

**ENHANCING VOCATIONAL SKILLS THROUGH EMPOWERMENT OF  
THE RURAL POPULACE: A WAY OF ADDRESSING THE CURRENT  
COMATOSE ECONOMY IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The Paper focused on Enhancing vocational Skills through Empowerment of the rural Populace: Addressing the Current Comatose Economy in Nigeria. The paper discussed the concept of vocational skills, empowerment, rural populations and empowerment as well as ways through which the rural populace could be supported and empowered as a way of addressing current economic problems in the country. Rural people are endowed with different vocational skills as identified in the paper such as farming, tailoring, animals rearing and so on, but yet due to lack of support from government and NGOs, poverty, poor infrastructure they contribute less to the economic development of the country. Conclusion and suggestions were made in the paper to include; there is need for the formation of Skill Based Consultations Forum (SBCF) with aim at putting all people with same skills together and share ideas as well as experience among them and Government as well as NGOs should come up will skill acquisition programmes for the rural people especially youths and women, so as to equip them with different skills and trades. Also more realistic approach needs to be employed in order to empower the rural populace so as redeem them from poverty and its consequential effects.

<p>Skill development for employability will be used as an agent of change in promoting rural populace employment. Rural populace face a</p>	<p>multitude of barriers in accessing skills and productive employment, remaining on the job due to effect of globalization or otherwise and advancing to higher level</p>
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jobs, as well as returning to the labour market after a period of absence spent. Verma (2015) opined that the training and skill development among rural populace would be mainly pertaining to tailoring, knitting farm forestry, pad making, cooking, sanitary pads making and so on. Men and Women in rural areas often face abusive situations related to domestic violence, physical and mental torture, wife and children beating, sexual abuse, and so on. It is also realized that rural populace face resistance in participating in training programmes due to marginalization and sharing of responsibilities at community level. They also face barriers due to bias and discriminatory behaviour prevailing in the larger society.

There is considerable evidence for the marginalization 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 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

### **Vocational Skills**

Vocational skills are empirical skills that individuals acquire in a specific area of interest. Vocational skills are more practical than theoretical skills. Individuals learn vocational skills from hands-on experience. Vocational skills offer hands-on training in a specific trade or job industry. The training takes place

outside the traditional classroom setting. Students are placed in manual labour intern positions that coincide with their vocational career choice. Students are exposed to hands-on activities through first-hand experience, and they acquire classroom knowledge. Training allows individuals to work in their areas of interest while obtaining first-hand knowledge and experience, while possibly earning a paycheck (Jabo & Ubandawaki, 2006). Vocational education is education that prepares people to work in a trade, a craft, as a technician, or in professional vocations such as engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, or law. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities and are traditionally non-academic but related to a specific trade or occupation. Vocational education is sometimes referred to as career education or technical education.

### **Concept of Empowerment**

Empowerment is regarded as the process of providing an individual with the opportunities that will enable him/her to get more involved in decision and activities that affect his/her life. Rural populace empowerment is the process by which rural populace identify and overcome their own problems (Muhammad & Mohammed, 2010). The goal of this is to enable them to take control of their own lives.

The process of empowerment according to Obanya (2004) has certain essential inputs. These are:

1. Knowledge which involves acquisition of information and insight.

2. Skills which includes mental, physical and social skills essential for decision making, problem solving and application of technical ideas.

3. Self-awareness which involve self-search with the view to discovering one's capabilities.

4. Visible tools of power which involves participation in socio-economic activities for income generation for self-reliance.

5. Positive self-concept which involves consideration of what one is, what one can do, and how one feels about self generally.

6. Full involvement/full control- this has to do with getting autonomy- full participation. Each stage in the empowerment process is a preparation for the next stage (Muhammad & Mohammed, 2010:242).

The word 'empowerment' means equipping someone with the ability to do or act, control, exercise right or authority in one's society. Rural populace empowerment denotes all purposeful efforts aimed at imparting education to rural dwellers that may be formal or informal, regular or irregular with sole aim of repositioning the knowledge skills and competences required of them by their society. Rural populace cannot be empowered without education and training. This is because being educated does not simply mean having the knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic alone, it encompasses a host of other aspect of rural populace for example

the learning of the process of income generating activities in education, the knowledge of nutrition and healthy living in education (Usman, 1997 in Haruna & Liman, 2015).

### **The Types of Empowerment**

The major types of empowerment can be summarized into four groups (Lennie, 2002).

**Community empowerment:** Access to new and useful knowledge and awareness, Developing new skills, abilities, confidence and competence, obtaining the friendship and support of other people, participating in various activities with other people.

**Organizational empowerment:** New knowledge and awareness about new benefits of technology for rural development through rural tourism development or development of agriculture cooperatives.

**Political empowerment:** Influencing other government policies and decisions that have effect on rural communities, changing town-based people's beliefs, networking with people in government and industry and other people to discuss issues affecting rural people as well as rural communities.

**Psychological empowerment:** An increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, greater motivation, inspiration, enthusiasm and interest to develop new skills and knowledge, to keep pushing for

better services for rural people, feelings of belonging related to participation in the online groups in particular.

### **Developmental Characteristics of Rural Areas Hindering Economic Development**

To Omotayo (2009) the following factors affect the performance of students especially in the rural area. Parent children relationship, domestic works such as hawking which is most parental among rural children's, parents level of education, environmental and so on. Oloko(1994) in Haruna and Liman (2015) observed that in Nigerian rural areas some children are kept at home on market days and after school hours to hawk around,, those children have little or no time to go through their school works. In a related literature, Denga and Denga (2007: 1-18) identify the following as the challenges of educating the Nigerian child.

**A. Poverty:** Is one of the notorious problems in developing nation especially among the rural population it is a social, economic and psychological problem that affect the rural people. It is a severe lack of income below poverty line), assets (property), basic social welfare facilities such as pipe born water, electricity, good food, medical service, good clothing, good education and severe absence of a means of livelihood. In summary poverty is a notorious social, economic and psychological fact that can be held accountable for lack of appropriate ways of educating Nigerian child in the rural areas.

Poverty is largely a rural phenomenon and is described as leaving below standard poverty like as the value of income or consumption necessary for minimum standards of nutrition and other necessities. It is considered as the symptom or manifestation of under-development, it is a plague afflicting people all over the world (Modibbo, 2006). Poverty is a way of life characterized by low calorie intake, inaccessibility to adequate health facilities, low quality of education system, low life expectancy, high rate of infant mortality, low income, under employment and inaccessibility of various housing and societal facilities. In real terms, poverty denies it victims the most basic needs for survival which are fundamental human rights such as water, food, clothing, shelter, health care and education (Modibbo, 2006). Income inequality, high rate of population growth, rural-urban migration, poor food security, lack of deterioration, of public health sector, poor education system, unemployment, corruption, bad governance, micro-economic distortions are described as the root causes of poverty in the rural area.

Busari (2010) identified the following as rural child school problems:- fear of going to school, absenteeism without permission, dropping out as well as academic underachievement. Ikwuba (2010) define poverty as a situation where an individual or groups of people have inadequate resources and access to basic need of life. World Development Report (1990) in Haruna and Liman (2015) conceived poverty as an inability of an

individual or group of people to obtain a minimum standard of living. World Bank and UNDP (2001) stated that 70% of the Nigerian population live in poverty and seven (7) out of every ten (10) live below the poverty line of less than one U.S dollar a day, poverty is more severe in Nigerian rural areas which make teaching and learning very difficult for both teachers and learners, because rural population constitutes mostly Nigerian peasantry poor and the largest illiterate group (Ikwuba, 2010).

**B. Cultural challenges:** Due to the characteristics of rural areas in Nigeria such as greater homogeneity, lack of social amenities and so on. The child in the rural area tend to take longer time before understand a specific concept unlike urban and semi-urban children, for instance while those in the urban areas have access to computer and computer related gadget the rural child know little nothing about the computer. In some communities some children have to go for Almajiri at lower age, this also constitute a serious challenge to their education (Haruna & Liman, 2015).

**C. Psychological challenges:** Some parents may not be able to provide stimulating and intellectual environment for their children, reading materials such as reading, writing and listening equipment are not a fordable such children may become depressed, frustrated and emotionally maladjusted because of lack of good classroom participation.

**D. Socialization challenges:** socialization is the process in which individual learn the attitudes, values and actions appropriate for members of a particular culture because rural orientation, rural child feel and act in society compared to their urban countries parts in Nigeria. The reason is the fact that child socialization process is affected by many social factors such as parents, home school, religious bodies, peer group influence as well as the large society to which he/she belong.

**E. Electricity problem** although is a national problem due to the inadequacies associated with the development of the sector, but it is more serious in most of the Nigerian rural areas, this place the development of rural populace to yet another miserable experience. This will also affect the school activities for example practical in computer and computer related areas, teachers morale as well as availability of teaching and learning materials that require energy (Haruna and Onyebu, 2011).

Other challenges include what Ekong (2003) pointed as deplorable condition of rural setting in Nigeria such as lack of infrastructural facilities, basic services such as electricity, water, health centres, good road networks, educational institutions and agricultural inputs which are required to meet the needs of the modern society and man, all these hinders the process of educating child. Other challenges of poverty in the area of educating child include; poverty is associated with factors such as malnutrition, low birth weight, poor health

care as well as inadequate child health care, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, unhealthy environment, and poor mental and physical potentials. It destroys hope, tolerance, self-satisfaction and personal competence, while these are social and psychological factors affecting education and the learning process of the child (Ikwuba, 2010).

Other challenges according to Haruna and Liman (2015) include motorable roads that link most rural areas to cities are in bad situation, in spite of some recent development efforts being made by political class in the area of road construction. It is still inadequate in rural areas. A very reasonable number of villages are cut off from the urban and semi-urban areas for lack of good road network. This affects not only economic activities in the area but also the educational and social development of teeming population leaving in such places. Rural areas in Nigeria are also characterized with inadequate or lack of portable drinking water (Haruna & Onyebu, 2011). Most villages in Nigeria depend on local wells, ponds, lakes as well as nearby streams for their drinking water as against what is obtained in the urban and most semi-urban areas. This lead to outbreak of many diseases, especially cholera, guinea worm and so on, in many rural areas which in no small measure affect not only the healthy living but even the educational opportunities of the rural child, since most teachers tend to run away from such areas.

The issue of ignorance and high level of literacy among rural populace also affects

economic, social and educational life of the people residing in the rural areas. Oyebo (2000) confirms that Nigeria is currently rated among the nine countries in the world with the largest population of non-literate people. Majority of the rural populace cannot perceive the value of education, as such cannot effectively contribute toward National Development.

### **Rural Population and Empowerment**

It is believed that majority of Nigerian people almost 50-70% lived in rural areas where the major activity is farming (Jabo&Ubandawaki, 2006). However, rural economic and entrepreneurial development is faced with a number of problems and constraints which include;

1. Rural diet is largely unbalanced due to poor protein contents in the diet.
2. Small farm holdings due to traditional land tenure system and financial ability.
3. Deprived basic social amenities and infrastructures such as electricity, good roads and water.
4. More than 70% of the rural populace are poor, having very little or nothing to invest in business.
5. Lack of access to bank loans because of lack of satisfactory collateral security.

To empower rural populace means to strengthen and provide skill opportunities to them for sustainable economic and social development. Due to the nature of rural areas, there are two major categories of empowerment programmes which are;

1. Farm enterprises
2. Non-farm enterprises

1. Farming enterprises include; poultry, rabbitary, apiculture (bee-keeping), aquaculture (fish production), cattle rearing, and other ruminant animals such as goats, sheep etc. crop productions which includes; millet, sorghum, groundnut, cowpea, cotton, vegetables, wheat, potatoes, sugar cane etc.

2. Non farming enterprises of rural populace also include; weaving/knitting, business (buying and selling), hair dressing/plaiting, milling, food selling, handcrafts such as basket making, blacksmithing, transport (vehicle and motor cycle), barbing, block/brick making, carpentry, vulcanizing, processing of farm products, photographing etc.

Jabo and Ubandawaki (2006) opined that, the rural populace in the Northern Nigeria practice the following enterprises: Food processing (threshing, grinding, sobo making etc), Blacksmithing, Hairdressing and barbing, Carpentry, basket making, technical works, Block making, cap making, cloth weaving, leather work, dyeing etc.

Education and training are powerful tools against poverty and hunger, and for rural populace empowerment. Educated men and women are more likely to be healthier, have higher earnings and exercise greater decision-making power within the community. They are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated. Thus breaking the cycle of

poverty and hunger in the rural areas, Education and training are essential components of any strategy to improve agricultural and non-farm productivity that can pull communities out of poverty. Learning about improved production technologies and methods, new products and markets, business skills, as well as life skills (such as health management, decision-making, self-confidence, or conflict management) can make a big difference. Skills development is particularly important to rural populace; who are more likely to be contributing community workers, subsistence farmers or home based micro-entrepreneurs in the informal sector, or performing low-paid, unskilled work as seasonal workers and undertaking specific tasks in crop, livestock or fish production and processing.

Skills development for rural women and men often requires a combination of training in formal settings (such as schools and training institutions), non-formal settings (such as community groups and Non-Governmental Organizations) and informal ones (such as learning from the family members or peers). It can comprise basic education, vocational training, life skills training, entrepreneurship training, and agricultural extension services. Policy makers should aim at designing and implementing a package of complementary measures to address the specific needs of each category of rural populace.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusively therefore; Skills development is very important to rural populace; who are more likely to be contributing to community workers, subsistence farmers or home based micro-entrepreneurs in the informal sector, or performing low-paid, unskilled work as seasonal workers and undertaking specific tasks in crop, livestock or fish production and processing. Skill development for employability will be used as an agent of change in promoting rural populace employment. The paper also highlighted that; Income inequality, high rate of population growth, rural-urban migration, poor food security, lack of deterioration, of public health sector, poor education system, unemployment, corruption, bad governance, micro-economic distortions are described as the root causes of poverty in the rural area which is a serious challenge to socio-economic development of the rural areas that require the intervention of empowerment programme from government and NGOs. Some of the skills and enterprises available in the rural areas that also enhance economic development were also identified to include; poultry, rabbitary, apiculture (bee-keeping), aquaculture (fish production), cattle rearing, and other ruminant animals such as goats, sheep etc. crop productions which includes; millet, sorghum, groundnut, cowpea, cotton, vegetables, wheat, potatoes, sugar cane etc. others include; weaving/knitting, business (buying and selling), hair dressing/plaiting, milling, food selling, handcrafts such as basket making,

blacksmithing, transport (vehicle and motor cycle), barbing, block making, carpentry, vulcanizing, processing of farm products, photographing. The finally suggested that;

### **Suggestions**

Based on the discussion made in the paper the following suggestions were made;

1. There is need for the formation of Skill Based Consultations Forum (SBCF) with aim at putting gall people with same skills together and share ideas as well as experience among them.
2. Government can also intervene by providing soft and interest free loans to the rural people.
3. Government as well as NGOs should come up will skill acquisition programmes for the rural people especially youths and women, so as to equip them with different skills and trades. Also more realistic approach needs to be employed in order to empower the rural populace so as redeem them from poverty and its consequential effects.
4. Community and religious leaders should intensify efforts in motivating parents and the larger society on the need to educate rural child in Nigeria for national development. There is also need for government to evolve a participatory poverty alleviation programme that will take into consideration of the needs of poor parents especially in the Nigeria rural areas.

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