for locally produced goods and services  
• Bargaining strategies (for higher wages, better working conditions etc) for citizen employers  
• Training and education consistent with skill requirements in the economy (Mogdori 1988; Conger and Kamugo, 1988; Enterprises 1999).

Nigeria going by the aspiration and huge investment of successive governments should by now moved forwards a stage of progress developmentally. The persistence of the indices of underdevelopment in the country has cost a big question mark on the country’s planning and execution techniques usually employed by planner. Nigeria is adjusted as the “giant of Africa” and it is abundantly blessing with natural and human resources, but in the first four decades of its independence, the potentials remained largely untapped and even mismanaged (Ckukwuemeka, 2010). With a population estimated at about 140 million, Nigeria is the largest country in Africa and one-sixth of the black population in the world. It is the 8th largest deposit of natural gas in the world (Soludo, 2006). Currently, barely 40% of its arable land is under cultivation. With over 100 tertiary institution producing more than 2000,000 graduate per annum (Soludo, 2006). Startling as it may be about two-thirds of Nigerian people are poor, yet Nigeria is a country with vast potential wealth. Although revenues from crude oil have been increasing over the past decades the people of Nigeria have been falling deeper into poverty. In 1980 an estimated 27% of Nigerians lived in poverty (Chukwumeka, 2010).

By 1999, about 70% of the population had income of less than $1 a day- and the figure has risen since then (NEEDS, 2005). Poverty levels vary across the country, with the highest proportion of people in the northwest and the lowest in the southeast. A classical example of underscore the scope of misfortune is to compare Nigeria with Indonesia and even Malaysia. By 1972, before Nigeria and Indonesia had the first oil boom contents (Soludo, 2006), both countries were comparable in almost all shares; agrarian societies, multi-ethnic and religious societies, with comparable size of GDP e.t.c.  
Both experience oil boom in 1973 and thereafter, both took differences policy choices. The outcomes of the differences in policy regimes are such that today, while manufactures as a percentages of total exports is about 40% in Indonesia, it is less than 1% in Nigerian where she was in the 1970 it would be recalled even Malaysia that has overtake Nigerian got her first palm seedling from Nigerian in the early 1960s, when oil palm produce was already a major export of Nigeria. In the 1990s, Malaysia export of palm produce earned it more than Nigeria earned from oil export (Suludo, 2006).  
Poverty in Nigeria has many causes, all of which reinforce one another. One source of poverty is the lack of basic services. Such as clean water, education, and health care. Another is lack of asserts, such as land, tools credit and supportive network of friends and family. A third is lack of employment income, including food, shelter, clothing and empowerment above all lack of power. Some of these factors directly affect poverty while others contribute indirectly by producing inequality by stiffing political power of certain sector of the population (Chukwuemeka 2008).

**Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria**

Beginning with the Harare declaration on the plan of action for youth empowerment in 1995 through the world youth ministers meeting in Portugal in 1998 to the youth ministers meeting in Solomon Island in 2000 (Suleiman 2006). The relevance of youth in contemporary development has received increased recognition in official circles. In Nigeria for example, the national youth development policy of 2001 and its accompanying implementation strategy are palpable testimonies to the renewed interest in the youth and development process.

The democratization process which started since 1991 to date has expanded the political space and provided ample opportunity for actors within the civil society to make their impact in the political process. The youth has been acknowledged as a formidable social force in this process, thus;…. youth are the most active segment of any society Imbued with relentless energy vigor and drive, the youth are the major catalyst for development in any given society. As future leaders and key determiners of the peace and stability of society, youth are indeed the greatest assets of any nation (Abdullai 2003).  
This explains why the Nigerian government decided to embarked on such rural development initiatives programmes aimed at empowering the youth in the country our the years.

Apart from previous government failed efforts which includes operation feed the nation (OFN), Green revolution (GR) structural adjustment programme (SAP), directorate of food road and rural infrastructure (DFRRI), national directorate of empowerment (NED) etc it has also come up with renews efforts in empowering the youth through poverty alleviation programme (PAP). The Obasanjo government in 2004 came up with a comprehensive home-grown poverty reduction strategy (NEEDS).  
The NEEDS as conceptualized is a medium term strategy (2003-2007), which derives from the country’s long-term goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation employment generation and value re-orientation. Needs is a national coordinated framework of action in collaboration with the state and local governments and other stakeholder, NEEDS is aimed at all aspects of the peoples socio-economic life with the aim of reducing poverty are inequality. Despite her great natural wealth, Nigeria is still considered poor and social development in limited. Under the NEEDS, reforms are ongoing in the key sectors of the economy with objectives of poverty reduction through various anti-poverty programmes and policies.

**The implication of empowerment programme in a developing economy**

* It increases the economy GDP
* It eradicates poverty
* It makes individual self-reliance
* It reduces social vices in the economy such as stealing, cultism. e.t.c
* It makes youth responsible
* It increases higher standard of living

**CONCLUSION**Nigeria as one of the three countries in the world identified by the World Bank to join the league of developed nations by 2020, hence we must harness all available resource most especially it human capital through its empowerment programmes to create more opportunity for the youth and reduce youth restiveness thereby making the responsible and developing the nation at large.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**  
The following are the recommendations

* The government should pursue policies and programmes that encouraged the growth and development of SMEs.
* The power sector should be reposition so as to stop or minimize erratic power feature.
* The downsizing and retrenchment policies of government is anti-poverty reduction strategy, Since government alone cant do it all “disempowered Nigerians must take responsibility for their own material gains on sustainable basis and become managers of their own development (Egbon 2009).
* The government should establish new and enhance existing human capital development centers most especially the skills acquisitions centers at affordable cost and accessible to her citizen.
* The government should pursue policies that increase access to loans for financing SME by youth who are enterprising.

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