

## **The Role of the Catholic Church towards the Youths and Skills Acquisition in Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State-Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Youths are said to be the future leaders of any country in the world, Nigeria inclusive. It is also a general belief that government all over the world try to invest strategically in her youth for them to be able to assume the position of leadership when the time comes. In spite of this, it appears that the training, the investment of the Nigerian governments as well as the socialization of youth in Nigeria and Taraba State in particular, seem to be inadequate because many of them instead of contributing meaningfully to the development of the society, they are doing otherwise. The Catholic Church in one of its spirited effort to combat this problem introduced the Skills Acquisition Programme to develop, empower and engage the youth in the State. This theoretical study, therefore, assessed the role of the Catholic Church in skill acquisition, employment opportunities for youth beneficiaries, reduce their involvement in social vices, improved their standard of living. The main thrust of this paper, therefore, is to showcase to the world how the catholic church as contributed in youth development and also to continue to challenge the Church as a model and vital social institution to use its gifts, resources and experiences to help young people become useful citizens. The recommendations that were made include: (a) that the church should facilitate the on-going reforms in the financial sector with the aim of reducing the obstacles in obtaining soft loans. The church should influence government policy to properly stream-line an efficient process of registering a business or enterprise with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

**Keywords:** Skill Acquisition, Jalingo, Youth, Roles, Catholic Church

## INTRODUCTION

Youth, according to the population census of 2006, account for about 70 percent of Nigeria's population figure, which means that they are very important set of people that should not be taken for granted in the society. However, these young people face many challenges; such as high rate of poverty and unemployment, indiscipline, ignorance, inability to access vital information, and essential welfare services, which have made these young people lose hope in themselves. Some high levels of violence, crime and high risk of sexual behaviors of any age group are seen in the youth, leading many to label them as a source of the societal problem rather than its potentials (Skogan, 1986).

According to [1], except factors, like unemployment, indiscipline, illiteracy, poverty, and others, are genuinely tackled by the government of nations, the problems confronting the contemporary African youth and the communities where they live will remain unresolved and possibly get worse. To develop and empower youth for community development and participation, the government and other stakeholders (e.g., NGO's and religious bodies) must be involved in the business of youth empowerment by organizing youth programmes that will help to place them in a position where they can contribute meaningfully to the development of the society.

The Nigerian situation is such that the institutions of learning turn out a workforce that is not equipped with the right skills employers require [6]. In addition, there is a recorded massive rural-urban drift, especially amongst the youth, who feel that they can make it better economically in the metropolitan areas of the country [2]. In consequence, the unemployed simply have to fend for themselves and grapple with this new phenomenon to create jobs independently self-employment as it is called, and this has been the trend for over two decades. It is how the youth have fared in pursuit of economic power/empowerment (entrepreneurship) and what the church can do to support them that constitute the thrust of this paper.

According to [12], the informal sector has been described by the International Finance Corporation as a vibrant sector that accounts for one-third of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), creating 90% new jobs. In Nigeria, the Federal office of statistics shows that the sector is responsible for 70% of Nigerian economic activity and 60% of total employment. By implication, a majority of Nigerians work and own business in this sector. However, the inability of the government to effectively harness the potential of these entrepreneurs and link them to the real sector has continued to foster poverty and undermine the potentials of economic growth that is inherent in this sector.

According to [11], he observes that Nigeria has numerous business and investment potentials for the youths due to the abundant, vibrant and dynamic human resources it possesses. However, the impact of the current global financial crisis and its attendant mass unemployment and job losses has brought to the front burner the issue of skills acquisition and economic recovery. Thus, as the number of unemployed graduates in Nigeria continues to increase, there is a growing need to promote youth skills acquisition and self-employment avenues. This is because youth-run enterprises will have a direct bearing on employment if young entrepreneurs hire fellow youth and thereby address some of the socio-psychological problems and anti-social delinquency that arise from joblessness. In view of this fact, [9] observes that government efforts alone cannot suffice to address all the problems in the society; hence, this paper solicits for the all-hands-on-deck approach.

The failure of the government to train the youths on skills acquisition calls for all the social actors to be involved in handling the issue. In this regard, the role of the Catholic Church becomes relevant. The Catholic Church is very influential, with a rich history of social teachings and actions that could be used in the Nigerian context. Actually, the Catholic Church like other Christian denominations adheres to the teachings of Jesus Christ that uphold in an unequivocal term options for the poor. This means that other than feeding the poor spiritually, the Roman Catholic Church also attends to the material needs of the poor.

In the modern time, the church has played a prominent role in the society, especially with regard to poverty and poor people. The church strives to free all humans from hunger, misery, oppression, ignorance, institutionalized injustice and hatred which are rooted in humans' selfishness (Achunike 2004:131). This approach entails that stakeholders in the society should contribute towards tackling social problems in the public space including the Catholic Church to address social problems; because the church is a significant social institution. This paper, therefore, builds on the Role of the Catholic in Skills Acquisition of the Youths in Jalingo metropolis Taraba State Nigeria

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research method adopted for this paper is theoretical in nature; it also involves the review of published works that relates to the role of the Catholic Church in skills acquisition. This paper relied on secondary sources, daily newspapers, textbooks, academic journals, thesis/dissertations, internet sources, and other periodicals. The research method was basically descriptive in nature.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **System Theory**

The paper adopted the systems theory. It is an approach that sees an organization or society as a dynamic open system or as an entity consisting of a set of elements in interaction with one another which maintains itself in a state of relatively stable equilibrium by experiencing a dynamic and constant interchange of energy and information with its environment (Makinde, 2011). Systems theory views social organizations as a complex set of dynamically intertwined and interconnected elements. Every system includes inputs, processes, outputs, feedback and the environment in which it operates and with which it continuously interacts.

### **Application of this theory to the study**

The study of skills acquisition programme and the role of the Catholic Church in Jalingo State should be studied with the systems approach. The Systems theory offers a fruitful approach to this study because of its input-output conversion mode. Input in the form of demands and support are received from the environment and output in the form of programmes, policies, and laws which intend to bring about changes in the environment are injected into the society (system) after that. This theory will help us in understanding how the youth empowerment programmes are made and implemented through the input, processes and output analysis of the systems theory as the theory is used in analyzing policy processes in public administration, the Church and other social sciences in general. The Catholic Church stands as the system while the State which comprises of the youth, ministries, departments and others stands as the environment. The problem posed by youth unemployment, crime and the desire to provide jobs for the youth stands as an input or demands from the

environment on the political system and after the demands passed through the political system, the skills acquisition programme which stands as an output was introduced in the environment as a programme of government to empower youth in the State. After implementing the programme, feedback was also generated and that in turn serve as another form of demands on the government which might form the basis for the institution of another youth empowerment programme later in the future.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Church As used in this paper, the church is a community of believers in the Lord, Jesus Christ. It represents a microcosm of the larger society to which it is called to mirror the love of God as demonstrated in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. The church is also called to serve humanity through the love of God that it has received and shares with other members of the society.

Skill acquisition according to Chudi-oji (2013) can be said to mean a well-designed procedure of acquiring new ways and methods of carrying out specialized functions. The policy focus of government in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic has been on how people, especially the youth, can acquire vocational trainings in order to engage them in gainful activities. Hence, between 1986 and 2013, successive

The word youth connotes being young. It is a relative term, defined by a given age range, and with its meaning varying across cultures, groups, and countries. According to the definition given in the African Youth Charter (AYC) "youth means every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years". The National Policy on Youth Development (NPYD) also said anyone that falls within the age bracket of 18 to 35 years is a youth. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defined youth as young male and female between the age bracket of 15 and 24 years. In Nigeria, university graduates, aged 30 years and below, are recognized by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as eligible to serve the nation under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme (Ngwoke, 1992). Considering the definitions given by AYC, NPYD, and NYSC a youth in my own opinion is anyone who is young and who is between the ages of 18 and 30 years.

Youth are the future leaders of any country, Nigeria inclusive. To Aiyede (2009), the youth population in Nigeria constitutes more than two-thirds of the country's population of 140 million. To him, they are the backbone of development as well as the future leaders of any country in the world. He said "Indeed, if Nigeria is to be sustained as a viable entity, there must be a very good plan to tap the energy and resourcefulness of the youth population to prepare them for the position of leadership and to fasttrack economic development".

Similarly, Jega (2012), writing on the roles and importance of youth in the society, asserted that it is imperative for policy makers and parents to understand and appreciate that youth are the future of this country; therefore, their mindset and creativity should be of a great concern to the nation. There is need for the government to create an atmosphere favorable for the youth to achieve their desired objectives. The agonies of Boko Haram, militancy, armed robberies, scams, and other social deviance are the product of lack of guardianship and vision for national development. Jega concluded by saying that investing in knowledge and skill is critical to youth development.

Ojikutu (1998) also asserted that youth empowerment is very crucial in the attainment of development because the transitional period from childhood to adulthood is unquestionably a

challenge for many youth and for them to contribute their quota to national development, government must help their transformation in this regard. Ifenkwe (2012) also stated that the youths in Nigeria need to be nurtured and catered for. Youth characters are influenced by both genetic inheritance and learning. Genetically inherited features are fixed and are difficult to change, while learned behavioral patterns can be modified with desirable results. The popular saying "as a tree is inclined, so shall it fall" aptly underscores the need to appropriately handle the conflicting personality, motivational and developmental factors associated with youth, and the transition from youth to adulthood.

The scriptures (Proverb 22:6) admonishes us to "train up a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The youth can be likened to a flood. "When there is no control system for a flood, a terrible disaster to all and sundry is usually the uninvited consequence. Several authors like Ejiogu (2001); Onochie (2008) have described the failure to show interest in youth empowerment and development as a grave and dangerous omission. Hence, the need to empower and cater for them.

Ozohu-Suleiman (2006) noted that Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment. According to him, Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among them in all developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Zakaria (2006) believes that "the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocateurs." These include desperate politicians and religious demagogues. Zakaria strongly believes that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences. Therefore, government and other groups in the society such as NGOs, to put a stop to social vices have to initiate youth empowerment programmes, such as the skill acquisition programme, entrepreneurial programmes, etc. to provide an alternative source of livelihood for youth in the absence of white collar jobs.

### **The Church and Youth skills Acquisition/Entrepreneurship:**

The church encourages Christians to work hard and not to be slothful in their businesses. Thus, there is the need to be diligent and conscientious in one's chosen field of endeavour. On this note, the ministry of the church is vital in modeling a holistic pattern of entrepreneurial skills acquisition because the socio-economic challenges facing the Nigerian youth and indeed Nigeria as a nation are growing. This presupposes the need to mobilize and develop a unified voice to question the idea of business as usual and challenge the status quo. Hence, as the church educates and equips young people to forage into skills acquisition, some of the advantages include that the enterprises will also create linkages between youth skills acquisition and other economic actors.

- a. In addition, youth skills acquisition promotes innovation and resilience as it encourages young people to find new solutions, ideas and ways of doing things through experience-based learning.
- b. Another factor is that youth skills acquisition tends to be responsive to new economic opportunities and trends because it is increasingly accepted that they can present alternatives to the organization of work, the transfer of technology, and a new perspective to the market economy.

In view of this, the Catholic Church is committed to model grace by sharing its vital gifts and experiences with the youth in order to weave them into a tapestry of utility in the society. More so, the Catholic Church brings the gift of good management and administration coupled with efficiency

of operation, space utilization, relationship, money and effective decision-making. These are salient virtues that are learned and practiced to support the work of the Kingdom of God as expressed first in the local church and in the many causes of Christ in the world. They are, therefore, rich gifts that the Catholic Church communicates to the society as the body of Christ and a faithful witness in the world.

### **Factors Militating against the Roles the Catholic Church and Skills Acquisition for the Youth in Jalingo Metropolis**

Thus, to achieve this target, there are some obstacles that the Catholic Church will have to contend with. These include the issue of:

**Motivation:** because most youth are not motivated to start and manage businesses because of the supposed harsh environment that affect business growth in Nigeria.

**Lack of finances:** Even when there is some motivation; young people are often frustrated by the lack of funds or inability to access start-up capital or seed grants.

**Basic management skills:** most young people do not have the basic skills to manage small businesses. There are a good number of young Nigerian graduates who desire to own and manage their businesses but in some cases the choice of business is usually different from their area of academic specialization. Hence, since the skills for being a successful entrepreneur differ, they need to learn more techniques of managing a business in order to achieve set goals. **Infrastructure:** The infrastructures that directly or indirectly affect business success are not adequately provided for in Nigeria. Some of such amenities include electricity supply, good roads, portable water and effective transportation.

**Information:** vital information about the availability of raw materials requires technology. This include effective business management, access to capital and other capacity building initiatives.

**Mentoring/Coaching:** recent studies have revealed the importance of having someone more experienced than one, to look up to, in whatever endeavour one is involved in. The outcome of mentoring and coaching programs has been tremendous because it provides the protégée with the opportunity to share one's problems and challenges with a more experienced person who can guide and offer necessary assistance when needed.

**Government Policies:** for a budding enterprise to blossom it needs the required conducive business environment to grow. Government is expected to create this type of environment by consciously formulating and implementing policies that will make it possible and this cannot be overemphasized. As the church works hard to support the youth through these and other challenges, some of the virtues and support that should be inculcated and given to these young skills acquisition youths include:

### **Ways to overcome these Obstacles/challenges of the Roles of the Catholic Church in Skills Acquisition in Jalingo Metropolis**

- i. **Vision:** it guides the potential entrepreneur and makes him aspire towards greatness. Having a vision is like having a road map a morale booster. It also provides an avenue for honest self-assessment. Nigerian youth should have both personal and national visions that can guide them on their way to the top.
- ii. **Finance:** there is no doubt that capital is one of the crucial factors that affects business. The church should network with both the government and the organized

private sector (OPS) to make funds available to budding and existing entrepreneurs. Accessing support from the OPS as a form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will go a long way in helping the youth achieve more, rather than being idle. However, in the absence of these forms of support, the youth can explore alternative sources of funds like loans from friends and family amongst others. If a business idea is well communicated and people can explicitly see the value derivable from it, it is likely that those sources would assist.

- iii. **Failure:** failing in a particular venture or endeavour does not infer that the person is an all-round failure. Failure is part of growth and young people should see it from the positive angle. It is not a crime to fail in an endeavour, but many people fail to learn vital lessons from their past mistakes.
- iv. **Growing slowly and steadily:** some youths are so eager to make millions in the first few years of venturing into business that they lose focus before reaping the dividends from their labour. This should not be so. In most cases, the few years of starting a business need to be used to create the right systems and consolidate on whatever one has been able to achieve. It is imperative to know that success is gradual, and young people should be willing and equipped to give it all it takes to reach the apex.
- v. **Getting requisite business management skills:** there is more to handling or managing skills than just personal interest or suggestions from people. Thus, any viable business management techniques should be adaptable in the real business world and young people who want to start businesses should be aware of what a business plan is and its importance to success.
- vi. **Partnership:** studies have shown that most entrepreneurs in Nigeria (Including youth) feel more comfortable working alone as sole-proprietors. **vii.**

This may not be helpful in all cases because people can pull resources together to form a network or alliance that can achieve more than if they were operating as single entities or entrepreneurs. More importantly, as a social advocate, the church should impress it on the government of the day to adopt a holistic approach to solving social problems. This is because young entrepreneurs can be fully utilized to cause a turn-around in the economy. Hence, since it is the main responsibility of government to provide social infrastructures, the unavailability or inadequacy of these basic needs will hamper any effort to achieve the desired result.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve the targets that have been set out in this paper, the following recommendations are suggested: Since the access to finance is key to the success of any entrepreneurial venture, the church should prod the on-going reforms in the banking sector this includes:

- i. The recapitalization of commercial banks and the formation of micro-credit finance banks that are run by individuals and private organizations to replace community banks that were not functional. This should be done with the aim of reducing the bottlenecks involved in obtaining soft loans for young entrepreneurs who do not generally have the required collateral to be credit worthy to banks who only want to make profits from their investments.
- ii. Another important area where the church can influence government policy so that it can be properly streamlined for efficiency in the process of registering a business or enterprise with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in Nigeria. Currently, the processes

involved appear simple but for many it is expensive in the sense that CAC offices are not located at the grassroots (i.e. Local Government Headquarters) where many of these young business entrepreneurs live and operate. For them, going to the state capitals where the CAC offices are located are expensive and time consuming. The church can assist the youth in getting through this simple but apparently frightening process. Hence, many young people run businesses without registering them officially. If the Catholic church steps in to support them through this process, then many more people can delve into the arena of business.

- iii. Currently, the electric power system in Nigeria is nothing to write home about and this is a very crucial factor for youths who are often unable to procure and maintain generating sets from the onset of their business life. Thus, it is recommended that the Catholic church should also try to influence government policy in this area. This will ensure that the environment will be conducive for young people to nurture and pursue their business ideas.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we discover that government's policies and projects have not really empowered the youth and given them substantial means and opportunities to participate constructively in the economy.

Although we did not specifically deal with the reasons behind this development, it is apparent that government's economic reforms did not open up the national economy to the global economy and many of the policies and programmes did not have any direct bearing on the situation of the youth in Nigeria. More so, over the years, most of the national social structures recorded some level of growth but collapsed at the long run while the youth population has continued to grow. Thus, unless something is done to enable young people to become fully integrated into the mainstream of the society, they will continue to be a social burden on the nation. On the strength of these observations and given the conditions under which the average youth struggles to find his feet economically, we pointed out that one viable option towards empowering the youth is for the church to step into the terrain and offer valid support and skills acquisition/entrepreneurship training and packages to young people.

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