

# **TOWARDS EMPOWERING NIGERIAN YOUTHS FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

**BY**

**MOHAMMED MAHMOUD BABA, Ph. D.**

Department of Educational Foundations,  
Faculty of Technology Education  
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi

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## **Abstract**

*Attempt was made in this paper to understand the pragmatic and useable counselling psychological strategies which could be employed to empower the youths in Nigeria. This is to ginger and fast-track their yearnings and aspirations for self-reliance, which could translate into sustainable national development. Demographically, the youths in Nigeria constitute a significant proportion of the entire population of the Nigerian society. For their strategic position in national development they are perceived as the pillars and vanguards for accelerated development, as they possess much energy, talents and potentialities to really contribute greatly to self and national development. As identifiable factors stand their ways, such as poverty, ignorance, lack of support and good environment, these tend to influence their interest, attitude and risk-taking behaviours. With well articulated and pragmatic counselling strategies such as behavior modification, rational emotive and adjustive and life skills, among others, they could be harnessed for self-employability skills to improve and sustain selves, as well as meaningfully contribute to sustainable national development in Nigeria. Recommendations are therefore provided such as counsellors' involvement in youth education, reorientation through individual and group counseling, packages and need for the establishment of comprehensive youth-friendly centres, educational excursions and discussions for exploring youths, talents and potentialities. Functional education, entrepreneurship education, employability skills, which are geared towards unveiling the youth potentialities and talents, hence making them self employed and self-reliant that could propel national development in Nigeria.*

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**Key Words:** Empowering, Youths, Self-Reliance, National Development, Counselling, Strategies

## **Introduction**

The much hue and cry in the Nigerian society about the debilitating and degenerative incidences of youth unemployment, corruption, crimes, communal and religious crises and conflicts, excruciating poverty, ignorance, diseases and begging culture. The teeming youths who are expected to be the real pillars and vanguards for societal development, are today falling prey to the societal vagaries and being manipulated by unscrupulous elements for personal aggrandizement. The far-reaching implications include: breeding hopelessness, sheer laziness, multiplication of crimes and

skepticism about the possible quality of leadership the society will have in the near future, if going by the saying that youths are leaders of tomorrow in the society. It may be true to some extent that various efforts have been, and are still being made by successive governments, at the three tiers (Local, State and Federal), non-governmental organizations and even well-meaning individuals, to address youth issues and to carry them on board. It is the contention of the writer that if youth empowerment policies and programmes are genuinely pursued, they will find relevance and play their expected roles as individuals and

collectively too, towards the betterment of the society. The youths occupy a critical and strategic position in the society vis-à-vis their numerical strength as well as their presumed reservoir of energies, talents and potentialities, they could be harnessed for better contribution to societal development. The necessary survival skills are hardly inculcated, the education some of them receive tend to lack genuine and pragmatic quality of content. Hence, they find it difficult to be independent in their thoughts and deeds. Unfortunately, through the writers interaction with some youth in the society, they were bold enough to express themselves, and to remark that they have been neglected for long, left idle, and so have every reason to make ends meet, positively or negatively. This may be a good pointer to the dire need for much more attention to them, intervention and right guidance to them. Researchers such as Akinboye (1989), Lititia, Nwachukwu and Nwamno (2010) and Alexander (2012) pointed out the need for timely intervention and strategies for empowering the youth and to afford them opportunity to think inwards, to acquire life-skills and survival skills so that the society they live in can tap and meaningfully explore and exploit the many and varied talents and potentialities.

Anameze (2002) pointed out that the problem of unemployment among Nigerian school leavers has been traced to the educational orientation of students, which is white-color job directed. Anameze further stressed that the problem has persisted despite governments' efforts to reverse the trend and make students acquire vocational and technical skills.

Similarly, Akibu (2002) also noted that large-scale unemployment is one of the greatest social problems in Nigeria today He cited the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1981), which reports of Nigeria that notwithstanding the resource rich state of the nation, open

unemployment especially among young school leavers, remains a serious problem. It shows that the menace of large-scale graduate unemployment can be seen in its ability to shower negative implications on all fabrics of the society.

Akibu (2002) earlier pointed out the need for youth empowerment in Nigeria, and stressed the need for entrepreneurial skills acquisition by the youth. An entrepreneur, according to him is one who organizes, operates and assumes the risk in a business venture in expectation of making profit. Entrepreneur is the act of exercising entrepreneurial skills. He noted that the entrepreneur perceives opportunities which others do not, and always searching for change, responding to it and exploiting it as an opportunity. Self-employment is subsisting by working for one-self rather than others; and that it carries the pride of being one's own master and the singular ownership of the fruits of one's enterprising initiatives. Education, and especially vocational education includes among other things, some form of training in a special skill preparatory to a particular occupational trade.

Okeke (2002) also opined that the central role of vocational and technical education in any country is to prepare people for skilled work. It is a form of education, training or retraining which is geared towards the improvement of the individual, and as a means of enabling him/her to acquire specific appreciation of the patterns of behavior, attitudes, skills, knowledge, values and culture needed to become more productive and efficient in given specialized skills.

In the same vein, Okeke (2002) also cited Robert (1971), who defined vocational and technical education as a type of education or training designed for preparing the individual learner to earn a living ( to be self-reliant) or increase his earning in an occupation where

technical information and an understanding of the laws of science and technology as applicable to modern design, production, distribution and services are essential for success. Vocational technical education is also viewed as aiming at producing the manpower who will apply the acquired knowledge towards improvement and solution of their environmental problems, thus making the environment more useful and convenient for man. This goes a long way to imply that the youths, as critical to the society, need to form the focus of the dire need for skills acquisition for self-reliance and foster the development of the society to which they belong. Hence, the imperativeness for their urgent and adequate empowerment in every perspective or dimension. It is expected that if they are empowered, their heads and hands would not be left idle for the devil to engage them. The society will then reap the benefits of their practical utilization of their labour, skills, knowledge and talents/ potentialities.

From the foregoing, self-reliance may be viewed as the person's ability to stand on his own, without undue dependence on others. This capacity involves some skills to be able to do better. On the other hand, national development is also viewed as a multi-dimensional process, which may involve human and material resources. Nigeria as a country is blessed with these, but the pace of development is retarded. The youths are, no doubt the hope for now and the future of the society.

### **Who are the Youths?**

United Nations Fund for Population Activities (2001) defined youths as persons who are aged between 15 and 24 years. It distinguished youths from adolescents (10-19 years). In the light of this, demographically, UNFPA cited NDHS 1999, which notes that 56% of the total population is under 20 years of age, 63% are under 25 years, whilst about thirty percent (28.7%) are aged between 10 and 24 years. This

informed the UNFPA to describe the Nigeria's population as youthful or young population.

### **Youths Empowerment**

Adebusuyi (2005) pointed out that the term empowerment captures the essence of what development is. It goes on to stress that it is an improvement in the lives of people and communities; and that empowerment is an increase in knowledge, capacity, self-confidence, high self-esteem, self-reliance and ultimately the well being of the empowered. In the same vein, he remarked also that this empowered idea manifests itself in all levels of social interaction. Adebusuyi (2005) cited Friedmann who saw empowerment as the struggle against poverty. And that it involves helping people to acquire useful knowledge and skills, and to achieve a positive self image. According to Adebusuyi, to achieve the goal of empowerment, the educational component is crucial.

The desire to encourage the youth to engage in useful livelihood is the concern of many educationalists and the public in general. Both the educated and uneducated youths litter the whole world seeking for employment (Lititia, Nwachukwu and Nwamuo, 2010). Alexander (2012) remarked that the word 'empowerment' has many definitions and uses. He also cited Wingspan Youth Empowerment Services, who defined empowerment as character education and leadership development. Alexander (2012), however, saw empowerment as a process through which disenfranchised social groups work to change their social surroundings, change detrimental policies and structure and work to fulfill their need. In this vein, he saw youth empowerment as an attitudinal, structural and cultural process where young people gain the ability, authority and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including youths and adults. Alexander further remarked that youth empowerment is often

addressed as a gateway to expand international equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Many local, state, provincial, regional, national and international government agencies and non-profit community-based organizations provide programmes centred on youth empowerment. The activities involved may focus on youth led media, youth rights, involvement in community decision making (Alexander, 2012). In sum, to empower means to give someone more control over his life or more power to do something.

### **Significance of the Youths in National Development**

In any human society, the youth are found to be very important. In the light of this, Rimfat (1999) cited Ocheke pointed out that the youth in this country (Nigeria) occupy a very strategic position in national development. According to him, they constitute about 80% of the population and 47% of them are the economically active population of our country. This underscores the significance of the youth, which Rimfat (1999) posits that the youth are expected to be the pillars and vanguard of accelerated development, the reservoir of energies of our nation. Rimfat stressed that they possess the power that propels the engine of progress and the visionary force behind success in our national endeavour. It emphasized that they are expected to be the vanguard for peace, stability and democracy without which no meaningful development can take place.

In the view of Ocheke (1997), guidance counsellors, teachers and parents owe it a duty to harness the productive energies of the youth for national development. Failure to do this will make the youth to constitute a threat to the continuity and survival of our society.

### **Youths Empowerment Strategies**

According to Alexander (2012:68) Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) is a scheme

under Nigeria LNG and has the objective of equipping the youths with knowledge and life skills to make them self-reliant and economically empowered as well as enhance their socio-economic status; and that the specific objectives of the YES are:

1. To provide vocational technical skills training for unemployed youths
2. To expose them to skills required to start, operate and manage their business
3. To stimulate entrepreneurial development and achievement and to achieve attitude reorientation among youths.

It is a sustainable development initiative of the company specifically targeted at youths within the NLNG host communities to make more economically and socially responsible and self-reliant via business and vocational skills acquisition through technical and managerial training. However, such initiative could be extended to other communities in Nigeria. The teeming youths are in dire need of knowledge and skills to make a meaningful living and contribute to the nation's development in almost all areas.

In this era of massive unemployment, the youths need to be inculcated with certain skills in trades such as welding and fabrication, fashion design and sewing, woodwork and furniture making, horticulture and landscaping, air conditioning and refrigeration, hair dressing and cosmetology, hat and caps making, tying and dyeing, catering services, photography and video production. For any of the skills above and others, it may not require much capital to start up. With these empowerment skills, determination, risk-taking behavior, supportive environment and perseverance, the youth could be adequately empowered to help themselves and the society. The youth as individuals stand to benefit greatly if they acquire the aforementioned skills and put into practice.

Some of the benefits and advantages were identified by Alexander (2012) to include:

Makes one self-reliant, reduces crime, increases and improves one's standard of living, guarantees attitude re-orientation, improves managerial capacity, leads the country's industrialization and improves agricultural base of the society. Alexander also identified some of the hindrances to youth empowerment which include: absence of instructional facilities, inadequate working capital, low standard of education, and lack of adequate training. With careful workable counseling strategies, these could be overcome or managed.

On a general note, the following strategies for youth self-reliance and sustainable national development: Group formation and good organization, networking, and above all good education. By group formation, the youth should not only see themselves as individuals but establish groups of like minds in order to pursue common course. This calls for synergy in order to achieve unity of purpose and success. There is also need for the youths to network by way of establishing linkages with other youths from near and far. This will enable them to share ideas in order to forge ahead. It is also important to provide youths with qualitative and functional education in order to help the youths to adequately fit in to the scheme of things in the modern world which is knowledge-driven. Through education, the youths will be kept abreast of new developments and acquire new skills for self-improvement and societal development.

### **Counselling Psychological Implications**

Guidance Counsellors (counselling psychologists) have vital roles to play towards youth empowerment. With their vast knowledge, experience and professional expertise, they could do much to emancipate and harness the potentialities of the youths. The youths' disposition in terms of interest, attitude,

aptitude, anxiety or phobia, as well as their environmental forces could be modified, and to enable them build up the necessary skills, problem-solving, achievement motivation and alternative procedures to cope or resolve problems and challenges. The Counsellor is expected to relate well with the youth. He/she can use the required skills to appraise and understand them as well as their personal difficulties and challenges better. He/She needs to understand their intellectual capacities and environmental forces that affect them positively or negatively. He/She can explore their background and life experiences to be able to harness their endeavours.

In more specific ways, the Counsellor could engage in the following: take inventories of individual youth through test and non-test techniques, organize individual or group counselling on topical issues to improve youths aspirations, motivation, business risks and challenges undertaken, and how to manage them. Entrepreneurial skills for youths and procedure to start up, relating to when, what, where and how to persevere in order to achieve success in becoming self-reliant and have the capacity to meaningfully contribute to national development.

### **Conclusion**

The youths in Nigeria truly deserve much more attention than hitherto. Most of the problems associated with the youths are as a result of ignorance, idleness and the presumed culture of dependence on others for livelihood. Empowering the youth today for self-reliance and positive contributions to societal development become imperative. In addition to the little efforts by others (government, organizations and individuals), professional guidance counsellors have the tasks of empowering the youths through good education, reorientation, problem-solving and risk-taking behaviours. Skills they need to acquire will help much in economic, social,

career and educational adjustments for guaranteeing self-reliance and sustainable national development.

## Recommendations

In order to promote youth empowerment in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

1. Counsellors' direct involvement in the education of the youth at different levels and sectors. They should help in designing and implementing educational policies, programmes and other relevant packages to enhance knowledge and skill base of the youths.
2. Proper reorientation to put values right, correct misconceptions and undo phobia.
3. Carefully designed packages and youth-friendly centres at strategic locations within the communities in order to serve the yearnings and aspirations of the teeming youths. The necessary personnel, trades, and other facilities for study, vocational, technical, health, sports and guidance and counseling. These will go a long way in interacting with them and to enable them acquire the desired knowledge and skills.
4. Excursions to places of educational and business interest, open discussions and use of media to reinforce knowledge and skills. The counsellor has the responsibility of organizing visit to places of educational interest because this will afford the youths with practical experience. They will see practical skills application by those on the field and be able to ask questions to reinforce their learning and the problem-solving capacities.
5. Education of the youth should be made functional, imbued with practical skills. Moreso, entrepreneurial skills should be provided and the necessary support in terms of funds and good environment.

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