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## Implementation of Youth Empowerment Programmes in Abia State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State, Nigeria. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Abia North Senatorial Zone. The population of the study comprised of 150 youth working with youth led-organizations in the state. Data was collected using structured questionnaire entitled: Implementation of Youth Empowerment Programmes Questionnaire (IYEPQ). The reliability coefficient was found to be 0.82. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the two research questions. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The major findings of the study revealed those motivational strategies for implementation of youth empowerment programmes include, adequate remuneration of trainers, disbursement of loans, bursary scheme for youth's educational empowerment, sharing of sewing machines. Supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes among others include, provision of adequate supervision task force for youth empowerment programmes and preparation of guidelines for reporting youth empowerment training activities among others. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded and recommended that: youth empowerment programmes should be introduced in the curriculum programmes in the institutions of higher learning; Post-primary schools should teach vocational education and skills acquisition programmes in their various schools to enable every Nigerian child to be self-reliant and self-developed and government should monitor, supervisors and evaluate skill acquisition centres established, run and funded by the government.

**Key words:** Youth, empowerment, youth empowerment, empowerment programmes, implementation

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### INTRODUCTION

Youth is a period of transition from the dependency of childhood to independency of adulthood. At this period adulthood awareness of interdependence as a member of a community is created. Youth also constitutes the backbone and the future of any nation. The progress and future development of any nation depends to a large extent on the youth. Particularly, this is why most nations have concreted empowerment programmes for their youths. According to the Anonymous (2008) youth is defined as anyone between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Anonymous (2001a) maintained that a person who is aged between 16 and 20 years is a youth. Nevertheless, most of the definitions of youth cited, point to a stage between adolescent and adulthood. Ejiogu (2001) stated that youth is a young person between childhood and adulthood. From the above, it is clear that the definition of youth is relatively subjective and the transition from one stage to

another will vary, therefore, sticking to one age bracket can be misleading and thus in every context it is important to outline what is meant by the term youth.

It is also helpful to add that progressive-mindedness is one of the defining characteristics of youth. Therefore, the current thinking is that people beyond the age of 36 who share the ideals of a progressive society are also considered as youths (Uzochukwu, 2014). Whatever, the age limit, youths are men and women considered to be young, energetic, vibrant and resourceful who are often engaged in social enterprises that require physical strength and mental capacity. In Africa, like most developing countries, a person is regarded as a youth when the individual reaches the age which is generally referred to as the age of maturity (Ejiogu, 2001). Youth are the most exuberant, the sharpest in memory, the most talented, the most innovative and the healthiest in most societies. These qualities have made them the most potent resource without which a society is lifeless. For the

purpose of this study, the researchers will utilize the age bracket of 18-24 years to define youth, stressing that this category represents the most active, volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population. Since, youths are considered to be young, energetic, vibrant and resourceful, they need to be empowered for the future development and progress of the nation.

**Concept of empowerment:** Empowerment refers to the activity of teaching, educating, training and imparting knowledge, ideas and relevant skills to the youth both within the formal and informal education system to enable them fully participate in development of society. This view has been supported by Essayed (2015) which set target for the achievement of education for all youth and children. As people experience increased power of choice an increased power in control of their lives happen simultaneously (Muluka, 2012). The concept of empowerment is based on consistent tendencies of sustainable support mechanisms. This may be the reason why Salami (2013) opined that empowerment is a means of assisting people to overcome obstacles which might prevent them from achieving their potentials. The need to empower arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams and reach their greatest potential due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society. Empowerment is widely used in social work, sociology and targeted at including people in decision making processes in their communities and raising their level of confidence in life (Fitzsimons *et al.*, 2011). Empowerment according to Indabawa and Mpofu (2004) is a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficiency in communities through identification and removal of conditions that reinforce powerlessness. The authors further explained that empowerment has to do with the ability people have to take for an effective control of their lives in terms of being well informed and equipped with regards to education and finance.

**Concept of youth empowerment:** Youth empowerment according to Fletcher and Valrus (2006) is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including adults. Olajire and Komolafe stated that youths are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices of life and are aware of the implications of these choices, make an informed decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. Muluka (2012) sees youth empowerment as an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young

people derive the ability, willingness, readiness and authority to make decisions and implement positive change in their own lives and to the intended beneficiaries around them. According to Fletcher (2005), youth empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. It simply means assisting the youth to overcome the difficulties which might prevent them from achieving their potentials. Tope (2011) defined youth empowerment as a process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement change in their own lives. The researcher further explained that youth empowerment can be exercised at homes, schools through youth organizations, non governmental organizations, government policy-making and community organizing campaigns. It ranges from economic empowerment to social, ideological, educational, technological and political empowerment which leads to manpower development. Youth empowerment can help reduce the poverty standard of any nation. The question may be how? When any youth is empowered financially, he uses the profit he makes from the business he does to sustain himself and his household. He may start-up businesses for his relations who were poor before and if this continues to grow to some extent, poverty will be eradicated from that vicinity. Empowering the youths with skills can go a long way in reducing poverty percentage of many societies. When a youth learns skills, he can use the skills learnt to feed, assist others and even invest for future use. For the purpose of this study, the researchers, therefore, defined youth empowerment as the means through which the young people are encouraged by individual, non-governmental organizations or government using any good means. The "Good means" here can be financially, skillfully, morally or any other means. Consequently, the government and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) have established empowerment programmes for youths.

**Concept of empowerment programmes:** Empowerment programme refers to the systematic, planned and organized programmes intended to improve the life of individuals or a group through the provisions of knowledge and relevant skills that would enhance their competence to accomplish the tasks which the education programmes required or aimed at (Indabawa and Mpofu, 2006). According to Zimmerman (2004) defined empowerment programmes as those programmes that encourage people to gain the relevant skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in their life or work environment. From the researchers

view, empowerment programmes can help individuals to develop skills within themselves or in the society. The researchers view empowerment programmes as interventions programmes that regularly involve young people as partners and participants in the decision-making processes they determine programme goals, planning and/or implementation and assessment. It is also clear that even though there are different perspectives to empowerment programmes, there is a general consensus that empowerment programmes will lead to increased capacity of people to have control over relevant skills, intellectual resources and ideology and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), employment, equality, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, sustainable development and peacekeeping (Curtin, 2004). In other words, it is an intervention that regularly involves young people as partners and participants in the decision-making processes that determine programme design, planning, or implementation. With the support of caring adults, youth empowerment Programmes engage young people in programmes leadership as a characteristic of their involvement in safe, positive and structured activities.

There are various forms of youth empowerment programmes that aim at creating opportunity for young people in their various fields of specialization as well as in their communities as a whole. Studies conducted by Anonymous (2001b) and Uzochukwu (2013) identified some forms of youth empowerment programmes functioning in harnessing the potentials and talents of young people, such as: good education empowerment programmes; entrepreneurship training programmes and advance technological development programmes. Various communities currently have a great number of youth and each community needs to improve their way of life so as to give hope to the coming generations. Other youths empowerment programmes as suggested by Uzochukwu (2014) which can be useful to redress and restructure the constraints to youth unemployment and above all reduce over dependency of young graduates on white-collar job include: financial youth empowerment, skills acquisition programmes and academic empowerment programmes. According to the researchers with all this youth empowerment programmes, the future and prosperity of the nation is secured. Strengthening further, the researchers noted that, the above programmes indicate that there is no nation that can exist without empowering their youths (Uzochukwu, 2014)

There are several benefits of youth empowerment programmes as pointed out by Zeldin *et al.* (2008) and Uzochukwu (2014) which include: The principles and

practices of youth involvement and empowerment become embedded within the organizational culture; Young people help clarify and bring focus to an organization's mission; Programming improvements occurred as the adults and the organizations as a whole became more connected and responsive to youth in the community; Organizations placed a greater value on inclusivity and representation. They saw the benefit of including multiple and diverse community voices in decision-making processes and the impact it has on programming and also youth in decision-making led organizations can also reach out to the rural communities in more diverse ways (e.g., community advocacy, policy-making, and service).

It is worthy of note that the means of empowering the youth does not only involve the government agencies alone rather it includes Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private agencies, educational institutions, intergovernmental organizations, public sectors, family sponsors and civil society organizations. These above mentioned bodies have been cited as key indicators or key stakeholders of youth empowerment programmes (Anonymous, 2011). According to Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2007-2015) empowering young people with programmes such: bursary scheme for youths educational empowerment, creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. These enabling conditions fall into four broad categories: an economic and social base, political will adequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, a stable environment of equality, peace and democracy and access to knowledge, information and skills and a positive value system.

Some states have taken bold steps by creating opportunities for youth empowerment programmes, establish and invest on Vocational Training Skills programmes, Agricultural empowerment programmes, skills acquisition programmes, mass literacy education programmes and poverty alleviation programmes have been carried out in other states of the federation as a means of lifelong self-development Programmes. They are critically important to reduce and to eradicate the level of crime, drug abuses, rural-to-urban migration, hawking, youth violence, over dependency on government recourses, white-collar jobs and above all unwanted pregnancies among under age females across the state. These include; Delta state government which has taking step towards youth empowerment, self-employment and many other laudable initiatives such as: Youth Empowerment Through Agriculture (YETA) Programmes, Farmer's Support Programme (FSP) and the micro-credit

scheme which has earned the state several honours and awards within a relatively short period of implementation (Anonymous, 2014). Others include: Youth Empowerment Programmes through Taraba State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (STEEDS) and Youth Empowerment Programmes through National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Tope, 2011).

United Nations (2010), Africa Commission (2009), Commonwealth Secretariat (2007) and World Bank (2007) documented the following as the major objectives why youth empowerment programmes must be executed and implemented across the globe, there are: to enable the youths gain understanding of the success and challenges of implementing policies on the ground, particularly for policy development and implementation of youth empowerment programmes, to recruit, train and support young people to be effective researchers, to mobilize young people to help strengthen youth-related policy formulation, to build the capacities of governments, non-governmental and civil society and private-sector organizations to ensure a better response to the needs and issues of young people, to share and exchange information on best practices on youth empowerment programmes, to promote gender mainstreaming in all activities of the global youths and to engage youth as protagonists in the design and implementation of local youth services in their various countries (Anonymous, 2009, 2010; Secretariat, 2007).

There are also several constraints that hinder effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria as suggested by Oseni *et al.* (2012), they include: lack of entrepreneurship; unavailability of fund from the government and private agencies; Poor knowledge based economy and low spirit of competition as constraints to youth empowerment programmes; Irregular distribution of materials and equipments to trainers at the centres; Non-inclusion of entrepreneurship programme in the school curriculum; Poor societal attitude to Technical and Vocational Education Programmes; Lack of fund to motivate already empowered youths, disrespect to Nigerian policies on education and inadequate facilities and equipments for teaching and training at the available centres constraint youth empowerment programmes in most states of Nigeria.

Furthermore, the means of empowering the youths cannot be achieve without some challenges which may confront effective implementation of such programmes. It is on this note that Oseni *et al.* (2012) further pointed other challenges confronting youth empowerment

programmes, such as: the breakdown in the machinery of governance, the collapse of our traditional values hard work, integrity, honesty, communal and self-help spirit, discipline, transparency, accountability etc., limited opportunity for productive activity leading to poverty, unemployment and their negative consequences like crime, insecurity and youth restiveness, weak infrastructure, decline in the quality of education, legacy of impunity, inherited and crippling debt burden and poor revenue generation and leakages. It is the concern of this study to ascertain the strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State.

**Purpose of the study:** The general purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State, Nigeria. specifically, the study:

- Ascertained the motivational strategies for implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State
- examined the supervisory strategies for effective Implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State

**Research questions:** The following questions have been posed to guide this study:

- What are the motivational strategies for implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State?
- What are the supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was carried out to investigate the implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State, Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated and answered in the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 150 respondents drawn and used for the study. The instrument for the data collection was structured questionnaire entitled: Implementation of Youth Empowerment Programmes Questionnaire (IYEPQ). The instrument was validated by three research experts, one in Sociology of Education Unit, one in Measurement and Evaluation Unit and one in Educational Administration and Planning Unit, all from the University of Nigeria,

Nsukka. The reliability was also established using Cronbach alpha method. The reliability co-efficient was found to be 0.82. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the three research questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of registered youth on the motivational strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State. From the result, the respondents acknowledged that all the items in the table are motivational strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State. The items had mean scores ranging between 3.34-3.95 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.43-0.58 which is above the agreed criterion mean of 2.5. The overall mean score show a cluster mean of 3.65 with the corresponding standard deviation of 0.48. This indicates a decision level of strongly agree. Consequently, the table shows that all the items in the table are the motivational strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State.

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of registered youth on the supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State. The result shows that the respondents accepted the fact that all the items listed in the table above are strategies for effective

implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State. This is because each of the items has its mean score between 3.19-3.85 which is above the agreed criterion mean of 2.5. Equally, the overall mean score show a cluster mean of 3.53. This shows a decision level of strongly agree. This is an indication that the respondents strongly agree that all the items in the table are the strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State.

The findings of the study showed that motivational strategies for implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State among others include, adequate remuneration of trainers, disbursement of long and short term loans, bursary scheme for youth's educational empowerment and sharing of sewing machines. This is in line with the National Youth Policy as cited in Uzochukwu (2013) which identified some forms of youth empowerment programmes functioning in harnessing the potentials and talents of young people, to include poverty eradication programmes, good education empowerment programmes, entrepreneurship training programmes and advance technological development programmes. The findings also revealed that bursary scheme for youth's educational empowerment, sharing of sewing machines to the youth by the state government, provision of vehicles (tricycle, taxi, mini buses to the youths for transport scheme are the various youth empowerment programmes that are executed by the government of Abia State. This is in accordance with Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (2007-2015) which indicated that empowering young people with programmes such bursary

Table 1: Mean ratings of registered youths on the motivational strategies for implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State

Items	X	SD	Decision
Adequate remuneration of trainers	3.34	0.48	A
Disbursement of long and short term loans	3.95	0.47	SA
Creation of vocational training centres	3.65	0.46	SA
Bursary scheme for youth's educational empowerment	3.73	0.48	SA
Sharing of sewing machines to the youth by the state government	3.46	0.50	A
Provision of vehicles (Keke Napepe, taxi, mini buses among others) to the youth for transport scheme	3.75	0.43	SA
Skill acquisition centers for the youths for self reliance	3.44	0.58	A
Training youth on information and communication technology programmes	3.85	0.48	SA
Installation of power generating sector for adequate energy supply	3.87	0.43	SA
Provision of adequate funds to meet up with youth empowerment programmes	3.59	0.49	SA
Adequate supply of computer equipments and accessories for the training of youths	3.45	0.49	A
Cluster mean	3.64	0.48	SA

Table 2: Mean ratings of the registered youth on the supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State

Items	X	SD	Decision
Provision of adequate supervision task force for youth empowerment programmes	3.75	0.49	SA
Preparation of guidelines for reporting youth empowerment training activities	3.19	0.59	A
Provision of adequate monitoring teams	3.52	0.50	SA
Provision of adequate supervisory teams	3.45	0.49	A
Thorough supervision of practical works in the youth empowerment centres	3.85	0.55	SA
Adequate assessment of the youth empowerment training activities	3.55	0.48	SA
Adequate feedback of the youth training programmes	3.65	0.65	SA
Keeping abreast of current developments in the youth empowerment centres	3.62	0.50	SA
Participation of external supervisors in work group as member and leader in the youth empowerment training	3.68	0.48	SA
Cluster mean	3.58	0.53	SA

scheme for youths educational empowerment among others mean creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others.

The result of this research study also showed that supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State among others include, provision of adequate supervision task force for youth empowerment programmes, preparation of guidelines for reporting youth empowerment training activities, provision of adequate monitoring teams, provision of adequate supervisory teams and participation of external supervisors in work group as member and leader in the youth empowerment training. This finding is not unexpected considering the view of Helmut *et al.* (2016) who postulated that the records of low implementation of youth's empowerment programmes are always informed by the fact that the government of this day are not concerned with the plight of the people they lead nor bear in mind that the youths are the leaders of future. Also, the result is in consonance with the assertions of Oseni *et al.* (2012) who pointed out that the reason for low and inadequate implementation of youth empowerment programme is because of the government lack of interest in matters that affect the youth.

### CONCLUSION

From the finding of the study, the researcher is of the view that motivational strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State include, adequate remuneration of trainers, disbursement of long and short term loans, bursary scheme for youth's educational empowerment, sharing of sewing machines among others. On the other hand, supervisory strategies for effective implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Abia State among others include, provision of adequate supervision task force for youth empowerment programmes, preparation of guidelines for supervision, monitoring and reporting youth empowerment training activities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study, such as: Youth empowerment programmes should be introduced in the curriculum programmes in the institutions of higher learning.

Post-primary schools should put in efforts in teaching vocational education and skills acquisition programmes in their various school to enable every Nigerian child to be self-reliant, self-developed and creative.

Federal, state and local government should investigate, monitor, supervisor and evaluate all skills acquisitions centres established, run and funds by the government.

Nigerian Corpers (NYSC) serving in education sectors should use their nine months training to learn the act of teaching and use the remaining three months to do teaching practice, to enable them get equipped and learn teaching skills for self developed.

Policy makers on youth development, job creation, educational sectors and rural development should remodeled to inculcate technical and relevant skill acquisitions which will help inculcate secondary school graduates to have employable skills.

Financial support, training and facilities need to be provided in order to ensure youth active participation in empowerment programmes.

The spirit of entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths should be promoted through seminars, conferences and workshops on corporate leadership and entrepreneurship.

Nigerian institutions of higher learning should focus on curriculum that is aimed at producing qualified professionals required by industries.

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