

## Harnessing Human Resource Development for Rural Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The paper is of the view that using Human Resource Development as a strategy for economic revival and sustainable self-reliance will require drastic organizational transformation in human resource policies and practices for integrated rural development. The study observed that in spite of governments earlier seemingly comprehensive efforts at improving the quality of life of the rural people, a number of flaws were identified. One of such flaws of the strategy is its being too agro-centered and neglecting non agricultural ventures/ entrepreneurship ventures, and training and development in productive and employable skills, tailoring, cloth weaving, trading blacksmithing etc. in the rural set up. Training (HRD) for better performance on non-agricultural jobs and increased productivity, therefrom had not been a matter of concern. Consequently, the marginalized condition of the rural poor tends to inhibit their training and development for rural projects. The paper also points out that other limiting factor against training and indeed human resource development in general is economic crisis. It suggests the desirability of "Participatory Rural Development" as positive remedy to cater for the material and non-material needs of the rural people.*

**Key words:** Human Resource Development, Rural development, Deregulation, Training, economic, Rural Projects, Agriculture, structural adjustment.

### Introduction

Since the advent of the Nigerian economic crisis, a number of fiscal and monetary policies have been instituted towards reversing the downward trend. Today we are all development oriented. Our economy is in a state of revolt against poverty, disease, ignorance and dominance by the stronger economics. The government is working hard to ensure that we are no longer disposed to entrust our future exclusively to either the parametric functions of the forces of the market or the whims of nature. The quest for Human Resource Development (HRD) as an essential prerequisite for economic growth and industrial development is in essence, a revolutionary movement which has no precedence in our history. The prominent and central term is "Development". We must note that, like other revolutionary slogans, "development" conveys many meanings to different groups. In our situation, it means industrialization. It symbolizes the achievement of meaningful political, economic and social development. It encompasses development in education and training. With the term 'development' in the background, sociologists and political scientists think of the transformation of social and political institutions.

The economists see development in terms of modernization, resulting from economic growth and concentrate primarily on capital, saving and returns on investment. The educationists equate development with not only the quantity but also the quality of the outputs of universities, colleges, secondary and primary schools and the human outputs from these human resource incubation. Trainers are interested in the number of trained manpower with the right knowledge, skills, attitudes and managerial capabilities. We are convinced and we submit at this point, that the desire should be more than for mere development or economic growth and industrial development in general but to rural development in particular.

### Human Resources and Rural Development

Human beings are *sine qua non* to development. We may, perhaps not need a Harbison (1962, 1968, 1970, 1973..) or a Damachi to know this. For it has become common knowledge, if not common sense from Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.) to Adam Smith (1723 -1990).

David Ricardo (1772 – 1823) Kari Marx (1818 – 1946), down to Hassan Ahmed II(1992). However, in spite of this rather “common place” of human resource, harnessing, refining and utilizing it effectively has been an onerous task through the ages. Hence, human resource is not only part of the development question, developing it is indeed a vital problem of development.

It is not part of this paper’s intention to jump into the ocean of definition of human resources development. But for the purpose of coming to terms with the perspective of this paper, it is necessary to state some cardinal points. Human resource is not only the quantum of Homo sapiens species of mammals that avail within a given space. But according to Ahmed II (1999) it is that aggregate of energy, knowledge, skills, behavior, cultural attributes and moral disposition of a people living within a particular social, political and economic setting. This endowment which varies in quantity and content between individuals according to age, gender and class must be harnessed, refined and utilized for economic growth and development. It is in the capacity for doing this, and the extent and wholesomeness with which it is done that countries differ between “developed” and “underdeveloped.” Given this expansive context and content of human resource development, we will focus the scope of the study to a consideration of “Training (human resource Development) for rural projects”.

Training is the systematic development of the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviour for better performance and increased productivity on a given job. Training is an essential component of human resource development. Indeed, along with education, training is the most active, process of human resource development. For general growth and development, training is an indispensable catalyst. As Yerspoor (1990) noted:

*“The education and training of men and – although often neglected – of women contributes directly to economic growth through its effects on productivity, earnings, job mobility, entrepreneurial skills, and technological innovation. The success of economic policies promoting international competitiveness and sustained development, after all, hinge to a large extent on the existence of a well educated (and trained) labour force” (1990)*

Hence, rural projects, the micro dimension of rural development (itself a sector of economic growth and development) must be backed up by the requisite skills, attitude and behaviour for its implementation to be worthwhile. According to a United Nations document: (2009)

*“Integrated rural development involves two fundamental components human resource development and development of physical and social infrastructure for greater productivity and social justice. Each is recognized to be linked to the other and each is essential to total human development” (UN 2009)*

The United Nation (2009) document on “Poverty and Self-Reliance.” proposed that, among other vital factors, provision of management skills and production skills are the best strategy for eliminating rural poverty and inequality.

### ***Deregulation, Training and Rural Projects***

In spite of the significance of training to rural development a number of factors militate against it. One of these factors is the very conception of what rural development is as well as its implementation. But the most discounting factor is economic deregulation. Since colonial times, rural development has been instituted in the Nigerian economy in one form or another. But as Segun Famoriyo (1985) observed:

*“Efforts made by successive Nigerian governments have been, at worse more of propaganda and at best more of adhoc than concise systematic measures to promote rural development.”*

However, Famoriyo was quick to note that with the establishment of Department of Rural Development in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1976 a more definitive effort at rural development was incepted. Before then, and even afterwards, (Jack 1988), rural development has been plagued by warped conception and ineffective implementation.

In colonial times, the imperial government in Nigeria had a “Commodity Approach” to rural development. The primary consideration of this approach was that tax expropriated from the agrarian economy should be ploughed back to boost the production of cash crops. Since the main aim then was to source ground nuts, cocoa, palm kernel and rubber cheaply from the economy, the condition of life of the rural people themselves was not directly improved. Hence, neither education, nor training, with a view to better the lives of the rural community, was extended to the peasants.

The colonial government established agricultural departments in the South as far back as 1910 and in the North in 1912. Plantations, forestry and bush single-tractor farms, workshops, experimental farms, forestry and bush projects were all set up between 1900 and 1960 by the colonial government, in order to entrench the cultivation of cash crops and increase their yield. While huge rural surplus was extracted as a result, neither rural infrastructure nor rural life improved significantly. Indeed, these institutions and projects failed woefully. In terms of training, these institutions only served as megaphones for handing down paternalistic propaganda for servitude. As a matter of fact, the farm settlements were little less than concentration camps where migrant labour was exploited. Commodity approach to rural development was bequeathed to the national government by the colonial regime. For post colonial agricultural policies, especially from the early 60's to the mid 70's, continued to be cash crop export-oriented. The activities of the Marketing Boards, in particular, underlined this commodity approach. Even when from the late 60's the national food question became prominent on the agricultural agenda, commodity approach persisted as an under-current in the consideration of strategy for alleviating urban food crisis. After all only the rural area produces the bulk of the food required by urban workers and the elites to subsist.

Initially, five "pilot projects" were set up in Funtua (Kaduna State) Gusa (Sokoto State), Gombe (Bauchi State) Ayangba (Benue State) and Lafia (Nasarawa State). More were set up between 1979 and 1980 at Bida (Niger State) and Ilorin (Kwara State). Eventually, following upon these pilot projects, an Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) has been set up in each state of the Federation as a cardinal development institution jointly financed by the States and Federal governments and backed by the World Bank. Basically, the main thrust of the "top-down strategy" of the ADPs was identified to include:

1. The "subsidy Approach". i.e. provision of highly subsidized infrastructure to rural people in order to stimulate growth and development, e.g. irrigation facilities, transport, fertilizer, storage and electricity; and
2. The "agrarian reform approach" i.e. provision of farm inputs, extension services, agricultural research, crop and animal protection, soil conservation, credit, roads and water supplies.

These put together constitute an "Integrated rural development" package. The package was intended to raise the level of living of the poorer classes through more equitable income distribution, agrarian reform and better quality of life for the rural people (Famoriayo (1985).

In spite of the seeming comprehensiveness of this package, a number of flaws have been identified. One of the undoings of the "top-down" strategy is its being too agro-centred. Thus, it neglects non agricultural occupations entrepreneurial ventures such as tailoring, cloth-weaving, trading, blacksmithing, etc. Under the circumstance therefrom, training for better performance on non-agricultural job and increased productivity, therefore is not a matter of concern.

Even in its decisively agricultural bias, the "top down" strategy employed in the ADPs provided training in an equally lopsided manner. Training Centres were established under some ADPs e.g. the Azare Agricultural Training Centre. However, such centres only offer instruction to agricultural officers and Extension Personnel in order to enhance the impact of extension service. It is believed that the knowledge and skills thus imparted will pass down from the agricultural training centres to the peasants through the "multiplier" and "trickle-down" effect.

This "multiplier" and "trickle-down" syndrome also affects the form and content of formal educational curricula. Because of the limits imposed upon the "academic" study of agriculture by its institutionalist scope and extension service orientation, teaching and research, results have not made as much impact as would otherwise have been registered. Above all, official and "bookish" misconception that, because of their inherent "rural idiocy", rural people cannot think about their problem and initiate remedy on their own. Hence, a lot of information, collations, is literally pushed down the throat of the rural people. Often, adverse consequences have resulted from that as the rural people tend to be resistant to "change and innovation".

In addition to these factors, the marginalized condition of the rural poor also tends to inhibit their training for rural projects. Due to the "cyclic poverty" into which they are structured, poor people in the rural areas are "culturally deprived". Thus poor child rearing methods, inability to teach children necessary skills which will enable them to make full use of educational and job opportunities and general under-socialization lead to poor performance, poor economic rewards and general social deprivation. The most limiting factors against training, indeed human resource development in general, is economic crisis. A conference on human Dimensions of Africa's economic Recovery and Development in Khartoum, Sudan, in March, 1988 provides support and glaring evidence of this.

The conference concluded that, over the past decade, the human conditions of most Africans have deteriorated calamitously. The reasons for this, the conference adduced, are the harsh economic measures adopted by African governments, on the advice of the IMF and the World Bank, to redress their economic crisis. The conference further highlighted that:

- (a) The implementation of “structural adjustment” programmes has progressively weakened the skills base through a withdrawal of resources from education and through an acceleration of the brain-drain from the continent. For example, while primary school enrolment fell to a rate of 2.9% yearly between 1980-84, secondary school enrolment during the same period dropped from 13.7% to 10.9%. and in higher education, annual enrolment declined by 66% between 1980-85
- (b) The dramatic growth in brain-drain involving middle and high-level manpower is another disturbing trend. A joint ECA/ILO report estimated that in six months to 1987, 70,000 Africans left the continent from 40,000 in 1985. This represents approximately 30% of Africa’s skilled men and women. While the lucky ones flee to Europe, those less fortunate took up jobs as Teachers and Doctors in some South Africa’s “home-land” a cruel irony (cited in the silent Revolution ... 1989).

The IMF deflationary measures have contributed to the decline in real earnings. This and the removal of subsidies, the increase in the cost of medical, educational and other services, the freezings of wages, and the massive retrenchments from the public services, are making life difficult for all Africans (ibid). Under such conditions, human resource development or training was grossly inhibited in Africa generally

In Nigeria, the gradual withdrawal of the state from the provision of some social services, commercialization and privatization have combined to similarly impose limiting effect on human resource development and training. According to human Development Report 2000, Nigeria’s human resource development index (a measure of choices open to people for self-improvement and quality of life) was 0.322. Thus Nigeria ranks among the low human development countries of the world.

It must however be mentioned, in all fairness that since the deregulation of the economy took on, a number of efforts in the direction of human resource development and training have been made by both the government and the private sector. Nonetheless, these efforts may, at best be described as a flash-in-the-pan against the backdrop of the overwhelming statistics of negative indices cited above.

Although Directorate of food, Roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) and (BELFRW) Better life for Rural Women programmes directed a lot of financial and material resources at the provision of infrastructure in the rural areas, their impact on human resource development is comparatively minimal. The high cost of food, the inaccessibility of many rural communities where food and raw materials abound, the scarcity of clean and hygienic water, fertilizer and other agricultural inputs lend credence to the assertion. The Better Life for rural women programme added the training of women in its activities. But the impact of this programme in general, and its training initiative in particular, is limited by its gender perspective and feminist bias. Perhaps, because of this, the scope of the programme was expanded to include rural males. Hence the new title “Better Life for Rural Dwellers” was adopted.

The national directorate of Employment (NDE) with its “School-to-Land” project and loan scheme for agriculture lend itself to the development of human resources in the rural area. But given its limited financial resources and the constraints of land and in-puts acquisitions, it is at best an exemplary social service for the private sector to compliment, if it cannot emulate. Neither is affected. The numbers of youth trained by the NDE also enlist little appreciation against an intimidating unemployment statistics. According to Isah (2012) other dimensions of Nigeria’s unemployment, besides age, gender, are education and rural urban migration.

Those with secondary school certificate and below have the highest unemployment rates. The current trend of national rate of unemployment and the 2010 rate of 21.1 percent CBN (2011) are major economic and social problems. The geopolitical pattern is even more serious economic and social threat. States such as Yobe, Zambara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna and Kano have unemployment rates that are well above the national average of 1.1% contrast, states like Lagos. Oyo and Ogun have lower rates of 7.6 percent, 8.8 percent and 9.9 percent respectively. Isah (2012) also stated that the various dimensions of unemployment are that general policies targeting unemployment are unlikely to achieve desired results if they discount the complex nature of the problem.

**Table 1: Comparison of Unemployment Rate by State (2006)**

State	International labour organization	Nigeria
Abia	19.5	25.1
Adamawa	4.1	21.5
Akwa Iborn	11.0	18.0
Anambra	7.8	14.9
Bauchi	3.0	20.5
Bayelsa	13.7	21.9
Benue	4.8	7.9
Borno	6.4	12.5
Cross River	24.7	32.8
Delta	15.1	22.9
Ebonyi	1.2	7.9
Edo	4.1	14.8
Ekiti	6.5	11.4
Enugu	2.6	14.1
Gombe	10.6	16.9
Imo	9.2	28.3
Jigawa	13.7	27.0
Kaduna	5.3	8.7
Kano	2.4	10.1
Katsina	3.7	10.9
Kebbi	1.1	1.3
Kogi	8.6	14.6
Kwara	14.1	17.7
Lagos	12.2	13.7
Nassarawa	3.0	11.8
Niger	2.1	4.2
Ogun	2.6	3.6
Ondo	1.9	6.7
Osun	3.5	8.1
Oyo	5.3	8.1
Plateau	5.0	6.8
Rivers	62.5	66.4
Sokoto	6.5	12.3
Taraba	13.2	15.2
Yobe	4.5	24.4
Zamfara	4.2	19.1
FOT	43.3	47.8
National	7.7	14.6
Source: General Household survey, NBS, Abuja		
Note: ILO OVERSION: One- Hour Criterion		
Nigerian Version: 40- Hour Criterion		

Any potentially successful policy must be mindful of the nature and extent of the unemployment problem in Nigeria especially among the youths. If we ignore the existing problem of youth unemployment and the human resource development issues, we are likely to worsen the security challenges of the Nation.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that a lot has been done towards developing Nigeria's human resource endowment. However, from the foregoing analysis, the much that is being done is, to our mind, not only inadequate, it is actually being vitiated by the negative consequences of deregulation. It only needs to be further studied so that more can be done for the betterment of the rural people.

As a contribution to that, and following from the preceding analysis, it is well to underline Ahmed Abubakar's (1988) observation on human resource, training and rural development. We must provide as a matter of deliberate choice clearly conscious observable level opportunities for the progressively adoptive and wholesome development of our people. As observed earlier, great moments decisions and great actions are the essential elements for the forward adaptive and creative development of man.

*“As Abubakar (1988) observed “Africa’s most valuable resource is human. There is a great reservation in the rural areas, perhaps not trained in the elitist sense, but trainable. And what it needs is not elitist training but functional training, there is also a lot that can be learned from the rural populace. The result of this learning could serve two major purposes. One (of which) is the articulation of correct policies, programme and projects that have high probability of succeeding”..*

This observation directs our attention and efforts to a reconsideration of hitherto and existing theories, policies and practices of rural development. We must review their form, content and impact. There is the need to shift from the “commodity Approach” or the “Top Down” strategy to rural development. Indeed, we should make haste to keep step with new perspectives and conditions being proposed for effective human resource and rural development.

It is instructive to note that some more result-sourcing consideration has come up with new ideas of rural development that portend more assuring outcome. Now, it is more desirable and rewarding to embark on “Participatory Rural Development” than just “Integrated Rural Development”. Although, as we defined it earlier, the later is comprehensive to cater for the material and non-material needs of the rural people, the former is more active, more decisive in its operations. Its thrust is not just pecuniary, it is inherently and determinedly political. The Cornell University Project identified four key elements in participatory development people's involvement in decision making, implementation, sharing of benefits and evaluation. The UNRISD programme on Sustainable Development defined participatory development as the “organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in a given social context on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto exclude from such control. Participatory rural development is underlined by the empowerment of the rural poor. Empowerment is enhanced by education, but more so by training because it enables the rural poor to deploy his or her labour in the project of his or her choice, the decision for and implementation of which he or she is personally involved. To this end, therefore, a “Development Initiator Programme (DIP) is recommended.

- The Development Initiator Programme would invariably put the conception, designing, implementation of and benefitting from rural project, firmly in the hands of the rural poor. This is the *raison d'être* of human resource development and economic growth and development. After all, unless man is the subject and object of development, he will respond negatively against any strategy for development.
- However, all these measures will come to naught if the deregulation of the economy continues beyond certain limits. For instance. The devaluation of the Naira and inflation, if left unchecked, will heighten purchasing powerlessness and even political powerlessness, especially of the rural poor. Poverty and the withdrawal of the government from providing social amenities, it has been shown above, militate against self-reliance and collective prosperity.

Government therefore, needs to modulate the deregulation of the economy by the responsibility imposed upon it by “social contract”. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must eschew paternalistic consideration in their philanthropic and self-help activities. The private sector must assume more and greater responsibilities in the communities they accrue bounteous profit from. Their profit motive should be subsumed by the economic wisdom and universal rationality of creating by recreating. Otherwise, not only are the animals and environment endangered, human beings are too.

However, neither the search for profit nor governance or any human endeavour can be undertaken with much success, if any at all, under circumstances that deplete the stock of human resource that abound in a nation.

The need to provide the material and non-material conditions for the development of human resource in Nigeria has been underlined in this study. One thing that can never be over-emphasized however is the issue of peace and stability. War, civil unrest and homicide decimate mankind in horrendous proportion. Indeed, it is the crass manner with which public money is appropriated and unaccounted for wealth is flaunted that undermines peace in Nigeria. Huge sums of money meant for the improvement of life especially that of the rural poor, is misappropriated. Thus gross privation and adversity is visited upon the rural poor as well as the entire populace.

When human beings, especially the poor, cannot meet basic requirements such as food, shelter, clothing or medication, when they cannot afford education or training for themselves or their children then, all the material and non-material elements of human resource will become distressed, tense and restive. Violence is the ultimate condition for relief. But we know very well that no people or nation has found relief in violence. We should do more and better to avoid that.

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