



THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS ON THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIVES OF THE POPULACE IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

This paper was concerned with the role of Vocational Training Centres on the Social and Economic lives of the populace in Delta State. The vocational training centres emphasized skills and knowledge required for a particular job function or trade management. Socio-economic impacts which bordered on improving the well-being physically, emotionally, mentally and financially of the trainees was identified and discussed. The positive impacts were identified to include peace building initiatives, standard of living, wealth and job creation opportunities. It was observed that literacy levels, poverty lines and employment challenge amongst the populace could be addressed through acquisition of vocational skills that are provided in Vocational Training Centres. Creation of awareness by the State Government, harmonized training system, effective supervision and collaboration with national and international agencies among others were recommended as a panacea for the vocational training centres across the state.

Introduction

Attempts to address the employment needs as well as the problems of poverty, illiteracy, gender related issues, occupational and vocational skills acquisition for economic self-reliance of individuals and communities are replete in Nigeria through various vocational training initiatives. Agencies established to address these problems include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Employment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS), Youth Economic Advancement Programme (YEAP), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), (Egunyomi & Okora, 2010).

These vocational training agencies are interventions by the government to ensure that non-formal training of youths and adults on vocational skills acquisition are carried out through work-oriented functional literacy.

Such skills as garri processing, carpentry, soap and pomade making, baking and confectionery, barbing and hair dressing, computer, family health and HIV/AIDS education among others are encouraged for improved economy. They also provide training in the areas of side line jobs for extra incomes, mechanic works, environmental management techniques, tie and dye, laundering, block molding, arts and crafts, shoe-making and repairs, fish farming, animal farming, crop production, book-keeping, tailoring and many others.

The efforts by these Vocational Training Centres (VTC) are in keeping with the United Nation Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty which is a threat to national stability and good governance. All over the world, governments have embraced the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is aimed at significantly reducing the number of people living below the poverty line, improve access



to education, promote gender equality, improve maternal and child health, ensure environmental sustainability and promote global partnership between developed and developing countries. The first goal of the MDGs is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger towards poverty alleviation, economic growth and creation of employment for all. However, poor people without employable skills cannot benefit from the growth process because of their peculiar challenge. The challenge then is to raise the productive capacity of the poor, the youth and the vulnerable ones in the society through the acquisition of specific job competencies in Vocational Training Centres (World Bank, 2011).

The Federal Government realized that without tackling this problem and harmonizing the programmes content of these centers, realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be a problem. Similarly, the African Union (AU) has a vision of "an integrated, peaceful, prosperous Africa, driven by its own people to take its rightful place in the global community and knowledge economy" that shapes the social fiber of the society (Seyfried, 1988). The world trend today, in private sector driven economy gave rise to the set up of non-formal learning methodologies and literacy programmes like NEEDS, You Win, Graduate-Internship and other forms of vocational training where various skills can be acquired.

By so doing, state governments like Delta, keyed into these initiatives to empower youths and leverage similar situations. The Delta State Government under her Three Point and now the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) agenda had a mission to harness the production potential of youths in Delta State through an era of rapid and sustainable socio-economic development drive that would transform the state into the most peaceful and industrialized state in Nigeria. The

objectives of the initiative according to (Eboh, 2016) include:

- Developing a platform, that will give the youths across the state opportunity to be employed with decency and dignity;
- Create employment opportunities through small scale entrepreneurship and value orientation amongst them;
- Promote indigenous culture through skill acquisition.

The proponents believe that given this platform, curbing youth unrest which is a major challenge in the state, economic empowerment, and development will be achieved. This eventually led to the establishment of Songhai Delta Vocational Training Centre, Amukpe Sapele, Entrepreneurship Capacity Centre Issele-Uku, Vocational Acquisition Centre, Kwale, Millennium Development Parks in Warri, Asaba and other skills acquisition centres in different Local Government Areas of Delta State. The policy objectives of these Vocational Training Centres (VTC) is in filling the gap towards generating employment by developing the youths in line with the poverty alleviation goals of Delta State government and combating the menace of unemployment among the youths.

However, the essence of these Vocational Training Centres (VTC) is yet to be fully felt at both individual and community levels especially within Delta State. This is due to the apparent poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and general under-development in the area even in the midst of plenty. The question is: Do these Vocational Training Centres have any bearing with the social, cultural and economic context of their beneficiary? It is doubtful whether, the social factors like attitude, family, opinion, lifestyle and interest of target participants are considered in the planning processes. Also cultural factors like values, language, norms and beliefs of the people are not put into perspective



during the implementation processes. Similarly, the economic context, occupational type, employment status and poverty levels of target participants are feared to have not been given adequate considerations in the process of designing such programmes. The extent to which these factors matter may equally not have been ascertained by the providing agencies. Again, one fundamental problem with non-formal education and training programmes is the top-bottom approach in their design and delivery process. This approach tends to make well intentioned programme look like imposition on the people with far many negative effects.

Vocational Training Centres (VTC) has existed in Delta State without visible impact on the area. Consequently, unemployment, illiteracy, youth restiveness and glaring under-development are still prevalent. There seems to be some disconnect between these centre's initiative and the unimpressive situation in Delta State.

Concept of Vocational Training

Vocational training is an instructional process which intends to prepare recipients for industrial or commercial occupations. It may be obtained formally either in trade schools, technical secondary schools or in on- job training programmes or more formally by picking up the necessary skills on the job. Vocational training generally prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels from a trade, a craft, technician, or a high professional practitioner position in careers such as engineering and accountancy. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities and are traditionally non-academic but related to a specific trade, occupation. It is sometimes referred to as technical/vocational education as the trainee directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques.

According to Akpodiete (2015), technological development and advancement revolve around a sound vocational/technical education programme. These programmes are the bedrock of technical breakthrough in our societies today. The existence of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mentally and physically equip individuals to live in the dynamic society of change. Vocational technical education enables individuals to function productively in industries, commercial and general occupation.

Vocational Skill Training Programmes in Delta State

The Delta State Government came up with the SMART agenda of Strategic wealth creation; Meaningful peace building platforms; Agricultural reforms and accelerated industrialization; Relevant education and health polices; and a Transformed environment through urban renewal (Akpodiete, 2015). The SMART agenda in Delta State is in six thematic areas designed to operate and impact positively through the vocational training centers for Deltans. The programmes are:

1. Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP)
2. Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP)
3. Productive and Processing Support Programme (PPSP)
4. Tractorization
5. Extension of loans and
6. Development of Agro-industries.

The policy thrust, when fully keyed into, would create jobs and wealth, diversify the economy, engage youths in production enterprises, nurture entrepreneurs and promote communication peace and security. However, there is the need for the people to have a clear understanding through aggressive awareness campaign, harmonized programme that would achieve the purpose through Technical and Vocational Training Educatio.



Amukpe Songhai Delta Integrated Vocational Centre

Songhai Delta Farms was created in 2002 with the 'Delta Beyond Oil' initiative is located 7km from the centre of Sapele town, along Amukpe road. Geographically, it is a cross road for all travelers headed for major states (Imo, Bayelsa and Rivers) in that part of the country. It is a meeting point with an important network of roads and increasing socio-economic development of Delta State. It is an Agro-Based Company Initiative Songhai Amukpe was commissioned as the centre to pilot training of Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship Programme (YAGEP) and Skill Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) on wealth and job creation for Deltans between the ages of 18-35 years through the SMART agenda, (Eboh 2015).

The programmes were strategically designed, planned and specifically tailored to tackle the problem of youth employment and produce lasting and sustainable prosperity across board. A development programme that would stimulate the growth of Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs). By definition; MSMEs are companies that employ less than 250 persons and available statistic indicate that 97% of all business in Nigeria employs less than 100" persons. Meanwhile, they account for about 50% of Nigeria's productive workforce and 46.54% of the Gross Domestic Production (GDP). The story is not different in other parts of the world. There are approximately 23 million small businesses in the USA and they employ more than 50% of the private workforce and generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, (GDP). Similarly, MSMEs account for 99.8% of all companies and 65% of business turnover in the European Union (Okowa, 2016).

The Amukpe Songhai after a 3-month training encouraged business management and entrepreneurship of 771 trainees (YAGEP 256 and STEP 515). In YAGEP, they were trained in agro-based

businesses of poultry, piggery, fishery and crop production with subject matter covering knowledge, enterprise management, leadership and life skills, group organization and group farming. While the STEP, was designed to train and establish unemployed youths in preferred skills or trade for job and wealth creation. Under this training, emphasis was on life skills and orientation course, vocational skills training, business and entrepreneurship. The areas include computer hardware, maintenance and repairs; catering and confectionary; electrical installations, repairs, barbing, bead making, cosmetology, decoration and event management, hair dressing and marketers; fashion design and tailoring; tiling, block moulding; Plaster of Paris (POP) and interlocking. The Socio- economic impacts cuts across, improved life styles, peace building, employment, wealth, equality and breaking of the white collar job jinx that has a hypodermic effect on local communities in Delta State.

Vocational Training Centres in Delta State and their influence the Social and Economic Lives of Nigerians

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Songhai Vocational Training Centre

Technical and Vocational Education and Training creates a better pathway from school to work. TVET programmes enjoin the individuals into the practical skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial tools that match labour market needs. Some of the components of TVET includes, gender equity, market based solutions, maintenance and evaluation, vocational career guide, life skills training, industry linkages, quality training centers and entrepreneurship training, (Eboh, 2015)

The visions of Songhai vocational training center was to combat unemployment, rural-urban drift and contribute to the development of small and medium scale enterprise among the



various Vocational Training Centres in Local Government Areas of Delta State. This idea is to fill a major gap in employment generation in the state, ensure self sustenance and skill acquisition by-developing youths in line with the poverty alleviation goal of the Delta State Government. The center provides employable skills training in various trades and equally makes the individuals to be employable and self-sustaining within and around its own communities. The center provides flexibility in terms of the entry requirement that accumulated all facts of individual in terms of age, education, places, pace and duration of study. The centre offers vocational training in auto general works, agro-based skills, business studies, electronics and electrical trades. The centre also apply the uses of ICT, multi media teaching, learning packages which includes self instructing print and audio-visual material, face-to-face counseling, workshop training, hands-on experience, interactive radio counseling, and the use of mobile phone for instant messaging and practical teaching at all the various centers.

Socio-Economic Factors and Songhai Vocational Skills Training Programmes

A discourse on social factors raises some questions. What is/are social factors? Indeed, one of the most confusing subject matters in educational and social sciences research is the delineation of social and cultural factors within the context of their causal and/ or effectual relationship with educational or sociological phenomena (Egunyomi and Ekom, 2010). The distinction often appears more complex when taken together with demographic variables. The tendency has generally been to easily mix up categorization whereby some social variables are considered along with economic variables, while often mixing demographic variables with cultural and social variable. However, this contradiction fits into Songhai

training centre as articulated by Delta State government because of peculiarities and circumstance of the state. Personality, attitude and lifestyles are social factors that constituted the nature of programmes and skills in Songhai vocational centre in Delta State. Across the three senatorial districts, peculiar norms and values, integrated and interacted to constitute programmes in Songhai skill acquisition centre.

Economic variables are no less intentioned in their internal relationship and their internal relations, source and cultural involvements. The most commonly identified economic indicators by various development scholars include income level, unemployment and under employment status: poverty level (Agabi 2000). These variables under poor government polices like privatization can come with undesirable economic consequences. Songhai Vocational Training Centre, leveraged on government polices like the SMART agenda to address those challenges. These systematical impacted on the lives of Deltans as it keyed into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The vocational training centre constantly produced a telling effect on their income. The skills they possess have gradually begun to respond to their economic status along the various lines of training.

Gender and Songhai Vocational Skill Training Centre

Several studies have been carried out on gender division of labour, explaining the relationship between sex and vocations. According Haralambos (2008), vocations such as hunting, lumbering and mining are predominantly male roles, while cooking, tailoring, fashion designing are largely female roles. Gender sensitivity in lifelong learning has received the nod of many international agencies in development. The Delta State Government identified and



applied 25-35years age bracket across the 270 wards in the state for the vocational training centre to harness the rich potentials of the teeming populace in Delta state.

Writing of gender and its place in determining the type of skill acquisition programme for beneficiary groups, Stromquist (2002) stated that gender is an element of social relationship that operates at multiple levels. It affects every day interaction, public institution work and household. The consequences of gender distinctions as Stromquist observed are notably reflected in politics, economic, social and cultural spheres. From this explanation, the ultimate goal of seeking to introduce the gender variable in vocational training centers in Delta state is to achieve gender equity at least to give women and men informal and effective right of participation in every sphere of live (UNESCO, 2003). Thus intervention agencies are critical to undertake community analysis/need surveys so that the profile and characteristics of all the elements in the community population are considered without any element of bias.

Literacy Level of Participants in Songhai Vocational Training Center

As a social variable, illiteracy or literacy transcends many areas of human (individual and national) development. It is a social variable with correlation value to many indices of development. Studies relate literacy to poverty or vice versa (Obanya, 2004). To (Torres, 2006), in combating the menace of literacy in the society, skill acquisition through systematic training for basic need is a core attribute of a healthy community. Basic needs vary according to individual's age, gender, context, culture, individual's interests, motivations and preferences. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of SMART in Delta State acts as panacea for eradicating illiteracy in the lives of the populace to

address critical social and economic problems of the illiterate populace. A literacy level of 40% per LGA in the 270 wards in the state was applied for full representation. Hence, it is given that the cultural integration of literacy practices into the life of the community is an important aspect of the vocational training centre initiative for sustainable skills acquisition and development.

Poverty Levels of Participants and Songhai Vocational Skills Training Programmes

The meaning and measurement of poverty has important implications for lifelong training of the populace in Delta State. International attention has impressively been drawn to the burden issues of poverty reduction now more than ever before. The focus is to reduce such poverty indicators as income poverty or human development; sustainable livelihood or social exclusion; current consumption and future security (Kareithi, 2000). This implies that understanding people's well-being and designing poverty intervention schemes will bring about social and economic security amongst the trainees. The Songhai vocational training center in Delta State was designed to attend to these challenges significantly for the populace who can apply relevant skills in the society, create wealth and employ labour.

Employment Status and Songhai Vocational Training Programmes

Employment related programmes are replete in most developing countries. Delta State, Nigeria is not an exception. This is as a result of glaring high rate of unemployment among the teeming youth and adult population.

Many reports of graduate unemployment at all levels of educational completion are given (Ngwu, 2001). Agencies such as NDE, NAPEPs NEEDS and SEEDS, were created out of the need to provide self-employment through vocational skill training for many of these unemployed to enable them gain



economic self reliance (Morell, 2013). Similarly, the unemployment rate in Nigeria has remained over and above 15% and 21% since the 21st century (Ngwu, 2001). The world recession which affect Delta state Nigeria has led to higher unemployment rates. The result is that most primary, secondary and post secondary school leavers revert to informal sector through vocational training centres for gainful employment.

There is therefore, the need to apply and applaud the idea of using Songhai vocational training skills centre to enhance better standard of living, socio-economic status, employment, wealth creation and overall development in the state.

Conclusion

Vocational Training Centre, precisely Songhai Deltga Farms in Delta State is an establishment capable of equipping Nigerians with employable skills for sustainable jobs, thereby bringing about positive change to human lives. The VTC equally librates people from poverty, creates employment, encourages income generation and removes the societal stigma that goes with poverty status in our communities.

Finally, there are opportunities in Songhai Vocational Training Center that can serve as a model for government and private sector for deprived communities. In this regards, the noticeable lapses in policy implementation of skills for sustainable development can be achieved

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- i. Delta State Government should create better awareness and ensure the application of new technologies, programmes and policies in the centers.
- ii. The Vocational Training Centers should all have a harmonized

training system with emphasis on indigenous technologies in skill acquisition.

- iii. The regulatory bodies of VTC in the state should come up with more attractive, accessible and improved quality of learning outcomes that would ensure relevance and connection with the world of work.
- iv. Vocational Training Centers should be embraced by all Deltans as a panacea for peace, poverty alleviation, enhanced quality of life and overall sustainable development in the state.

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