Youth unemployment: Entrepreneurship development programme as an intervention mechanism

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Within the framework of potential efforts and strategies to boost employment and job creation for young people, entrepreneurship is increasingly accepted as an important means and a valuable additional strategy to create jobs and improve livelihoods and economic independence of young people. Regrettably, problems of unemployment as experienced by the educated youths and even the uneducated but skilled youths have become more pathetic in many developing economies, despite the neo-liberal strategies in addressing the issue of enhancing human capital. The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the constraints that impede young people in search of non-existing jobs and the urgent need to orient people of these affected economies particularly Nigerians on imbibing self-employment and entrepreneurship through vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes as a short-term intervention mechanism.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, unemployment, youth.

BACKGROUND

Youth development and empowerment are vital stages in life for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and lead better, and possibly have a more fulfilling life. The human capital formed in youth is thus an important determinant of long term growth that a nation can invest on. Hence, making sure that youths are well prepared for their future is enormously important to the course of poverty reduction and growth. Africa is a continent with a massive population of young people. More than half of Africa’s population is aged less than 21 years and two-thirds less than 30 years. In all African countries, the median age of the population is 20 years or less, that is, half or more of the population are under 21 years of age and up to one-fifth between 15 and 24. Countries vary considerably in their definition of youth and childhood. The UN considers individuals under the age group of 15 – 24 as youths. In Uganda, for example, youth is from 12 to 30 years, while in Nigeria, it is between 18 and 35 years (ILO publication, 2005). In general, over 200 million Africans are now officially designated as youths (that is, aged 15 to 24). This group makes up 40% of Africa’s working age population, unfortunately 60% are unemployed. Despite the yearly increase in the number of children attending school and those completing tertiary education (Longe Report, 1992), millions of the young people face bleak employment opportunities.

According to the ILO (ILO publication, 2007), the increase in the number of youths in secondary and tertiary education is a positive development; however, labour markets in many countries are presently unable to accommodate the expanding pool of the skilled young graduates. It is estimated that about 400 million new jobs would be needed to absorb today’s youths. Due to this decline in jobs and the rise in the number of those unemployed, young people are forced in the informal...