

EFFECT OF NATIONAL OPEN APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN IKWERRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the effect of the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme on youth employment in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Data were collected with the aid of the structured questionnaire administered to 120 randomly selected youths in the study area. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results revealed high (79.2%) level of awareness and high (84.2%) level of participation by respondents in the scheme. More participation by the respondents in the scheme were on catering with 11.3% response and welding and fabrication with 10.0% response. Socio-economic effect of the scheme was more on employment generation with 87.5% response. Major problems of respondents in the scheme were, exclusion of some participants from resettlement benefits which accounted for 76.3% of the problem and insufficient resettlement package which accounted for 71.3% of the problem. Increasing the number of participants to benefit from the scheme's resettlement package and improving the content of the resettlement package are recommended.

Keywords: National, open apprenticeship scheme, youths, employment, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Youth development and empowerment are vital activities for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and lead better and possibly have a more fulfilling life. Africa has the world's youngest population (Hall et al 2006) because more than half of Africa's population is made up of youths who are less than 21 years of age with two-third less than 30 years (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi 2010). In African, the median age of the population is 20 years or less, which means it is youth dominated. This implies that half or more of the population of African countries is under 21 years of age with upto one fifth between 15 and 24 years which is the United Nation's delineation of the ages of youth. Nigeria being the most populated country in Africa is also affected by this description. Out of the Nigerian population which came up to be 167 million people as at the 21st of October, 2011 (Nlerum and Okorie, 2012), the youth population according to the Nigerian Youth Parliament (2011) is more than 60%.

As much as 64 million Nigerian youths are unemployed while another 1.6 million of them are under employed (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010). Unemployment is defined as the number of economically active population who are without work, but are available for and seeking work, including those who have voluntarily left work (Okafor, 2011 and Obumeke, 2010). Unemployment rate generally in Nigeria has been on the increase from 5.5% in 1995 to 23,9% in 2011; with the youths as the worst hit (Emeh, 2012). The secondary school graduates are the largest among the unemployed youths in Nigeria (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2012). Youth unemployment which is described as the conglomerate of youths with diverse background, willing and able to work, but cannot find any is identified as one of the core causes of the rising level of social disorder and insecurity

in Nigeria. The disorder and insecurity are seen in the form of political thuggery, militancy, restiveness, cultism, etc.

The Nigerian youth need to be well empowered to gain employment because they represent important stakeholders in the society as nation builders (Okafor, 2011). Youth empowerment on the other hand is explained as an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people (Nnadi, et al 2012). The desire to tackle the problem of youth unemployment and hence empower them creatively led to the establishment of the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS). NOAS was established to address the employment problem of youths especially the secondary school graduates who are the worst hit by unemployment in Nigeria. The National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) is a component of the Vocational Skills Acquisition Training of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) of Nigeria. The NDE was established in November, 1986. The NOAS emphasized on-the-job training by which apprentices, who are uneducated or young school leavers were attached to master craftsmen, companies and agencies (National Directorate Employment, 2006). Some of the youths were given admission into vocational training institutions or centres to learn a trade. The overall aim of NOAS is to provide the unemployed youths with basic skills that were needed in the economy (NDE, undated) in order to make them fit for employment or be self-employed. This was with the realization that majority of the unemployed in the country were youths who had no productive and marketable skills.

The NOAS training package involved an 80% practical training component and 20% theory. While the 80% practical session is carried out in the workshop, the 20% theory session is carried out as Saturday classes to give participants the theoretical explanation of what they learnt at the workshop and as well as prepare them for low and middle level craftsmen examinations such as the Trade Test, thereby enhancing their employment opportunities. Trainees were currently paid N500.00 stipend per month instead of the initial N250.00 paid to them at beginning of the Scheme. The master craftsmen and women (trainers) were paid by the NDE for services rendered at the cost of N250.00 which has been increased to N1,000.00 per trainee per year. However, computer trainers were paid N5,000.00 per trainee for six months. The trainers were assisted by NDE to upgrade their workshops with a loan of N150,000.00 per trainer for the purpose of enhancing the quality of training being impacted on participants. At the end of the training which spanned between six months to three years, depending on the type of trade (National Open Apprenticeship Scheme, undated), graduates who merited resettlement benefits are given soft loan in the form of tools and or cash component of varying amount depending on the trade. The loans were repaid after some grace periods with nine percent rate of interest.

The activities of the NOAS are still on-going in Nigeria. According to Mohammed (2010) the NDE trained as much as 38,000 youths under the NOAS in 2009. In the study area, participants were trained in such areas as auto-electrification, auto-mechanic, carpentry, welding and fabrication, shoe makers (leather works), tailoring/fashion designing, computer operation and maintenance, mobile phone repairs, cosmetology and aluminum fabrication. Others were trained in driving, heavy duty engine mechanic, boat repairs, bricklaying and catering. Despite the activities of NOAS and the fact that its effects are being appreciated, youth unemployment especially among secondary school leavers still persists. The question that is unanswered is, to what extent are youths in the rural areas of this study aware of the activities of NOAS, and what the effects of the Scheme on those who were aware and participated in it? This question constituted the research problem of the study.

In order to address the research problem, the objective of the study therefore determined the awareness of youths in Ikwerre Local Government Area of the activities of

NOAS and also determined the effects of the scheme in addressing the employment problem of its participants.

METHODOLOGY

Ikwerre Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State, Nigeria was the area of study of this work. The study area has boundaries with Imo State in the North, Emohua Local Government Area in the West and Etche Local Government Area in the East and Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in the South. Its headquarters is in Isiokpo. The LGA is rich with natural resources and it is endowed with productive agricultural land, forest, fresh and saline water bodies, oil and gas deposits. The indigenous occupation of people is agricultural production and its related activities such as hunting and lumbering. The major food crops grown by farmers in the 1,099 kilometres square fertile land yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize, vegetables, groundnut and egusi. Dominant perennial crops grown in the area are oil palm, plantain, banana, coconut, African pear, raffia palm, orange, pawpaw, etc. The average, annual rainfall of 171.8mm of the area supports an all year agricultural production activities of farmers in the LGA. Agriculturally, the area is referred to as an indispensable food basket for Abia, Imo and Rivers States of Nigeria.

The sample size of the study was made up of 120 youths who were randomly selected from six out of the thirteen communities of the study area. The selected communities were Aluu, Apani, Igwuruta, Omanwa, Omerelu and Ozuaha. Twenty youths were selected from each of the previously selected communities. This was how the sample size of the study was drawn. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Enumerators who were trained for this purpose were used for field data gathering. Descriptive statistics involving frequency and percentage were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in Table 1 indicates that as much as 79.2% of the respondents were aware of the activities of the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme in the area.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to their Awareness of the Scheme.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Aware	95	79.2
Not aware	25	20.8
Total	120	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2011

This result connotes a high level of awareness of the NOAS among the rural youths in this study area.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to their Participation in the Scheme.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Participants	80	84.2
Non-participants	15	15.8
Total	95	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Table 2 revealed a high (84.2%) level of participation in the scheme among the 95 respondents who were aware of the existence of the scheme as shown in Table 2. This high level of participation tends to suggest a high level of sensitization of the area about the

benefits of the Scheme by the National Directorate of Employment. Besides this, the quest by the young school leavers to be gainfully engaged would have also contributed to this high level of participation in the area. The observed high level of participation in this Scheme disagreed with the moderate (41.25%) level of participation which was observed among respondents in the study of Adeboye and Oyesola (2010).

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to their Participation in the Activities of the Scheme.

Activity	Frequency	Percentage %
Auto-electrification/electrical installation.	4	5.0
Auto-mechanic	7	8.8
Carpentry	5	6.2
Welding and fabrication	8	10.0
Shoemaking (Leather works)	7	8.8
Tailoring/ Fashion designing	5	6.2
Computer typing/Maintenance	5	6.2
Mobile telephone repairs	5	6.2
Cosmetology	7	8.8
Aluminum fabrication	4	5.0
Driving	5	6.2
Heavy duty engine mechanic	2	2.5
Boat repairs	2	2.5
Brick laying	5	6.3
Catering	9	11.3
Total	80	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Table 3 revealed that the respondents participated more (11.3%) in catering activity of the scheme. This was followed by welding and fabrication as shown by 10.0% of the respondents and then by auto-mechanic, leather works and cosmetology with 8.8% responses each. A close look at the Scheme's activities in the area seems to suggest that they are those that could be started off with a minimum capital investment to suit the need of the respondents who would soon become young entrepreneurs after their training period. The various skills provided by the NOAS in Table 3 is indicative of the fact the scheme has satisfied the later recommendation of Fan, et al (2010) that more Nigerian youths be trained as craftsmen and technicians to make them self reliant.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents According to Effect of the Scheme on their Socio-economic Lives (n=80)

Socio-economic effect	Frequency	Percentage %
Provision of skill	13	53.8
Improvement of capacity on-the-job	18	22.5
Increased income	38	47.5
Provision of source of employment	70	87.5
Payment of club dues	25	31.3
Enhanced family finance	38	47.5
Reduced dependence on parental finance	27	33.8
Complete independent of parental finance	10	13.0

Source: Field Survey, 2011. Multiple responses were used.

Respondents indicated that the scheme has provided source of employment to them as shown in Table 4. As much as 87.5% of the response conformed this fact. This finding agreed with the finding in the study of Hashim (2012) which showed that there was a significant connection between NOAS and youth employment in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The training obtained by the respondents provided them means of livelihood. This connotes that NOAS in this study area met the need for which it was established. The respondents also noted that the scheme has provided them with skills on which to depend for self improvement. This fact was indicated by 53.8% of their response. This connotes that the young school leavers who had no form of skill by the nature of their level of education are now offered skills for self and industry employment. The finding also agreed with the recommendation of Hashim, (2012) that there is the need for basic and vocational education, which prepares young people for the world of work. The findings in Table 4 has shown that the NOAS has made meaningful effect in the socio-economic lives of youths in the area. This supports the assertion of Nzeako (1992) that the NOAS of National Directorate of Employment should be integrated into the mainstream of the national education and socio-technical development programme as a baseline strategy for national technological improvement.

Table 5: Distribution of Problems of Participants in the Scheme (n=80)

Problems	Frequency	Percentage %
Long distance to training	53	66.3
Inadequacy of stipend	36	45.0
Insufficient training tools	39	48.8
Insufficient experience of trainers	42	52.5
Unfriendliness of trainers	48	60.0
Insufficient resettlement benefit	57	71.3
Exclusion from resettlement benefit	61	76.3

Source: Field Survey, 2011. Multiple responses were used.

Table 5 indicated that “exclusion from resettlement benefit” was the major problem of the participants as shown by 76.3% of the respondents. This finding appear to be representing the views of the participants who did not qualify to be resettled, since the resettlement packages of the Scheme were meant for trainees who had shown enough interest and performance during the training. “Insufficient resettlement benefit” with 71.3% response was the second problem of the participants. This result implied that irrespective of the fact that some trainees benefited from the resettlement capital, the package was not good enough to have them established as entrepreneurs. The third problem was “long distance to training” which accounted for 66.3% of the response as entrepreneurs. This constraint may have been complicated by the problem of inadequacy of monthly stipend which was given to participants. The combined effect of these problems on participants may have been responsible for the high drop-out-rate of trainees of NOAS which was reported in the earlier study of Evawoma-Enuku and Mgbo (2005).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that the activities of the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme were well-known among the rural youths of Ikwerre Local Government Area. The study also indicated a high level of participation in the Scheme by the respondents. Further findings showed that the participation in the Scheme was more on catering, followed by welding and fabrication, then auto-mechanic, leather works and cosmetology. Provision of employment and skill were the major effects of the Scheme on the socio-economic lives of participants.

The major problems of participants in the study in order of priority were exclusion from resettlement benefits, insufficient resettlement benefits and long distance to location of training. The study recommends the inclusion of more participants in resettlement benefits, provision of sufficient resettlement benefits and making of training locations to be within the reach of participants.

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