

Operation, Problems, and Prospects of Youth Employment Programmes in Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Oyo State like many of its counterparts in Nigeria is faced with the problem of a high number of its young population lacking access to employment opportunities. The State Government having realized the extent of the problem had to embark on several initiatives with the aim of reducing youth unemployment in the state. Evaluating the impact of any programme is an invaluable element required in policy formulation thus, the study was conducted to investigate the operation, problems and prospects of youth employment programmes in the State, using the Skill Acquisition Scheme and the Youth Empowerment Scheme- Oyo (YES-O) as case studies. A survey methodology was adopted for the study with structured questionnaires designed for four categories of respondents: trainees under the Skill Acquisition Scheme, tutors under the Skill Acquisition Scheme, administrators of the two employment programmes in the State, and cadets of the YES-O programme. The data gotten from respondents were analyzed through the help of the statistical software, SPSS. To ensure a lucid and simple analysis, descriptive statistics measures such as tables and percentages were used in interpreting results gotten from the study. The results obtained showed that many factors have militated against the ability of the two schemes to achieve their objectives. The State Skills Acquisition Scheme was characterized by problems ranging from inadequate funding, lack of an enduring exit strategy, lack of start-up capital, ineffective monitoring and supervisory mechanism, absence of literacy and numeracy components, and poor sensitization. The YES-O programme encountered challenges such as salary-related issues, absence of clearly defined exit strategy, duplications of duties and the inability of cadets to acquire relevant skills useful in the labor market. The recommendations for the improvement of the Skill Acquisition Scheme include the expansion of channels of enrollment into the scheme through collaboration with social groups, the establishment of more training centers, the creation of linkages with Micro Finance Institutions, and the adoption of Public Private Partnership (PPP) developmental strategy in the scheme. With regard to the YES-O programme, components such as entrepreneurship education, vocational training, and business management skills should be incorporated into the programme to cater for cadets in the post YES-O employment period.

Keywords: Unemployment, Skill Acquisition Scheme, YES-O, Poverty

1. Introduction

Youth are the future of every society as their energy and skills contribute to the development of any society. However, perceptions on who really is a youth vary among major development stakeholders such as the government, international organizations, and individuals.

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The term youth generally implies a period of life between childhood and adulthood. In most countries, Adulthood is officially attained at the age of twenty-one. This may however, vary from one society to another particularly in some African settings and cultures. The concepts of youth employment and empowerment are rapidly gaining importance in the developmental agenda of various governments, regional entities and international development organizations with the World Bank Youth Report (2005) stating that governments, donor agencies, and civil societies must be guided by a comprehensive national perspective in their efforts aimed at tackling poverty among young people.

Nigeria, like most developing countries in the world is faced with myriad of problems such as poverty, terrorism, political instability and most importantly unemployment. In recent years, increased unemployment rate has affected many young school leavers who fall within the working age but have been denied job opportunities. Graduate unemployment in the words of Dabalen et al (2000), accounted for about 32% of the unemployed labor force between 1992 and 1997. This has compelled the Nigerian government as far back as the 1960s to start implementing programmes aimed at tackling the unemployment situation in the country. Providing employment was made one of the cardinal objectives of the first developmental plan; an objective aimed at not just creating employment but to also to train people in skills that will meet the challenges of an ever dynamic economy. The above was indeed the catalyst for the establishment of a number of employment programmes such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Scheme (NEEDS) and many other similar programmes funded by various stakeholders like state governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations like the World Bank and the United Nations.

Unemployment is one the developmental problems facing every developing economy in the 21st century. Agu (2008) pointed out that there has been an exponential increase in youth unemployment in the country. In his words, youth unemployment in the country has caused serious problems that past and successive administrations have not been able to find a lasting solution. Although successive governments in Nigeria since independence have implemented several programmes to address the problem of youth unemployment and poverty, the assessment of the various contributions of such programmes remains scanty compared to the huge amount of resources committed to them (Egware, 1997). In the words of Yakubu (2010), youth employment and poverty alleviation programmes implemented in the last few decades have failed to confront the multidimensionality of poverty as most of these programmes were unable to respond to the exact needs of the poor. Programmes such as the NDE, FEAP, Better Life Programme, NAPEP, NEEDS have all been affected by common problems; such as: inadequate funding, project duplication, gross inefficiency, poor coordination of programmes, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability (Obadan, 2001).

At the state level, the establishment of the Oyo State Youth Development centre was one of the programmes implemented to tackle the unemployment situation in the state. The establishment of the centre followed the guidelines of the National Youth Policy that was established in 1968 with the objective of training out-of-school youth graduates who are unemployed in various vocational trades such as carpentry, fashion designing, hair dressing, shoe-making etc, thereby enabling them inculcate an entrepreneurial culture that would enable them to be self-dependent. Wale-Saka (2005) in his evaluation of the Oyo State Youth Development Centre noted that, several problems militated against the success of the scheme. He is of the opinion that, the skill acquisition scheme faced challenges such as problems of inadequate training materials, dearth of funding, poor remuneration of tutors, insufficient number of tutors etc, all of which contributed to its failure. In light of this, therefore, the questions to guide this research study include the following:

- a. Have the youth employment programmes implemented in the State improved the skills and economic well being of youths in the state?
- b. Are the policies of the various employment programmes in the State well formulated, do they give room for innovations in order to achieve better results?

The objective of this research is:

- a. To assess the operation, problems and prospects of youth employment programmes in Oyo State.
- b. To make recommendations on how the employment programmes implemented in the State can be made more effective in addressing youth unemployment.

This is the gap the paper intends to fill in advancing the literature on the workings of empowerment schemes in Nigeria. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: section 2 presents the review of literature in the study area, section 3 makes a brief description of the Skill Acquisition Scheme and the YES-O programme, section 4 present data sources, sampling procedures and modeling techniques. Section 5 presents the empirical estimations and analysis of the results, while section 6 concludes with summary, conclusions and policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current State of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Young people are key players needed for the rapid growth and development of all countries. However, in most countries, young people are constrained by factors that limit their contributions to the society; chief among these is the lack of employment opportunities. Employment is one of the basic indicators of the economic health of a nation; its consequences do not only manifest itself in household poverty but also lead to losses to the economy as a whole in terms of potential output and reduction in human capital (World Bank, 2009).

Youth unemployment has become a critical issue in the political agenda of developed and developing countries even though empirical evidence show that, the nature of the problem is quite different in these two groups of countries with more educated people being unemployed in less developed countries. The world population is estimated to contain about 1.2 billion young people (aged 15 to 24) with 87% of them living in developing countries (United Nations, 2007). The share of the youth who are employed declined from 49.2 to 44.5 percent between 1997 and 2007 (ILO, 2008), even though youth unemployment rate is seen as one of the major indicators of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and accounts for about one-half of global unemployment (World Bank, 2006).

In most countries, the ratio of youth- to- adult unemployment rate equals three (ILO, 2006), which clearly shows the difficulties young people face in accessing employment opportunities in the labour market. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 3 in 5 of the total unemployed are youth (ILO, 2006), and an average of 72% of its youth population lives below poverty line (World Bank, 2010).

Unemployment is one of the key developmental problems facing every developing economy in the 21st century. The Nigerian economy since the attainment of political independence in 1960 has undergone fundamental structural changes. The domestic structural shifts have however not resulted in any significant and sustainable economic growth and development. In the Second National Development Plan, the problem that informed the policy adopted on employment was the emergence of the high rate of unemployment among the youth. Findings show that 70 percent of the unemployed were youth between 15 and 23 years of age (Adebayo, 1999).

Available data from the National Universities Commission (2004) pointed out that, massive unemployment exists among most graduates of tertiary institutions in the country; a situation that was said to be traceable to the disequilibrium between labor market requirements and essential employment skills of these graduates. The rate of unemployment in the country was at a considerable figure of 1.7% per annum during the '60s with the total unemployment rate among the youth (aged between 15 and 29 years) being 10.5%. In the 1970s, the fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985) noted that urban unemployment had risen between 8% and 15% in the urban centers with Oyejide (1974) noting that the rate of open urban unemployment only revealed the visible aspects of the problems of unemployment situation in the country.

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was implemented in the country in 1986, a development that led to the closure of many industries while the few that survived were forced to retrench a large percentage of their workforce; a situation which further increased the country's unemployment rate. Specifically, total disengagements from the federal civil service rose from 2,724 in 1980 to 6,294 in 1987 (Oduola, 2001). In recent years, increasing unemployment has affected professionals and graduates. According to a 1974 survey reported by Aigbokan (2000), graduate unemployment accounted for less than 1% of the unemployed in 1974, but by 1984 the figure rose to 4% for urban areas and 2.1% in rural areas. Graduate unemployment in the words of Dabelen et al (2000) accounted for about 32 percent of the unemployed labour force between 1992 and 1997.

Although, a conflicting opinions exists about the authentic unemployment rate in the country. For instance the official publication of the federal government during the Obasanjo administration stated a total reduction in unemployment rate by 50 %. However, the published census figures (2007) put the unemployment rate at 70%. It is also interesting to note that, the National Bureau of Statistics (2011) in a survey noted that the country's unemployment rate increased to 23.9% in 2011 compared to the 19.7% figure in 2009 and 2010. "The Nigerian unemployment Report 2011" prepared by the Bureau showed that the unemployment rate was higher in rural areas (25.6%) than in urban areas (17.1%) in 2011. The results of the survey showed that people within the ages 0 and 14 years constituted 39.6% of the total unemployed, with those within the ages 15 and 64, who are the economically active population constituting 56.3% while those aged 65 and above constituted 4.2%. The data above particularly shows that large percentage of the economic population (working age) is unemployed which has a consequent effect on the economic growth and development of the country

Table 1: Nigeria's Unemployment rate by Age Grouping

| Age Group | Unemployment Rate (%) |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| 15-24 | 41.6 |
| 25-44 | 17 |
| 45-59 | 11.3 |
| 60-64 | 16.7 |

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2011).

2.2 Youth Labour Market Segmentations

The labour market for young people can be conceptualized into two contrasting ways: the first making emphases on competition between youth and other job seekers; the second case making emphases on the premise that youth are competing in a separate and distinct labour market determined by the manner in which employers characterize and recruit young workers. In the case of the former, young workers are seen to be at a disadvantage because of the view that, they lack work experience and work-related skills needed to function in the work place (Hasluck, 1998). Employers generally screen and discriminate between potential employees in order to achieve a match between job applicants and job requirements.

As a consequence, the least “employable” individual can be expected to remain out of employment for a long time, a condition reducing the probability of the individual being employed in the future (Hasluck, 1998). Makeham (1980), Laynard (1982), and Raffe (1984) were of the opinion that youth unemployment reflects the demands of employers at a given period of time that is youth unemployment is cyclical in nature. In their opinion, in periods of economic recessions, a rise in the general level of unemployment is most times accompanied by a greater percentage rise in the level of unemployment among young people.

Conversely, during periods of expansions, young people are recruited in disproportional rates than adults leading to a faster reduction in youth unemployment. The cyclical sensitivity of youth unemployment can also be explained in terms of investment made by employers in job specific trainings (Oi, 1962). He was of the view that employers would seek to retain workers whom they have invested on (in terms of job specific trainings) in periods of recession since they would seek to gain a return on such investment in order to stay productive, thus diverting the full effect of recession on less skilled and untrained workers. This view was corroborated by Reder (1964) who was of the opinion that employers may wish to retain skilled workers if they believe that skilled workers possess an overall productive superiority due to the ability to use their skills in many operations. However, in a contrasting view, Reder (1965) opined that the cyclical nature of youth unemployment is caused by the inconsistent hiring standards of employers. When there is a fall in the demand for labour, it generally leads to employers tightening hiring and job qualification standards across the entire skills ladder. Consequently, workers displaced compete with semi-skilled workers for jobs, with individuals who are least employable pushed to the bottom of the skill hierarchy.

In reality, the youth represents the unskilled workers with their demand declining in periods of recession. As a result, they get squeezed out of employment, as employers raise their requirements in terms of experience, previous training and skills. In sum, Reder (1964) believed that changes in industrial and occupational structures of jobs reflected in changes in skills and labour requirements of employers had minimal effect on the trends of youth unemployment in the past decades, but that youth unemployment has been sensitive to the general economic activity (recessions and expansions), and that the probability of youth having access to employment opportunities can be improved by making them employable through training.

The exclusion of young people from certain sectors of the labour market and the existence of some jobs exclusively for them has challenged the view that, the youth labour market is undifferentiated, an assertion which is in direct conflict with Reder’s hypothesis. Ashton and Maguire (1983), and Ashton, Maguire, and Spilsbury (1990) were of the view that the cause of the division of the labour market into non-competing groups arose from employers viewing labour as non-substitutable.

The structure of the labour market was divided into individual and group level competitions with three (3) levels of competitions identified; namely: sheltered entry point into employment, where competition is restricted to young people; competition restricted to adults and exposed points of entry, where adults and youth compete directly for available jobs (Ashton, Maguire, and Garland, 1982). Thus, the characteristics of the youth labour force are determined by the types of jobs employers (public and private) make available for young people. Therefore, we can make a conclusion that shifts in the structure of the labour market might have been caused by an industrial change or through the effect of a new technology employed which was accompanied by changes in production techniques and skill requirements (Maguire and Spilsbury, 1990).

3. Oyo State Skill Acquisition Scheme and the YES-O Empowerment Programme

3.2 The Oyo State Skills Acquisition Scheme

In its efforts aimed at reducing youth unemployment and poverty in the state, the Oyo state government train unemployed youths in the acquisition of skills and trades such as computer studies, fashion designing, hair-dressing, barbing, catering services, auto-mechanic, electrical installations, bricklaying, panel-beating, carpentry, cobbling etc. In order to ensure a smooth running of the programme, Skills Acquisition Centers were established in eight (8) local government areas of the state, as follows: Yemetu, Ososami, Iganga, Awe, Arowomole, Omi, Ilegbo, and Igbowo. Participants interested in the Oyo State Skill Acquisition Scheme obtain entry forms through three channels; the Ministry for youth, Ministry of women affairs and any local government council office nearest to them. After the completion of the forms, interviews would be conducted for interested candidates, and the quota system is applied in the recruitment process of the candidates for the scheme.

The Skills Acquisition centre runs both short term (3 months) and long term courses depending on the vocation for which candidates were picked. For instance, trainees in vocations such as catering and hotel management, and electrical installations undergo their training for three months, while other trades offer a compulsory training period of six months. The training centre is headed by a General Manager employed by the state government, who has the sole responsibility of ensuring a smooth running of the activities of the centre. Training in the Skills Acquisition centre is done through three groups of working trainers; traditional artisans/craftsmen, training consultants employed in vocations such as catering and the relevant personnel in the ministries of youth and women affairs. The training workforce is recruited into the scheme through three channels:

- a. Application by the intending trainer followed by an interview by the officials of the local Government council or the two ministries involved.
- b. Through liaison with vocational organizations.
- c. Through placements by private firms.

The trainers/tutors of the Skills Acquisition scheme are paid their remuneration monthly instead of being paid apprenticeship fees as it is being done in other climes. The amount paid to tutors ranges between N10, 000 – N20, 000, in trades such as electrical installations, hair dressing and fashion designing, while trainers in computer training and catering receive a monthly salary of N21, 000 – N30, 000. In its bid to ensure a proper and efficient operation of the programme, officials from the Ministry of Women Affairs make periodic visits to the Skill Acquisition centers. A larger percentage of trainees and tutors confirmed that most monitoring activities of the scheme are carried out on a quarterly basis, except in the short term courses where monitoring is done on a monthly basis. According to tutors of the scheme, observations are made on key components such as: the attitude, punctuality and commitment of trainees; the amount and state of equipment available in the centre; performance of trainees; and the attitudes and performance of tutors during periods of inspection.

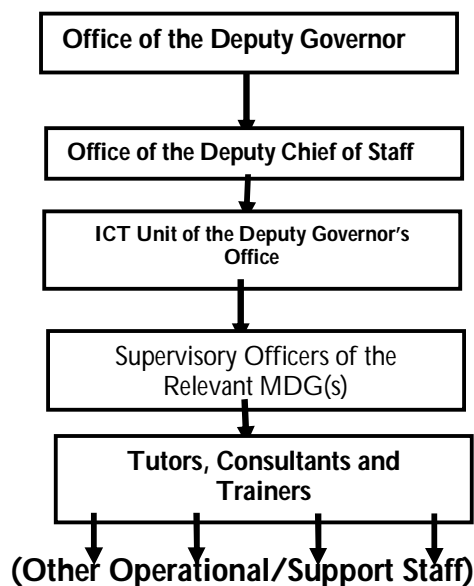
3.3 Youth Empowerment Scheme-Oyo State (YES-O)

YES-O is an acronym for the Youth Empowerment Scheme of Oyo State. The programme was established by the Governor Abiola Ajimobi led administration to provide a platform for unemployed youth to be empowered in the state. The programme is structured to provide the unemployed youth in the state to acquire the necessary skills for a period of one year to enable them fit-in for job placements and entrepreneurship; with the primary aim of integrating a large percentage of them into the state civil service, while others could pursue personal endeavors. Orientation of cadets began in December 2011 at the NYSC orientation camp in Isheyi, Oyo State, for a period of two weeks; exposed to the core departments in the scheme.

However, deployment of cadets to the various departments only began in May 2012, at the onset, a total of 150,000 youth applied online, out of which 20 000 were selected for the 6 pivot components of the programme which include; Environment, Works and Transportation, Emergency, Health, Agriculture, and Education. Participants interested in the YES-O scheme applied online through the programmes website, where necessary details such as candidate's age, sex, marital status, academic qualifications, and the department they wish to be enrolled in are asked. After few weeks, names of successful candidates are shortlisted at the scheme's website with candidates advised to proceed to their places of posting for the collection of engagement letters.

In the earlier stages of the programme, five key components were earmarked (as stated earlier) but due to the large number of candidates, the scheme has been expanded into 13 departments which include; Education, Works, Mechanical and Electrical, Planning Research and Statistics, Health, Oyo State and Road Transport Management (OYRTMA), Environment, Vehicle Inspections, Agriculture, Administration and Supplies, Public Building, High Way Laboratory together with Administrative staffs in all the Local Council Offices and Ministries in the state secretariat. The organizational structure of the YES-O scheme is illustrated below:

The Organo-Structure of the O-YES Scheme



The functions of the various departments in the scheme are listed below:

Table 2: Functional Distribution and Co-ordination of the YES-O Scheme

| Departments | Functions | Coordinating office/official |
|--|---|--|
| Health | Maintenance of state owned health centers and hospitals, emergency services | Oyo State Hospital Management Board. |
| Planning, Research and statistics | Collection of data from various government agencies for budget preparation | Ministry of Finance |
| Environment | Sanitation, cleaning of roads, markets and drainages. | Yard superintendent in the Ministry of Environment |
| Public Buildings | Maintenance of government Owned infrastructures | Ministry of Housing, state secretariat |
| Works | Construction of public infrastructures | Ministry of works and Transport |
| OYRTMA | Maintenance of road safety and Traffic control | Yard superintendent, OYRTMA |
| Education | Teaching in state government owned primary and secondary schools | Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), Oyo state. |
| Vehicle Inspection | Checking road worthiness of vehicles, impounding of vehicles, and arrest of defaulting drivers. | State Vehicle Inspection Office. |
| High way laboratory | Testing and evaluating materials to be used for constructing public infrastructures. | Ministry of Works and Transport. |
| Mechanical and Electrical | Maintenance of state owned power plants and street lights | Ministry of Works and Transport |
| Agriculture | Provision of agricultural extension services | Ministry of Agriculture |
| Admin and supply | Administrative services and provision of administrative materials for all government ministries/agencies. | ICT |
| Administrative staff in Local Government Council office and Ministries | Providing clerical and administrative duties such as receiving files, recording files, preparation of memos, minutes etc. | Officer in charge of cadets in the various ministries. |

Source: Field Survey by the Author, 2012

4. Research Methodology

4.2 Research Design and Instrument

The aim of the study is to analyze the operation, problems and prospects of youth employment programmes in Oyo State.

To achieve this objective, a qualitative method (primary data) of analysis was used, involving four categories of respondents; trainees of the skill acquisition scheme, tutors of the skill acquisition scheme, YES-O cadet members and Administrators in charge of the two schemes were randomly selected mostly from the pool working in Ibadan, the State capital. Questionnaires were designed for each category of respondents, with questions framed to include components relating to the mode of operation, problems and prospects of the two employment schemes under study. In view of the scope of the study, questionnaires were administered in two skill acquisition centres in Ibadan (Omi and Yemetu); out of which 120 trainees and 11 tutors participated in the process. In addition, 20 administrators and 100 YES cadets working in the State capital also took part in the data collection process. In order to ensure high validity of result, consultations were made with college researchers and the research supervisor all of whom ensured that, all key components of the study were appropriately captured.

4.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data gotten from respondents were analyzed through the help of the statistical software, SPSS. To ensure a lucid and simple analysis, descriptive statistics measures such as tables and percentages were used in interpreting results gotten from the study.

5. Empirical Analysis

5.2 Operation of the Skills Acquisition Programme

Due to the limit in the scope of the study, a structured questionnaire was administered to 120 trainees at the Yemetu and Ido training centres. On getting to the centers, the researcher observed that, only some of the accredited training schemes were operational, amongst which are; computer training, catering and hotel management, fashion designing, hair dressing and electrical installations; all of which formed the basis of our analysis. Out of the 120 participants surveyed, 44% were into computer training, 17.5% into catering, 17% for fashion designing, 19.2% for hairdressing and 5% for electrical installations.

In terms of the method of enrollment into the scheme, 47.5% of the participants through the local government council office near them, 19.2% and 33.3% through the ministries of youth and women affairs respectively. In the Skill Acquisition scheme, most vocations are taught by traditional craftsmen sourced from different trade organizations, with personnel from the two ministries involved and the training consultants. Out of the training work force of the scheme, 48.3 were traditional craftsmen, 41.7% workers of the ministries and 10% are training consultants.

The survey of tutors in the scheme revealed that, 63.6% were enrolled through the local government council office and government ministries/agencies in charge, 27.3% through vocational organizations and 9.1% through placement by private firms. In each of the vocations used for this analysis, the average number of trainee per trainer is shown in the table below:

Table 3: Components Checked During Inspection Period

| Components | Percentage (%) |
|---|----------------|
| Attitude, punctuality and commitment of trainees | 27.3 |
| The equipments available at the skills acquisition centre | 9.1 |
| Performance of trainees | 9.1 |
| Attitude, punctuality, commitment and performance of tutors | 9.1 |
| All of the above | 45.5 |

Source: Field Survey by the Author, 2012

5.3 Problems of the Skill Acquisition Programme

The Oyo State Skills Acquisition Scheme like other similar programmes in the country faces a number of challenges, such as inadequate public sensitization, shortage and incompetent tutors, dearth of training equipments, lack of motivation on the part of the trainees and trainers, poor funding, lack/inadequacy of start-up packages for graduates of the scheme etc. As mentioned earlier, most skill acquisition centres in the state suffers from the low ratio of tutors/trainees, a reason that can be deduced from the inability of all the centres to work at optimum capacity.

The evaluation of the tutors by the trainees, in terms of the quality of tutors revealed that, 40% of trainees believe that their tutors are incompetent while 43.3% sees them as average in terms of service delivery, while other 26.7% are indifferent. In addition, the scheme faces the problem of inadequate training equipments which is needed for quality and effective training. 78.3% of the trainees believe the skills acquisition centers are under-stocked with necessary facilities which has greatly hampered their learning process. This view was corroborated by the tutors, as 90.9% of them hold the same view as the trainees.

Motivation is key component in a programme that revolves around the acquisition of new skills, as its absence could lead to reduced commitment on the part of both parties involved- tutors and trainees; this is obviously lacking, as trainees of the scheme are not paid any form of stipend/allowance, even though a large percentage of trainees come from far distances, this constitutes additional burden on parents and guardians of trainees in terms of transportation cost. As a result, the enthusiasm of trainees in the scheme has dropped considerably; this could be seen in their behaviors in terms of punctuality and attendance, with 72.7% of craftsmen stating that their trainees come late to the centers. Furthermore, the attendance of trainee ranges from a very low average figure of 18.2% to a slightly encouraging level of 63.6%. In the same vein, the tutors of the scheme are also poorly motivated, as 100% of them stated that their monthly salary is not enough to cater for their basic needs.

An effective youth employment programme must have an efficient exit strategy to accommodate new entrants into the scheme and as well contains the key ingredient of a post graduation self-employment arrangement of the participants. In a survey of administrators of the scheme, 38.5% were unsure if the scheme does have an exit component for current beneficiaries with 62.5% stating that the exit strategy of the scheme involves the setting up of excellent graduates in their chosen vocation. The exit strategy involves a process where payments of 25% of the total cost of the "start-up" equipment are paid by the beneficiaries, with the remaining percentage taken care of by the government. This apparent lack of/insufficient "start-up" package for participants of the scheme after graduation is a major factor affecting the effectiveness of the scheme as regards to meeting its core objectives of reducing the youth unemployment in the state.

56.7% of trainees believe that the programme has a "start-up package" component, but 80% of them believe it is inadequate for them to start up their own business given the current economic situation in the country. The problem of little or no "start-up packages" could have been solved if the state government were in partnership with various microfinance institutions, thereby enabling more participants of the scheme access funds to start their business as obtainable in some other climes. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as 61.5% of administrators of the scheme confirmed that the skill acquisition scheme does not have any link with micro credit institutions in the country.

Another serious challenge of the scheme is the poor enlightenment; the officials in charge of the scheme continually fail to carry out sensitization programmes to the public on the benefits inherent in the scheme. A very small percentage of participants actually got to know about the programme through government owned channels such as the state owned media, the government website, and the various ministries in charge compared to the numbers that were introduced to the scheme by friends and family relatives that had participated in the scheme in the past. Specifically, 10%, 8.3%, 25.6% got to know about the scheme through the media, internet, and government agencies respectively, compared to the 40.8%, and 15.8% that were introduced to the scheme by friends and at other social gatherings.

The agency in charge of the scheme also failed to carry out feasibility studies on the type of skills needed in the society. For example, 69.2% of scheme administrators confirmed that, there was no any form of base-line survey and feasibility studies before the project implementation, point was corroborated by trainees, with 69.2% of them confirming that the choice of training vocations this were imposed on them.

The lack of an effective monitoring and supervisory mechanism is another problem limiting the effectiveness of the Skills Acquisition Scheme. An employment programme like the Skills Acquisition Scheme needs a constant monitoring activity to ascertain the progress being made at the centers, the challenges faced in its operations and the going-forward strategies. In addition, the scheme lack post-graduation monitoring plans that would enable it follow up the progress of past beneficiaries of the scheme; many of whom sell their start-up equipments and therefore remain idle and unemployed even after they might have undergone the training.

This assertion was corroborated by 76.9% of its administrators who confirmed that, the scheme does not have a post graduation monitoring plan, with 72.7% of them revealing that, periodic monitoring activities are carried out only on quarterly basis.

Finally, literacy and numeracy skills are needed in every human endeavor. Most participants and craftsmen alike in the scheme, lack the literacy and numeracy skills required in their chosen vocation, thereby reducing their ability to compete favorably with other professionals elsewhere. In other parts of the world, students of similar schemes are enrolled in continuing education classes, where basic numeracy and literacy knowledge about their trade are taught. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the state, as 72.7% of craftsmen confirmed that such component does not exist in the programme.

5.4 Prospects of the Skills Acquisition Scheme

Skills acquisition programmes are implemented with a twin intention of alleviating skills shortages in the economy by making the hitherto unskilled individuals now competent to take up the available vacancies and consequently reducing the poverty level in the society. They are aimed at enhancing productivity and employability of participants- young job seekers through the improvement of their skills while simultaneously fulfilling the needs of the labour market (World Bank, 2007). It has been established that vocational training in developing countries improves employment prospects between 6 and 57 percents, with females and lower-educated individuals the highest beneficiaries (World Bank, 2007).

Analyzing the prospects of the Oyo State Skills Acquisition Scheme raises the following salient questions:

- a. Has the skills acquired from the scheme being able to help its participants cater for their basic needs?
- b. How relevant are the skills acquired in the scheme in terms of the current requirement of the labor market?
- c. Does the scheme have social benefits component from the provision of job opportunities that would encourage key stakeholders invest their funds in the programme?
- d. Does the scheme have the necessary ingredients needed to tackle the problem of unemployment in the state?
- e. Has the scheme been able to reduce the scourge of youth unemployment in the state?
- f. With the level of government commitment and the impact of the scheme on its target, do we foresee the scheme's sustainability in the future?
- g. Do participants in the scheme see the utilization of the skills learnt as a major source of livelihood?

In a survey of 120 participants of the scheme, 87.5% of trainees have been able to acquire new skills in all the five trades under review. Skills acquired by participants are summarized in the table below:

Table 4: Skills learnt by Participants of the Skills Acquisition Programme

| Skills Acquired | Percentage of Trainees (%) |
|--|----------------------------|
| Measuring, cutting and designing cloths, bags, and head warmer | 17.5 |
| How to mix, roll flowers for pastry making; preparing local and continental dishes | 19.2 |
| Repair of electrical appliances like television set, radio | 4.2 |
| How to make different hair styles | 15.8 |
| Knowledge of computer packages, hardware and software | 30.8 |
| No skill acquired | 12.5 |

Source: Field survey by Author, 2012

Nevertheless, the acquisition of the above skills has not in any way contributed to the welfare of the participants of the scheme as a large majority of trainees do not have enough resources to start a business of their own after graduation, thereby still depending on parents and friends. In the sample used in the study, 63% of the participants complained of their inability to meet their basic needs even after learning few skills from the scheme. Consequently, majority of the participants of the scheme do not see the skills learnt as a viable option for livelihood in the future, thus negating the core objectives of the scheme- providing alternative job opportunities.

Specifically, 70% of respondents do not want to make the skills learnt in the scheme a main source of livelihood in the future with 59.2% of respondents stating that the scheme has not positively impacted on their lives.

A large percentage of crimes witnessed in the society stems directly to the lack of meaningful engagements for the unemployed in the society; youths unfortunately being a large percentage of this group. Anti-social vices like prostitution, cultism, and armed robbery can be reduced if a large proportion of youth have something meaningful to do. An idle mind they say is the devils workshop. When respondents were asked about the social benefits they have enjoyed since their enrollment into the scheme; 18.3% believed that their participation in the scheme has made them self-fulfilled and less idle, 10% feel that the scheme has made them meet new people thereby enhancing their social and business contacts for the future, 24.2% of respondents said the scheme has enabled them to abandon their anti-social behaviors like prostitution, gangsterism etc, while 35.8% did not see any benefits in the scheme apart from the acquisition of new skills.

Funding is a major issue in every successful empowerment programme all around the world. The skill acquisition programme like many employment focused programmes, at both national and state levels, suffer greatly from the challenge of insufficient funding. Key stakeholders of the scheme believe that the programme is poorly funded with 76.9%, 90.9%, and 70% of administrators, tutors and trainees respectively, stating that, the programme is inadequately funded by the state government. In sum, the various challenges faced by the scheme such as inadequate funding, incompetent staff, inadequate training equipment, lack of government commitment, ineffective monitoring and supervisory mechanism have made the attainment of the objectives of the scheme unrealizable; that is, the scheme has failed to reduce the extent of youth unemployment in the state, thus raising the doubts about the sustainability of the scheme in the long run.

This was further buttressed by the respondents to the questionnaires administered for this study where they were of the opinion that, problem of funding and lack of political commitment will result in the programme being frozen up in the nearest future. The study showed that, 43.3%, 26.7% of trainees strongly disagree and disagree respectively when asked if the scheme had the necessary ingredients needed to reduce youth unemployment in the state.

Likewise, 54.6% of tutors also disagreed on the capacity of the scheme to reduce the problem of unemployment in the state.

In evaluating the impact of the scheme on the current unemployment situation in the state, 65.8% of trainees were of the opinion that the scheme has not evidently reduced significantly, the unemployment rate among youth in the state; a point corroborated by 63.6% of master craftsmen of the scheme. In addition to this, key stakeholders of the scheme: administrators, trainees and tutors do not see the programme being operational in the future as a result of the challenges it is currently facing, as 53.8%, 73.3% and 72.7% of administrators, trainees and tutors respectively do not see the scheme sustainability.

Table 5: YES-O Scheme Challenges Profile

| Problems | Opinions of cadets in Percentage (%) |
|--|---|
| Salary related problems | 28.0 |
| Transportation problems | 10.0 |
| Inadequate funding | 16.0 |
| Overlapping/duplication of operations in various departments | 5.0 |
| Communication gap/ absence of a proper organizational structure within the programme | 16.0 |
| Hostile attitude of members of the public towards cadets | 16.0 |
| Inadequate equipment and lack of training in usage of work equipment | 9.0 |

Source: Field Survey by the Author, 2012

Lack of an appropriate organization structure and gaps in communication is another problem militating against the success of the scheme. Most departments in the scheme lack proper coordinating arm that could oversee the activities of its cadets. Most times an official in the ministry or department is appointed to be in charge of cadets; whom most of the time is busy with other works of the agency or ministry. Duplication of duties/functions in some of the departments in the scheme is another problem faced by the scheme. Departments such as Public Buildings and Works, OYRTMA and VIO perform almost the same type of functions thereby wasting the man power that could have been used for other productive activities.

Finally, the YES-O scheme has failed in inculcating necessary entrepreneurship and self employment skills on its participants. 53% of cadets were of the view that they have been unable to learn necessary skills needed to be successful in the current labour market. With a large majority of cadets set to be dismissed after the completion of the mandatory one year employment period, the inability of the scheme to empower the cadets in terms of improving their working skills has rendered the programme baseless and a complete waste of time.

5.5 Prospects of the YES-O Programme

Analyzing the prospects of any employment programme involves evaluating factors such as the social benefits of such programme, its impact on the economic well being of its beneficiaries, its current challenges, and the view of major stakeholders about the financing and long term sustainability of such programmes. In a survey conducted on YES-O cadets to know other social benefits they have gained from their participation in the scheme since their enrollment; 32% opined that the programme has helped them become busy thereby limiting frustrations and depressions that accompanies periods of unemployment, 10% were of the opinion that the scheme has enabled them increase their social and business connections, 17% noting a reduction in their involvement in anti social vices such as prostitution, armed robbery etc, while 35% of the cadets said they have not benefitted anything since their enrollment in the scheme.

Input assessment of the impact of the YES-O scheme on the economic wellbeing of its beneficiaries showed little or no leverage on the lives of its cadets, as 67% of cadets were of the opinion that the scheme has not in any way impacted on them positively; rather it has worsened their economic and emotional sufferings.

Funding is a key component of programmes of this magnitude where collaboration between the public and private sector is a necessity. Unfortunately, the YES-O scheme suffers greatly from the problem of inadequate funding and low government commitment.

This view was corroborated by key stakeholders of the scheme, where 76.9% and 80% of administrators and cadets respectively complained bitterly about the lack of proper funding for the scheme. Consequently, the various challenges faced by the scheme have reduced its potency in reducing youth unemployment in the state.

When asked about the extent to which the scheme has been able to reduce unemployment in the state; 69.2% and 72% of administrators and cadets respectively believe that the scheme to a very large extent has been unable to reduce youth unemployment in the state.

In a likert scaling survey of both administrators and cadets; 42%, 24% and 10% of cadets strongly disagree, disagree and were neutral respectively when asked if the scheme possess the necessary ingredients needed to reduce the problem of youth unemployment in the state. Similarly, 23.1%, 15.4%, and 38.5% of administrators strongly disagree, disagree and agree about the scheme having the necessary ingredients needed to resolve the unemployment of young people in the state. Finally, with the aforementioned challenges the scheme is currently facing, there exists a huge doubt about the long term sustainability of the scheme when viewed in terms of funding, impact and government commitment resulting in 82% and 53.8% of cadets and administrators of the scheme predicting a blight future for the scheme in terms of its continuity beyond the current political dispensation. The YES-O scheme even though faced by stiff challenges can still be restructured to be a success in terms of empowering youths in the state.

5.6 Recommendations

Against the backdrop of the outcome of our extensive survey, the following are the recommendations for government and other key stakeholders:

- a. The process of enrollment into the Skill Acquisition Scheme should be expanded from the current three channels. This could be achieved if the state liaises regularly with social groups like youth associations, the religious bodies etc. The government should endeavor to properly sensitize these bodies and the general public on the existence and benefits of the scheme, therefore encouraging more youths in the state to key-in into the scheme.
- b. The eight centres currently sited across the state are inadequate to cater for the training of the large pool of unemployed youth in the state. Therefore, if government is desirous about reducing unemployment through skills acquisition scheme, more centres need to be established in every nook and cranny of the state. In addition, more training staffs are required at the training centres, as most of the vocations earlier scheduled for training are not being taught. This problem could be solved if the state government goes into partnership with various vocational organizations by sourcing needed man power in areas currently in need of trainers in the scheme.
- c. The inadequacy or absence of start-up capital for graduates of the scheme has been a major challenge militating against the success of the programme. Government should solicit the support of the private sector, especially Micro Finance Institutions that would enable beneficiaries of the scheme have access to interest-free loans or low interest facilities, thereby helping them to start their own business and consequently become employers of labour.
- d. Most participants of the scheme are graduates of various secondary schools in the state. The government in its drive to make the scheme more effective should look at incorporating vocational skills training into the curriculum of all secondary schools in the state (private and public). By doing this, most students in these schools would have inculcated the spirit of craftsmanship and entrepreneurship in the school before proceeding for tertiary education.
- e. Lastly, experiences from other parts of the continent have shown that, the objectives of vocational training schemes are best achieved when they are provided by both the public and private sectors. This is deduced from the fact that the burden of providing such schemes in this type of setting is reduced on one party without necessarily affecting the quality of service provided.

A prime example of this type of scheme is the Jua Kali scheme implemented in Kenya, where intending participants of any vocational training scheme are free of choosing from a large pool of training providers based on skills required, experience and competence of such providers. This type of scheme can be implemented in the state if government could subsidize some percentage of the training cost for participants interested in one vocation or another, thereby simultaneously delimiting participants to centres being run by the government and improving the quality of service provided as a result of increased competition.

- f. Public works programmes all over the world are run by the government and target the most disadvantaged workers with the aim of keeping them in contact with the labour market and mitigate the depreciation of human capital during periods of unemployment. Therefore, public works programmes remain a valuable short term measure to mitigate unemployment and poverty. The YES-O scheme is an example of a public works programme. The programme has huge potentials of reducing the problem of unemployment if components such as entrepreneurship education, vocational skills training, internship, career guidance and counseling, business management skills and behavioral skills are incorporated into the scheme to make participants appropriately equipped for the labour market. So also, the programme can enhance patriotism, as most public works programmes promote community services, such as building of basic infrastructures, health services etc.
- g. On the whole, the YES-O scheme would require a holistic review in terms of the implementation template, structure and funding strategies with the government needing to consider the modern day developmental approach of Public Private Partnership (PPP).

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