



APPLICATIONS OF THE STRATEGIES OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES IN ONDO STATE OF NIGERIA: HOW EFFECTIVE HAS IT BEEN?

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Abstract

Government introduced the youth empowerment schemes through which youths can acquire various entrepreneurial and vocational skills and thereafter engage in meaningful economic activities. However, since the introduction of the scheme, the problems facing the youths in Ondo State still persists. It is in view of this that the study investigated the strategies put in place to implement the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo State in order to determine their level of effectiveness in the course of implementing the scheme. Copies of questionnaire were administered to the beneficiaries and staffs of the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo State while members of staffs of the coordinating ministries and departments were further interviewed. Findings revealed that the ministries of youth and sports, adult, technical and vocational education, departments of youth development and that of vocational education, creation of vocational training centers and micro credit agencies, a defined method of selecting beneficiaries and supervision of the scheme were the strategies adopted to ensure a proper implementation of the scheme. Findings further revealed that the strategies were very effective at the early years of implementation but over the years, due to dwindling financial resources and support from stakeholders, the level of effectiveness of these strategies are no longer encouraging, hence, the scheme is said to be facing a lot of challenges in recent times.

Key Words: Youth, Youth Empowerment, Policy Implementation, Implementation, Strategies

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1. Introduction

Youth around the world represent a significant and dynamic force in society. It is also a general belief that governments, worldwide try to invest strategically in her youth so that they can successfully engage in the affairs of their communities. Additionally, youth development and empowerment are now essential, particularly in Africa's emerging nations where many young people find it difficult to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Fatoki (2019), the Nigerian youths are even worse-off, the rate of youth unemployment keeps rising on a daily and these youths, through whatever means had to fend for themselves, thereby making them to get involved in social vices. As a result, the government in Ondo State of Nigeria had to implement various empowerment programmes in 2008 in order to educate, empower, and develop young people to get them involved in worthwhile endeavours.

According to Akinmulegun (2014), Adedokun, Fatoki and Fasasi (2017), it appears that the training, the investment of the governments as well as the socialization of youth in Nigeria and Ondo State in particular seem to be inadequate. These inadequacies are evident from the persistent increase in the rate of youth unemployment and underemployment, insufficient formal and informal education, domestic culture of indiscipline, the enthusiasm to become rich overnight and, consequently, these inadequacies have resulted in their continuous involvement in criminal activities like international fraudulent acts popularly called “yahoo- yahoo” among the youths, rape, prostitution, drug trafficking, examination malpractices and involvement in election malpractices, among others.

In recent times, the government had further introduced more youth empowerment programmes to further consolidate the previous efforts of government as regards youth empowerment. Such programmes include the Skill Acquisition Programme (SAP), youth involvement Agriculture, Entrepreneurship Development Scheme (EDS), Renewable and Sustainable Green Energy Programme, reinvigoration of the education system, establishment of small and medium scale industries, the revitalization of ailing industries for the youth to work and the establishment of micro credit agency to make loans available to young entrepreneurs and farmers, among others. However, since the establishment of these various youth empowerment programmes, Government and society expect, among other things, to see a sharp decline in the level of unemployment and youth involvement in social vices. However, recent events have shown that this is not the case, with social vices among young people in Nigeria, particularly Ondo State, on the rise. It is on this basis that the research work is predicated, to assess the application of the strategies of the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo State with a view to ascertaining how effective these strategies had been and also putting forward how best to strengthen, modify or adjust the strategies in order to make them achieve their stated policy goals.

2. Research Questions

- i. What are the strategies put in place to implement the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo State of Nigeria?
- ii. How effective are the strategies used in implementing the youth empowerment schemes in the State

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3. Literature Review

Empowering youth, according to Adedokun, Fatoki and Fasasi (2017) implies establishing and sustaining the conditions that allow young people to behave independently and under their own authority, as opposed to being directed by others. Reiss (1988) defined youth empowerment as giving young people the knowledge and skills required for them to get involved effectively and meaningfully in the activities of that affects them as well as involving them in decision-making processes on matters that impact them.

The Concept of Youth Empowerment and development has gained increasing attention over years in the Nigerian society. Scholars are also conducting studies on these youth programmes to determine the impact they have on youth as well as the challenges which the programme face during implementation. Fayemi (2012), affirms that the best policy to reducing youth poverty is the introduction of youth empowerment policies. He admits that there have been numerous issues with young people, particularly graduates who are still looking for white-collar or government jobs. He claimed that most of these problems are completely being solved in Ogun State because of the implementation of the entrepreneurship and vocational programmes of the State government. He also discovered that the two major challenges facing the programmes are the fact that the programmes are not evenly spread among the youth in the state and also, the youth empowerment programmes are politically oriented.

According to Fatoki (2019), when it comes to the roles and significance of empowering young, it's critical for parents and policymakers to recognise that children are the nation's future, thus the nation should pay close attention to their attitude and inventiveness. The government must foster an environment that will allow young people to accomplish their goals. Lack of oversight and a vision for national development is the cause of the suffering of Boko Haram insurgents, militancy, armed robberies, con games, and other social aberrations. The development of youth depends on making investments in knowledge and abilities.

Ma'aji and Hassan (2012) assert that the administrative procedures used in Nigeria's empowerment programmes are excellent and sufficient to fully achieve the program's goals. They require sufficient fiscal support from the government, as well as sufficient tools, machines, equipment, and supplies for the program's recipients. Additionally, they stated that there is no reciprocal interaction between any philanthropists, local or international institutions, and the youth empowerment programmes. If such a thing existed, it would have solved the logistics and material resource issues that the plan ran into. The majority of the beneficiaries are clustered in metropolitan regions, according to evidences from the study. However, this defeats the government's intention to make rural areas habitable in order to slow the rural-urban movement. it was also revealed that the provision of power in rural regions can stop this trend. They believe there are potential for the plan to be expanded and improved on. In order to ensure that the country's crippling graduate unemployment becomes a thing of the past, the government, the youth empowerment plan management, the beneficiaries, and even the general public, all have a part to play.

Ajibade and Adenike (2012), in trying to proffer solutions to the plight of youth in Nigeria, Observe that, aside from the fact that the Nigerian governments' considerable economic initiatives portend an anti-youth stance. They contend that sectionalism, corruption, bottlenecks, and other barriers put in place at either the micro or macro levels of implementation prevent this

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population from accessing facilities for empowerment. However, they recommended that impact evaluation strategies should support government initiatives to improve the suffering of youth. Youth programme development and implementation involving the broader public and civil society will inevitably lessen youth susceptibility to immoral behaviour. Additionally essential to addressing youth issues is national renewal.

4. Methodology

The youth beneficiaries, the instructors at the various training facilities, and the staff members in charge of coordination from the departments of youth development and vocational education made up the population under study through which the strategies applied to implement the youth empowerment schemes in ondo state were evaluated. Since the beginning of the programme, 5,566 young people have benefited from it, and there are 84 trainers working at the vocational training centres. 11 people work for the department of youth development, while 15 works for the department of vocational education.

Five hundred eighty-five (585) questionnaire were distributed: 27 copies went to the trainers at the skill acquisition centres, while 557 copies went to the program's beneficiaries in Ondo State. In order to evaluate how successful the implementation techniques had been since inception, the trainers and members of the coordinating departments were also chosen for in-depth interviews. This statistic reflects 50% of the whole employees in the two Departments. Relevant textbooks, periodicals, and online resources were consulted. Additionally, information was gathered from the Ministry of Adult Technical and Vocational Education and the Ministries of Youth Development and Sports. While secondary data were analysed using content analysis, primary data were analysed using a chart and straightforward percentages.

5. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Results

This section focuses on the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the information gathered through the distribution of questionnaire to the programme participants and trainers in Ondo State. In order to gather data on the methods used to implement the Youth Empowerment Schemes in Ondo State, a total of 584 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. On the other hand, 497 copies of the questionnaire were recovered from the field, making up 85.1% of the total amount of questionnaire distributed. Hence, Four hundred and ninety-seven (497) people in total were surveyed for this study.

6. The Identification of the Strategies put in place to Implement the Youth Empowerment Schemes in Ondo State

This section provided answers to research question one by identifying the various strategies adopted to implement the youth empowerment schemes were identified. To do this, the study listed the strategies said to have been adopted to implement the schemes and asked the respondents to affirm if they were truly adopted. The strategies include vocational training centres, coordinating ministries to coordinate the affairs of the programme, supervising departments like the department of youth development to monitor the implementation of the various programmes, micro credit agencies to give loans to youth who have successfully learned a vocation and a well-designed selection process to ensure fair selection of youth into the programme. Also included are a design of how to adequately fund the programme, train the educators as well as motivating of all the staffs involved in the scheme.

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As shown in Figure 1, the total respondents ultimately acknowledged that coordinating ministries were in existence and they were able to establish and coordinate the activities of training centres in various local government areas of the State to train youth in different vocations. This implies that establishment of coordinating ministries are major strategies adopted for the implementation of youth empowerment schemes in Ondo state. Also, 489 (98.4%) of the respondents affirmed that supervising departments are one of the strategies adopted to implement the scheme. This was followed by a well-designed process of supplying all needed facilities for programme as 482 (97%) of the respondents admitted it as one of the strategies adopted in the under the youth empowerment scheme in Ondo state. Remarkably, coordinating ministries, supervising departments and well-designed process of providing facilities and infrastructures are the leading strategies affirmed to have been adopted in the course of implementing the youth empowerment scheme in Ondo State.

Furthermore, 443 (89.1%) of the respondents acknowledged the existence of micro credit agencies as an available agency created to empower the youth in Ondo State. It therefore indicates that micro credit agency was available for grandaunts of the programme to access soft loans on completion of the training. This was closely followed by well-designed means of funding the programme as 420, representing 84.5% of the respondents acceded to the fact that government designed a means through which the programme will be funded. While, 416 (83.7%) of the respondents recognized adequate training of the educators as an existing mechanism through which the government ensures that the beneficiaries are been trained by well qualified staffs. Inference could therefore be drawn that the existence of micro credit agency, well-designed means of funding and proper training of educators constituted the second class category of strategies adopted in the process of implementing the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo state.

As revealed in Figure 1, 336, representing 67.6% of the respondents admitted the existence of a merit based system of selection as one of the strategies adopted in implementing youth empowerment schemes. This shows that a merit based system of selection was rated above average. However, creation of vocational training centres is also one of the strategies adopted to implement the scheme. Although, this strategy was recognized by 234 (47%) of the respondents. In the same vein, 199 (40%) of the respondent admitted a properly designed method of motivating staffs as one of the strategies designed to implement the youth empowerment schemes of the State, and 194 (39%) of the respondents acknowledged proper channel of supervision as the least popular strategy adopted to implement the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo state. It could be deduced from the above that existence of vocational training center, a properly designed method of motivating staffs and proper channel of supervision are though adopted, but not prominent strategies in the state adopted in the course of implementing the skills acquisition programme. See Figure one below

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The Identification of the Strategies put in place to implement the Youth Empowerment Schemes in Ondo State

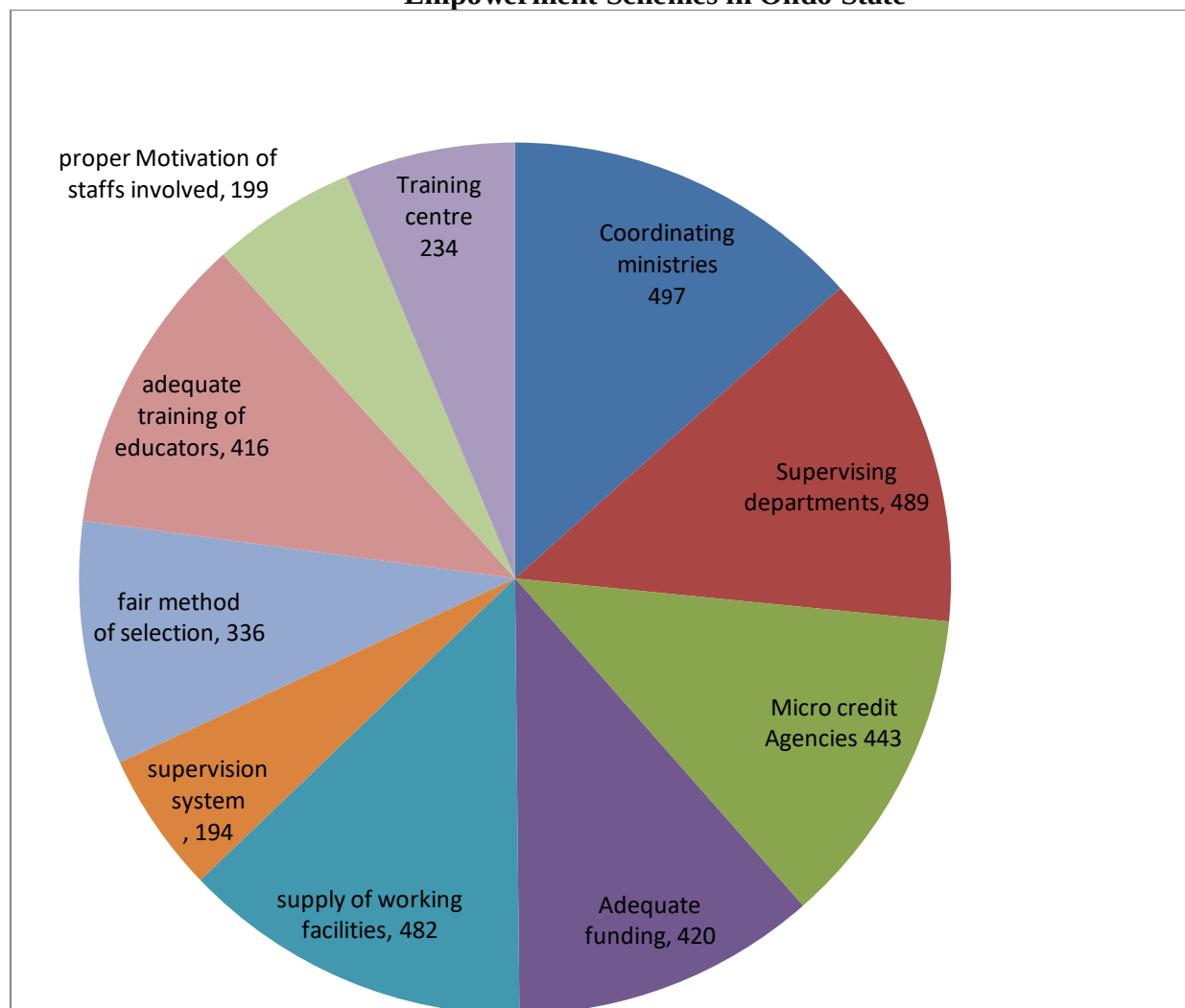


Figure 1:Source: Field Survery, 2021

7. Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Strategies put in place to Implement the Youth Empowerment Schemes

This section provides answers to research question two, it discusses the effectiveness of the various strategies introduced and used by the Ondo State government to implement the youth empowerment schemes in the State. It was believed that with the strategies in place, the programme will achieve its policy goals of empowering, developing and engaging youths in meaningful activities that can contribute to the development of the State. In order to determine the effectiveness of these strategies, the study rely solely on the data gathered during the interview sessions and the findings is provided below.

The Coordinating Ministries: There are two ministries, the Ministry of Adult, Technical and Vocational Education and the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports. The ministries are in

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charge of creating vocational training centres, employing trainers, selecting beneficiaries using a merit based system, distributing working tools to beneficiaries and also ensuring that the scheme achieve its policy goals and objectives. On the effectiveness of these ministries, findings revealed that at the inception of the programme, the ministries were fully equipped with the necessary facilities and tools to coordinate the implementation of the programme but as time goes on, the resources at the disposal of the ministries were no longer sufficient to ensure proper coordination across the eighteen local government areas of the State. By implication, one can conclude that the ministries were only effective in providing proper coordination and direction at the early years of implementing the programme and as a result of limited resources, the ministries could no longer function as expected.

The Supervising Departments: The departments- Department of Youth Development and the Department of Vocational Studies are saddled with the responsibilities of supervising the operations of the various empowerment programmes. The staffs of the departments are under the ministries and they are directly responsible for monitoring how the programme is performing. Findings revealed that the departments are understaffed and a lot of political factors undermined their operations in the course of selecting beneficiaries and employment of trainers. This has hindered the successful implementation of the scheme no doubt, but still it was revealed that they have been able to achieve considerable level of success over the years.

The vocational Training Centres: The Ondo State government, in order to implement and achieve the aims and objectives of the youth empowerment schemes, established vocational training centres, spread across the 18 local government areas of the State. This was to ensure that youths who are ready to acquire skills or vocations are provided the necessary platforms to do so free of charge. As regards the effectiveness of these centres, findings revealed that the State government have been trying to meet their needs, however, a lot are yet to be attended to in terms of machines, tools, buildings, and other facilities. This has limited the performances of the trainers and the beneficiaries.

Micro credit Agency: The State government also introduced micro credit agency to provide soft loans to people on the successful completion of the training programme as well as to provide loans to people who want to start up a business of their own. The Study revealed that the agency has been able to provide credit facilities to some youths to start a business of their own, however, not so many of them have been able to benefit from this as the agency has a limited capacity. There are many factors which undermined the performance of the agency like insufficient funds, inability of youth to repay loans as at when due and lack of collateral on the part of the youth to access huge amount of money from the agency limited the successful operation of the agency. In summary, many of the beneficiaries affirmed that the agency has not been effective in delivering services to the youths.

A Designed Platform for Selection of Beneficiaries: The government through the ministries also designed a platform to ensure a fair and merit based system of selecting beneficiaries into the programme. Findings revealed that the process has been compromised as the political actors do influence the selection process in order to favour members of their party, friends and relatives. Also, it was discovered that people who were been given the vocational tools they needed to start up business do not always engage in the business after all. Most of them sell off those tools in order to make money for other things and that is because they are not really

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interested in the business or vocation. Hence, the whole system has been compromised and youths only get to benefit from the system only if they have god fathers who are influential.

A Designed System of Supervision/Coordination/Monitoring: A system through which the programme will be monitored or coordinated was also designed. As revealed by the departments involved, the system only performed well at the initial stage of the programme, recently, findings revealed that the departments can no longer coordinate or monitor the scheme effectively through the eighteen local government areas of the State as a result of dwindling resources, notwithstanding, the ministries and departments are said to be working hard in order to ensure the schemes are implemented according to the policy document.

Adequate Funding: The government also designed a system of how it intends to disburse funds for the proper implementation of the programme. The study found out that the system is still very much in place but due to inadequate government revenue and a lot of projects and demands calling for government attention, the schemes have not been receiving sufficient funds from the government.

8. Conclusion

The implementation strategies of the youth empowerment schemes in Ondo State, based on the findings of this study was to a reasonable extent, effective in implementing the schemes at the inception of the programme, but in recent times, one could conclude that the level of effectiveness of these strategies are no longer encouraging as the schemes are already becoming unpopular among the youths and the generality of the people of Ondo State.

9. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended

- Government should ensure timely and adequate release of funds for the scheme in order to enable it achieve its goals and objectives. If funds are adequate, the coordinating ministries will be able to procure equipment needed for the scheme to thrive and also employ more staffs to ensure proper coordination
- The government should also ensure that only people who are interested in the scheme are selected, the selection should be merit based and government should also ensure that those who are benefiting from the free tools and facilities that government gives are using it for the intended purposes.
- The general public should also be sensitized on why they need to support the scheme in order to allow more youths who are interested to also benefit from it.

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