YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A PANACEA TO ECONOMIC RECESSION

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Introduction

Youth is the period when one is young, a period between childhood and adulthood. Youth may also be referred to as a particular mindset of attitude, e.g. one may be said to be youthful. Youths may be classified as teen youths (13-19 years), junior youths (20-24 years), and adult youths (25 years and above). With a special reference to Nigeria, the age of the youth ranges from 18 to 35 years. The UNO recognizes the essence of youth and that is why August 12 was declared International Youth Day by the United Nations.

Reference to the term empowerment, it implies a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. Empowerment is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and their society by acting on issues they define as important. At the centre of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power - power can change; power can expand.

Youths are at the centerpiece of community, national and global growth, development and prosperity for next generations. Youth empowerment is very imperative for national development, especially in less developed countries (LDCs). According to the Wikipedia, youth empowerment is a process of where young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives, and they do this by addressing their situation and then taking action in order to improve their access to resources and transforming their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes. A variety of youth empowerment programmes (YEPs) are being organized and executed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public/government organizations, educational institutions, and private organizations. Youth empowerment can be typologized majorly into six: psychological, community, organizational, economic, social, and cultural.
Benefits of Youth Empowerment

The benefits derivable from youth empowerment can also provide pointers to the various youth empowerment programmes (YEPs). These benefits according to First thought (2012) include:

- Healthy community/society/nation
- Empowered and skilled youths
- Prosperity
- Entrepreneurship/entrepreneurship
- Internal harmony and peace
- Employment
- Community/national development
- Transparent social and political system
- Educated public
- Social and economic development
- Less dependence on government by youths
- Voicing effectively on youth issues
- Resolution of youth issues and advocating them at local, national and international levels.

Strategies for Effective Youth Empowerment

1. Training on Life Skills

The term “life skills” refers to the various psychological and interpersonal skills that lead youths to a healthy and productive life. Life skills involve skills/competencies including knowledge, skills, attitudes and types of behaviour that youths need to become healthy, happy, and well-balanced individuals. They include:

(a) Communication skills.
(b) Ability to handle conflicts.
(c) Ability to manage personal stress and help others manage theirs.
(d) Ability to work with others in decision making activities.
(e) Ability to listen to others' points of view.
(f) Ability to work as a member of a team.
(g) Ability to gather and use information.
(h) Ability to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses.

2. Meta-academic Orientation

This involves education and training that transcends and incorporates philosophical, ideological, religious, psychological, and even rational liberal dimension. Techniques for effective meta-learning include:

(a) Individualization of instruction
(b) Personalization of instruction
(c) Practicalization of instruction
(d) Customization of instruction  
(e) Cognitive restructuring  
(f) Converting strategies to practice  
(g) Communicating with your mind  
(h) Imaging the future  
(i) Positive reflections  
(j) Being aware and taking control of one's learning  
(k) Advisory function to self on situations/ circumstances.  
(l) Taking effective learning into account  
(m) Recognizing one's motivation for learning  
(n) A sense of identity in the learning process  
(o) Effective mentoring  
(p) Ability to see the bigger picture for learning  
(q) Actualization of learned behaviour  
(r) Ability to adapt and change approached to learning  
(s) Potentiation of positive ways of learning, and  
(t) Ability to connect and use different sorts of knowledge creatively

3. **Entrepreneurial potentiation**
Favourable entrepreneurial culture and attitudes can be enhanced through:
(a) Increasing awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities  
(b) Improving the image of a place  
(c) Intensifying enterprise education and awareness campaigns  
(d) Creating identifiable role models and champions.  
(e) Establishing mentor and patron panels  
(f) Incentives and support for business success and succession.  
(g) Creating incentives for SMEs to take apprentices  
(h) Enhancing intrapreneurship.

4. **Job Monitoring**
Individuals in the community with careers of interest should be identified. They could be invited to address the youths about their own careers. They should bring posters, objects and audio/ video tapes to be listened to or viewed as well as reading materials about the careers for display or distribution.

5. **Mind Sensitization**
Akin to job monitoring is mind sensitization. Here, seasoned professionals, technocrats and even entrepreneurs are invited to give talks to sensitize the minds of youths to become successful in respective professional areas or life pursuits. The need for dignity of labour and best practices should be emphasized.
6. **Job Volunteering**

Youths can assist an organization to do some tasks without expecting pay but just to gain experience in doing the job. This can be done on part-time basis. In the countryside, there may be a limited number of career possibilities. The youths may consider church/mosque and school careers because various communities have faith-based organization and schools to cater for children there. Career opportunities in nearby town centres can also be considered.

7. **Helping Youths See and Develop Their Talents**

Everybody has talents; that is, areas where he indicates special abilities or aptitudes e.g. music, maths, sports, social/human relationships, arts, creative thinking, writing, etc. An analysis of personality traits becomes crucial. Encouragement from the environment, parents and guardians, mentors and the educational system, becomes paramount. Any of or a combination of the aforementioned major strategies can be applied. Sometimes, the youths are inspired to develop their talents through the example of a mentor. They may see a particular skill in someone they adore, practise it constantly, and develop expertise in it.

8. **Ethics Training**

In this age of best practices, there is the need for requisite training on appropriate ethics with morality. Ethics entails what is good for the individuals and the society. It deals with values relating to human conduct. Through seminars, workshops, and similar training programmes, youths can be exposed to requisited standards of conduct to guide to make good success in their careers in life.

**Conclusion**

Youths are the leaders of tomorrow, and they should be encouraged to make the best out of their lives. Youth empowerment entails encouraging young people to effectively and efficiently take charge of their lives. Youth empowerment is of six interdependent and overlapping dimensions, viz: psychological, community, organizational, economic, social, and cultural. There are many strategies for youth empowerment and these includes: training on life skills; meta-academic orientation; entrepreneurial potentiation; job mentoring; mind sensitization; job volunteering; helping youths see and develop their talents; and ethics training.

**Select Bibliography**


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