



## YOUTHS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *No country seeking economic development which is the good and better life can afford to neglect the youth or abandon them to constitute a major social problem. This is because the youths are the engine of growth and development. Their action and inaction can develop or destroy the fabrics of their country. In other words, they determine the future of the country. It is on this backdrop that this paper is out to address the importance of preparation and training of the youths in order to achieve sustainable economic development. It adopted a theoretical approach as its methodology and found that there is indisputable evidence of poor economic development due to lack of preparation and training on the part of the youths. The paper therefore recommended that the government should adequately fund the educational sector and should also have the farmer's mentality and do away with the hunter's mentality.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Positive Youth Development, Education, Economic development.



## **INTRODUCTION**

No country seeking economic development, which is the good and better life, can afford to neglect the youths, or abandon them to constitute major social problems. This is because the youths are the engine of growth and development; they provide or serve as the source of the labour force for the production of goods and services. They are also the critical masses of the people whose action and inaction can develop or destroy the fabrics of their country. In other words, they determine the future of the country (Uba & Chiwuike, 2022).

In Nigeria, the youth population accounts for over half of the projected national population of over 200 million people. Population growth and urbanisation go together and economic development is closely correlated with urbanisation (Akinyemi & Mibolaji, 2022). Unfortunately, despite this huge population, Nigerian youths have not leveraged its population strength to vote for leaders of character or contribute to economic development.

Many youths are not even sufficiently educated to have skills that make them employable. This has provided an opportunity and a basis for the political elites to consider youths as political enforcers, through thuggery, purveyors of violence and other nefarious purposes (Uba & Chiwuike, 2022). The youths, therefore, need to understand their role and responsibilities. That they are leaders of tomorrow. That they needed preparation and training now to avoid negative consequences in the future. This paper is therefore emphasising on the importance of preparation and training of the youth in order to achieve sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Youths**

There seems to be no standard global definition of a youth. Many countries of the world have long insisted that youth is not a range of ages but is defined by a diversity of culturally defined social processes that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood.

According to the United Nations, 'youth' is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The Commonwealth defined youth as those those between 15 and 29 years of age. The African Youth charter defined youth as any individual between 15 and 35 years of age.

In Nigeria, the 2019 National Youth Policy defines a youth as a person between 15 and 29 years. This explains why NYSC is limited to graduates under the age of 30 years (Unini, 2020; Onah, 2012). Therefore based on the following contextual definitions, it is correct to treat youths in Nigeria as between 15 and 29 years of age, free from the encumbrances of marriage, having strength to carry out certain functions that require physical energy and a bridge between older generation and the younger children.



## **Economic Development**

Economic development has been a victim of definitional pluralism and taken as identical to economic growth in some quarters or cases. In other words, economic development is a difficult term to define. According to Goulef (1971), for development to be meaningful, it must incorporate these basic core values. These are:

- i. **Life-sustenance:** This is the ability to provide basic necessities. All people have certain basic needs without which life would be impossible. For example, food, health, protection etc where they are critically in short supply, a condition of absolute underdevelopment exists.
- ii. **Self-esteem:** This is a person's sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own ends.
- iii. **Freedom from servitude:** This is the freedom of choice. It means emancipation from alienating material conditions of life.

For Dudley Seer, critical questions to be asked about development are the trends in poverty, unemployment, income equality in a society among other variables. The questions are simply put;

- i. What has been happening to poverty?
- ii. What has been happening to unemployment?
- iii. What has been happening to inequality
- iv. What has been happening to educational, health and other social and cultural services.
- v. Has economic progress enhanced individual and group esteem?
- vi. Has economic progress expanded the rank of human choice and free people from external dependence and internal servitude to other men?

And that if all the answers to the above questions are in the affirmative, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned.

Currently, most economists and social scientists have conceived development as a multi-dimensional phenomenon having economic, social, political, technological and many other dimensions. It is also very important in the discussion of the quality of life of people today to include environmental issues such as pollution, environmental degradation and not just growth in per capita income, because of the externality effect of production and consumption.

According to Umo (2007), the production and consumption activities, most times result in environmental damage in the form of pollution, warming of the environment and so on.

In other words, there is a need to protect the environment to avoid the persistence of poverty, unemployment inequality and health hazards because they are directly connected to the mismanagement of the environment. Hence, this paper will adopt, with little addition, the definition of Akpakpan (1987 & 2011) as cited by Wilson (2017). That is, development is the



process of improvement in the various aspects of the life of the society, usually seen in the occurrence of desirable changes such as;

- i. An increase in the capacity of the society to produce and distribute needed goods and services.
- ii. A reduction in the level of unemployment; that is, a reduction in the proportion of the population living below the poverty line;
- iii. A reduction in the level of economic and social inequality;
- v. An increase in the real output of goods and services, that is, economic growth;
- vi. A rise in the level of social and political consciousness and political participation;
- vii. An improvement in the quality of services;
- viii. An improvement in the quality of life as measured by access to clean and safe water, adequate health services and decent accommodation; and
- ix. A reduction in pollution and or environmental degradation.

## **THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theory of PPositive YYouth DDevelopment**

Positive YYouth Development (PYD) asserts that basic psychological conditions are significant determinants of youth well-being. Lerner (2009) as cited by Abdul-Kadir and Mohd (2021) sees sees Positive Youth Development (PYD) as asthe relational developmental systems theory, which suggests that young people possess resources that can be developed, nurtured and cultivated. A major PYD resource is the social context in which youths live such as family, school and community organisations. PYD is described as a process that promotes the “5Cs”: competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. Lerner (2009) also described thriving young people as individuals who actively nurture, cultivate and develop positive qualities. In the “5Cs” model, competence is the ability and skill to deal with the challenges, tasks and stresses in life; confidence is the positive belief in one’s own worth and efficacy, while the term connection describes positive relationship with others, including family members, peers and communities; character defines the standard of behaviour that promote social functioning in societies. Finally, caring implies a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. The positive nature of the factors of PYD necessitates a strength–based approach rather than a deficit-based approach which is characterised by researchers concentrating on risk reduction to create more favourable growth conditions.

Positive youth development does not focus only on the development of individual strengths, but also devotes significant efforts at supporting positive relations between young people and their social-community resources. Beyond the “5Cs”, other internal strengths of young people include purpose in life and hope. Hence a variety of strengths and a positive identity, particularly purpose in life may help emerging youths to not only adapt but also flourish as they enter the next phase of life (e.g marriage, occupation).



Based on Keyes' (2002) model, one can expect possible positive associations between the 5 C's of PYD and wellbeing as a part of mental health. Young people who score high on wellbeing and low on mental illness are flourishing; those who score high on well-being and high on mental illness are struggling. Young people, who score low on well-being and high on mental illness, are floundering and young people who score low on mental health and low on mental illness are languishing. Mental health is a complete state that consists of the absence of mental illness and the presence of a high level of well-being.

Young people who are mentally healthy are those who exhibit emotional vitality (happiness and life satisfaction). Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises how their abilities can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and can make a contribution to their community.

### **Empirical Review**

Ozturk (2001) examined the role of education in economic development: A theoretical perspective and explained that education in every sense is one of the fundamental factors of development. No country can achieve sustainable economic development without substantial investment in human capital. Education enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world. It improves the qualities of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education raises people's production and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution.

Babatunde and Adefabi (2005) investigated the long run relationship between education and economic growth in Nigeria between 1970 and 2003 through the application of Johansen cointegration techniques and Vector Error Correction Method. It examines two different channels through which human capital can affect long run economic growth in Nigeria. The first channel is when human capital is a direct input in the production function and the second channel is when human capital affects the technology parameter. The Johansen cointegration result established a long-run relationship between education and economic growth. A well-educated labour force appeared to significantly influence economic growth both as a factor in the production function and through total factor productivity.

Williams (2014) examined education and economic development where he firmly believed that education could be the answer to the economic development of a community. The researcher conducted eight in-depth, open-ended interviews with key informants who were directly engaged in the K-12 education system and economic development of the Greater Hattiesburg Area. The results showed that there is a definite connection between education and economic development. The five major themes found in the data were that;

- i. There is a connection between education and economic development
- ii. Education is used as a tool for economic development
- iii. There are challenges to strengthening the relationship between education and economic development
- iv. Steps can be taken to increase this relationship and Hattiesbury has all the right ingredients to tap into this alliance.



## Evaluation of Empirical Literature

Previous works on youths and economic development were all of the view that youths have an important role to play in the process of development. This paper is therefore emphasising the importance of well-funded education for our youths to empower, prepare and train them, especially now that there is an increasing rate of unemployment and seemingly government inability to curb it.

## DISCUSSION

The place and importance of the youths in the development process is aptly described by the 2019 Nigerian Youths Policy in this way;

Youths are the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of the country (FGN, 2019).

Unfortunately, many youths who are energetic remain unemployed, continue to suffer from poor health, and lack support. The responsibility of ensuring that the aspirations and hopes of the youths are met lies with a multiplicity of stakeholders, but at the forefront should be the government.

It is therefore not enough to lament about the negative developments in Nigeria without making efforts to change it. The President Muhammadu Buhari was very right, when he described the majority of youths as lazy and uneducated. And that a lot of them have not been to school to improve their skills and they are claiming that Nigeria is an oil producing country and therefore should sit and do nothing and get housing, health care, and education free. Just hustling to get on the gravy train (Ogundipo, (2018). According to one commentator, they are not only the laziest but the most miserable of human beings, always chanting "Articulated", Obedient" or Jagaban.

The truth is that the President and others only re-echoed Nigeria's abysmal education and employment situation. How can the youth go to school when graduates are half baked and cannot find jobs? Where academic staff are always on strike.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria from 1999 had embarked on 17 strikes in 24 years for failure of the government to provide adequate funding for tertiary education (Ashiru, 2022). The annual budget allocation to the education sector is very low compared to UNESCO recommendation of 26% (Udo et al., 2020).



### **Nigeria Budgetary Allocation to The Education Sector From 2010 - 2020**

Year	Allocation in Percentage (%)
2010	4.03
2011	6.16
2012	8.20
2013	8.55
2014	9.54
2015	7.74
2016	6.10
2017	6.38
2018	7.03
2019	7.63
2020	6.7

*Source: Federal Ministry of Education Report (2020)*

The above statistics only show that there is a crisis in Nigeria's education sector. The only way to win is simply education. According to Plato as cited by Patrinos (2016), if a man neglects education he walks lame to the end of life. The Holy Scripture in Proverb 24:3 says, homes are built on the foundation of wisdom and understanding or it takes care to lay the foundations of a house, and skill to build it. Where there is knowledge, the rooms are furnished with valuables and beautiful things. That is to say that education is the key determinant of economic well being; therefore, increasing the human capital inherent in the labour force of a country is considered a channel for economic growth and development since it constitutes an intrinsic mechanism for knowledge absorption (Hanushek & Wubomann, 2010). This fact is in line with Todaro (1980), Wilson (2017) when they cited Professor Harbison H. that human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of a nation. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organisations and carry forward national development.

### **CONCLUSION**

The role of youths in economic development is therefore crucial. They have the ability to create an identity for themselves and move the nation forward. However, they will not be able to do this without the support of the government and if the government fails to do what is expected of them, it may lead to huge grievances for the country especially when there are no suitable job opportunities.

It should be noted that a country is in trouble when its king (leader) is a youth and or old man (unprepared/untrained youth of yesterday).



Finally, it should also be noted that we are having no good or better life because our leaders today who were youths of yesterday were not prepared or trained. And if this trend continues, we will simply have old people of tomorrow instead of elder statesmen.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the statistics and the attitude of the government, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The politicians and government should have the farmer's mentality by preparing the soil for cultivation instead of the hunter's mentality where the hunter kills and eats what is already available without replenishing the sources.
2. Governments should adequately fund the educational sector as recommended by UNESCO, and make the education sector more attractive to the youths.

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