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Youthpreneurship: A Gateway to Sustainable Development in Southeast, Nigeria

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Abstract

Youthpreneurship in recent times has become a veritable tool in achieving sustainable development in both developed and developing countries. It is based on this, that this study examined youthpreneurship as a gateway to sustainable development in Southeast Nigeria, as a broad objective. It adopted a survey research design with a combined population of 200 youths selected randomly. A Likert structured questionnaire format was deployed for data collection. The analysis was carried out using correlation analysis, while hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance. Findings revealed that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between youth empowerment and innovativeness ($r = .981$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$). The study concluded that entrepreneurship remains one of the surest ways of getting employed and employing others. Among others, it was recommended that the creation of more youth empowerment programs should be one of the priorities of government and other well-meaning individuals, if they are serious about finding a way around unemployment in the region.

Introduction

Background of the Study

The volatility of the global economy has beckoned for entrepreneurial doggedness and innovativeness of the global citizenry. There is a lot of youth unemployment in Nigeria, especially in the south eastern part of the country (Jwasshaka, Amin & Dogara, 2018). This situation has made unemployed youth within the region to venture into entrepreneurship. Youthpreneurship seems to be an option to provide succour for these teeming unemployed youths. Youths are important for the growth of any nation, providing jobs for them and taking them out of poverty is therefore, paramount. Employment generation play a critical role in the economy of nations, this is part of the reason it formed a critical element of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and this may not be achieved in isolation without bringing the youths into the mix.

Sustainable development has become a household concept among scholars and government of various nations. This increased interest in the concept is because of what it professes to

offer, leading to the captioning of a developmental programme as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Local and international agencies, churches and schools are not left out in the campaign for the achievement of SDGs. The frequent usage of the word may be attributed to the establishment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that subsequently gave birth to SDGs. The former was when 189 nations gathered in September 2000 at the United Nations headquarters and signed the establishment of MDGs, with the aim of achieving a set of eight agenda (goals) that would help to ameliorate the sufferings of the developing and under-developed nations. These goals summarily range from reduction of extreme poverty, hunger, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality to a bearable minimum, improving maternal health, combating disease etc. The MDGs goals expired in the year 2015, and thus ushered in the SDGs which is more comprehensive and encompassing, and has its life span till 2030 (2015 – 2030). SDG has a 17 aim agenda that summarily includes promotion of sustainable economic growth, employment, decent work for all, reduction of inequality among countries etc (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2015).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a development that meets the needs and aspiration of the present without compromising the future; sees the youth as part and parcel of the major groups which the United Nations (UN) would work together with to ensure the attainment of the said agenda (UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2015). The global youth population is put at about 1.8 billion, aged between 15–24, based on the UN definition of youth. African youths are said to be about 200 million (Odoh & Eme, 2014). Nigeria youths are people between the ages of 18 – 35, and they formed the largest segment of the Nigeria population (Kolade, Towobala, Orasanye, Ayami & Omodewu, 2014). Interestingly, the African youth population is expected to grow in future, while the youth population in other parts of the globe are expected to shrink (Gyimah-Brepong & Kimenyi, 2013).

Youths are a veritable part of any economy, this is because of their size, dynamism, energy and age. This is why they are regarded as the future leaders, economic and political drivers of any nation (Odoh & Eme, 2014). However, it seems to have become a mirage, that this particular segment of our society is facing all manner of challenges such as unemployment, underemployment, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and different forms of diseases (Mulvey, 2005). According to International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017), between 1997 to 2017, the youth population added by 139 million while the youth labour force contrasted by 34.9 million, and that in the near future, most of the youths are expected to be unemployed in the developing countries. Undoubtedly, juxtaposing the above statistics with the current situation of youth unemployment in Nigeria, and the southeast in particular, the need to nip off the problem in the bud to avoid getting out of hand needs urgent attention.

Southeast is one of the geopolitical zones in Nigeria with the highest number of unemployed youth after the South-South zone (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2020). These damning statistics make a case for a study of this nature to be undertaken. The study is narrowed down to two states in the southeast, Imo and Anambra state. The narrowing down was necessitated by the fact that Imo state has the highest number of unemployed youths in Nigeria (48.7%) while Anambra state has the least number of unemployed youths in Nigeria (13.1%) (NBS, 2021). This study, therefore, seeks to ascertain the relationship between youthpreneurship and achievement of sustainable development in southeast, Nigeria, as the broad objective. Specifically, however, the study seeks to:

Determine the extent of relationship that exists between youth empowerment and Innovativeness in Southeast, Nigeria.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Entrepreneurship

This is the quality and dexterity needed to become an entrepreneur. It is also the capacity needed for inventing and generating innovative business ideas, coordinating resources, organizing production, marketing the product, and managing the inherent risks. Onuoha (2007) opines that entrepreneurship is the process of creating new organizations or revitalizing an already existing business organization with the view of identifying business opportunities. Schumpeter (1970) as cited in Eroglu and Picak (2011) aver that entrepreneurs are the people who make use of market opportunities through technological inventions. In the views of Mohammed (2008), it is the process undertaken by a risk-taker, called the entrepreneur to establish a progressive business by discovering business opportunities, organizing them, managing the risks and as well contributing to economic growth.

Entrepreneurship just like other areas of specialization has no single definition. Everyone views the concept from different perspective and backgrounds. However, it could be said to have four key elements. They are:

- I. **Vision:** This has to do with sporting emerging business opportunities.
- II. **Innovation:** Inventing new business or hatching new ideas of doing things.
- III. **Risk Bearing:** Facing business challenges and uncertainties
- IV. **Organizing:** Coordinating the necessary resources needed in setting up a business.

Youthpreneurship

This is an aspect of entrepreneurship designed to influence an entrepreneurial culture and spirit among youths that will foster personnel and economic development. This concept empowers young to look towards self-employment and generate employment opportunities for themselves and others. They are motivated to establish an entrepreneurial venture because of their motive to become an employer of labour, obtain an alternative source of income, provide innovative and competitive products and services (Riah, 2010). According to small business leadership (2017), youthpreneur has three transitional periods, which includes:

- **Pre-Entrepreneurs:** These are entrepreneurs who are still at the incubating stage. They have gathered much experience. These are people between the ages of 15 – 19. They are entrepreneurs who need various entrepreneurship possibilities. Entrepreneurship orientation and awareness at this stage is key.
- **Budding Entrepreneurs:** This is the second stage of youthpreneurship development. These are entrepreneurs between the ages of 20-24. They have been equipped with entrepreneurial exposures and confidence to establish their own business. Intensive entrepreneurial development training is needs at this stage for survival.
- **Emergent Entrepreneurs:** These sets of youthpreneurs are the most equipped and experienced of the youthpreneurs. They have access to many things like capital, mentors and operational support. Their businesses are already in the market and they just needed only tactical skills for growth and expansion.

Youth Empowerment

This is the idea of equipping, strengthening and encouraging young people to take the initiative on how to be in charge of their life. This will inculcate the habit of self-actualization and independence among the youths, reduce unemployment, crime and other social vices ravaging the society in recent times. Akintola and Adiat (2013) opine that youth

empowerment creates enabling atmosphere for an individual by improving the zeal to perform. The path to youth empowerment is anchored in the attitudinal, structural, and cultural aspects of a person which propels the desire to make certain decisions in the person's life (Tope, 2011). However, youth empower does not only mean strengthening the youth on how to take charge of their lives but also include them in decision making processes or issues that matter and honour their collective resolve.

Youth Empowerment Schemes in Nigeria

The volatile nature of Nigeria economy in recent times and the seeming saturation of the labour market with lots of youth (both graduates and undergraduates) left unemployed makes youthpreneurship and youth empowerment programmes the last resort for this segment of people. These schemes are laid out by the Nigeria government as a support for any youth who intends to set up his/her enterprise. Some of these programmes include

i. Presidential Youth Enterprises support scheme (P-YES)

This scheme trains and award loans to start-up small and medium scale business for participants who must be between the ages of 18 – 35. The programme is carried out by the Bank of Industry (BOI) in collaboration with the minister of Youth affairs. All you need to access the loan is a valid means of identification from your local government area, must be a Nigeria citizen between the ages of 18 and 40, the applicant must provide a guarantor, ability to communicate in basic English Language or any local Nigerian language, ability to secure the endorsement of a local government official and provable upright character and a stable mind.

ii. N – Power: This scheme is divided into two:

The N-power graduate category and N-power Non-graduate category provides the beneficiaries with job training and a monthly allowance of ₦30,000.

iii. Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (You win): The beneficiaries of this scheme are awarded grants, and must have a business plan. This scheme was established to empower Nigerian youth by giving grants to outstanding business plans and would-be entrepreneurs.

iv. Trader Moni: This scheme offers an interest-free loan to 5 million aspiring entrepreneurs in Nigeria to start up a business of their choice. No collateral is needed before getting the loan.

v. Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS)

This scheme is founded in 2012, and it is for graduates who are finding it difficult to secure jobs after graduating. Monthly stipends of thirty thousand naira (#30,000) are paid to the beneficiaries

Innovativeness

This is the characteristic of being innovative. Innovation in the other hands means the act of creating or inventing ideas, products or services that have not been in existence; bringing something new into being. Innovative ideas are what separate one product and services from others. Creating an outstanding product, or rendering outstanding services and compete favourably in any competitive environment requires innovativeness. In developing economies like Nigeria and other African countries, young people need to equip themselves with skills and knowledge to pursue and develop innovative solutions for immediate consumption and posterity. Youths have shown their innovativeness in areas like fashions, music, software designs etc (Sebba, Hunt, Griffiths & Robinson, 2009)

Youth

The concept of youth varies from culture to culture and from society to society. In most societies, the advancement from childhood to youth involves some systematic rites of passage. The rites have a symbolic significance which only participating in them enables an individual to achieve a new status and position, this new status gain authenticates recognition through genuine community action (National Youth Policy, 2009). According to Ubi (2007), the UN and World Bank describe the youth as those persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years, for the commonwealth, the age bracket is between the ages of 15 – 29 years. In different Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries, the age bracket is between 15 – 35 years, like in Ghana and Nigeria the age bracket of the youth is between the ages of 18 – 35 while that of Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia and Mali is 15 – 35 years and India adopted 15 – 34 years as a youth,

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)/Sustainable Development Goals

The world leaders came together in September 2000 to adopt the United Nations millennium declaration. This declaration committed nations to global partnership and to set out eight time-bound targets to achieve with a deadline of 2015. The aim was to produce a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing the human race, especially, the developing nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started in 2000 to tackle poverty in the developing economies. The SDGs or Global Goals are 17 interrelated global goals designed to be a road map to achieve a better and more sustainable future for developing nations. The 17 SDGs are as follows:

1. End Poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all woman and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Promote sustainable industrialization.
8. Ensure access to affordable reliable and modern energy for all.
9. Promote strong inclusive and sustainable economic growth and work for all.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Build inclusive, safe and sustainable cities and human settlements.
12. Promotes sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Promote actions at all levels to address climate change.
14. Attain conservation and sustainable use of marine resources oceans and seas.
15. Protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems and halt all biodiversity loss.
16. Achieve peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law effective and capable institutions.
17. Strengthen and enhance the means of implementation and global partnership for sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Schumpeter's concept of Creative Destruction (1942) which states essentially that long-standing business models, organizations and structures must be

destroyed to open opportunities for innovation and new businesses. Also, Hart and Milstein (1999) argue that overall innovators and entrepreneur will view sustainable development as one of the biggest business opportunities in the history of commerce. Also, in their view, entrepreneurs have the chance to reposition themselves in their business environment by enhancing their competencies and finally redesign their industries toward sustainability. From the concept, the federal government has repositioned the youth through programmes like SURE-P and YouWIN in the business environment and enhancing their competencies through training to sharpen their skill to enable the youths to redesign their industries for sustainability.

Empirical Reviews

Brahima Dhruyand Ahmadou (2019) investigated Job Creation for youth in African, assessing the potential of industries without smokestacks. The study sort a premature levelling off of manufacturing and a weak structural transformation dynamic are confining African economic to low-productivity sectors and limiting the prospect of large scale formal sector job creation, These industries without smokestack (IWOSS) present characteristics similar to manufacturing such as being tradable, employing low and moderately skilled labour, having higher than average value added per worker and exhibiting capacity for technological change and productivity growth. The study assesses the job creation potential of industries without smokestacks by estimating employment to output elasticity. The results indicated that (IWOSS) have employment to output elasticity of 0.9, similar to that of manufacturing 0.8, but higher than the 0.6 estimates suggest that there is great scope for IWOSS to have a high employment-generating capacity and those policies supporting an environment conducive to their development could be effective in addressing African's youth unemployment challenge. Onuoha and Woghiren (2019) studied job creation strategies for Nigeria. The paper surveyed a wide range of job creation strategies that policymakers can implement during times of economic recession. The paper did not specify which job creation strategies work best rather it is a broad survey mapping the landscape of job creation strategies. The study recommended Nigeria government practitioners to focus more narrowly on stimulating labour demand and employing workers now. Practitioners must balance long and short term goals in job creation, realizing that few policies can serve both.

Sabelo and Happyson (2017) studied the effectiveness of youth entrepreneurship programmes and enhancing an entrepreneurial culture in Swaziland. The paper assessed the effectiveness of a Swaziland programme inculcating an entrepreneurial culture among the youths. Survey research was carried out involving 123 current members in six different institutions of higher learning. Findings showed that lack of access to finance was a major barrier to entrepreneurial entry for young people and also several youth entrepreneurial programmes were designed without the involvement of young people hence not addressing the need of the youth. The study suggested that the existence of weaknesses and loopholes is in the manner the programme is managed and marketed.

Akiri, Onoja and Kunanzang (2016) investigated entrepreneurship and job creation in Nigeria. The paper examined entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, pre-colonial, entrepreneur and colonial and post-colonial. It also highlighted some government efforts and policies supporting entrepreneurship and job creation. The study employed a descriptive statistical analysis to compare data on the number of entrepreneur and employment between 2010 and 2013 and the percentage change in each component. The result revealed that as entrepreneur's increases so do the employment rate, also certain factors are impediments to

the growth of entrepreneurs such as political instability and insurgency. The study recommended that the sustainability of this growth depends on the macro-economic policies and political stability of the country.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design because data were collected through a questionnaire. Out of the five states in the Southeast region of Nigeria, two states (Anambra & Imo state) were selected for the study, with a combined population of 200 youths that were randomly selected. The study employed the use of census because the entire population was considered small, based on the entire size of entrepreneurs in these states. A five-point Likert structured questionnaire was deployed in eliciting data from the respondents. The instrument was tested for validity using face and content measure, while the validity was ascertained using Cronbach alpha, with a coefficient of 0.902 obtained. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in line with the population of the study, 186 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis. The analysis was carried out with the use of correlation analysis and the hypotheses were tested at 5% level of significance.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Responses from respondents on Youth Empowerment and Innovativeness

Youth Empowerment		5	4	3	2	1	
		SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN
1	Youth Empowerment Scheme has empowered a lot of youths I know.	61	33	28	31	33	3.31
2	I am a beneficiary of government youth empowerment scheme	37	22	11	66	50	2.62
3	Youth empowerment has reduced the unemployment of youths in my state	58	49	34	27	18	3.55
4	Youth empowerment could eradicate poverty among the youths	68	44	21	37	16	3.60
5	Youth empowerment could put an end to all manner of social vices in my state.	50	47	53	19	17	3.51
Innovativeness							
6	I have skills in many areas.	44	58	15	29	40	3.20
7	Getting training support from the government or other bodies can help in my skills.	49	53	29	31	24	3.39
8	My talent can be sharpened with a bit of skill training.	44	68	25	28	21	3.46
9	I can apply various skills in accomplishing different tasks.	39	56	47	30	14	3.41
10	I am good at creative thinking	49	56	38	34	9	3.60

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses for Youth Empowerment and Innovativeness in southeast Nigeria. The analysis is based on descriptive statistics (mean), with a threshold of acceptance of 3. From the Table, it is seen that all the individual questionnaire items except questionnaire item 1 have a mean of 3 and above. This implies that the respondent agreed to the existence or truthfulness of the respective questions. .

Test of Hypothesis

Ha: Youth empowerment has a statistically significant relationship with innovativeness in Southeast, Nigeria.

Table 3: Correlations Analysis for Hypothesis One

		YOUTHEMP	INNO
YOUTHEMP	Pearson Correlation	1	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	186	186
INNO	Pearson Correlation	.981**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	186	186

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 shows Pearson's correlation analysis on the relationship between youth empowerment and innovativeness in Southeast, Nigeria. From the Table, it reveals that the Pearson's correlation (r) is .981 and the probability value (p -value) as represented by Sig in the Table is $.000 < 0.05$ level of significance. Going by this, it shows that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between youth empowerment and innovativeness in Southeast, Nigeria, therefore, the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

The unprecedented level of unemployment in Nigeria as a whole and southeast Nigeria, in particular, is alarming. This could be connected to the increasing crime rate in the region as an idle mind is said to be the devil's workshop. Engaging the youths in productive ventures remains one of the veritable tools of productive engagement. The government has proven to be unable to employ everyone, therefore, youths appear to be on their own in terms of finding gainful employment. Entrepreneurship remains one of the surest ways of getting employed and employing others, but the enabling environments need to be created through youth empowerment has the potential of making the youths more innovative and built with the right capacity to excel.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this study, the study makes the following recommendation: The creation of more youth entrepreneurship programs should be one of the priorities of government and other well-meaning individuals, if they are serious about finding a way around unemployment in the region. This is because, with empowerment schemes, youths will be motivated to put in their best and fan the embers of innovation in them.

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