

Attempts at Empowering Rural Communities through Vocational Skills: Some Guiding Theories

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Abstract: The high unemployment rates in the rural areas call for the empowerment of both the young and old on survival skills. This will help them to participate in the informal economy for their livelihoods. Informal jobs offer valuable opportunities for young unskilled workers in terms of skill acquisition and career advancement. To be specific, they serve as a stepping stone to formal jobs, which offer better conditions in terms of pay, insurance, job security, and other amenities at work. Although the existence of a large informal sector may distort tax collection and reduce productivity, informal job opportunities may in fact be welfare enhancing for the young and unskilled workers in developing countries, because these jobs help workers gain expertise and build professional networks for improving their career prospects. Integrated Skills Outreach Programme is one TVET way of equipping rural populations with skills to fend for themselves.

Keywords: Rural, vocational, empower, skills, unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas contribute significantly to employment and economic growth in many countries. Of the developing world's 5.98 billion people, close to 3.4 billion live in rural areas, and a significant number depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (Unesco.2009). Flourishing rural areas are vital to regional and national development. Education, entrepreneurship, and physical and social infrastructure all play an important role in developing rural regions. Skills are central to improving employability and livelihood opportunities, reducing poverty, enhancing productivity and promoting environmentally sustainable development. TVET is the process which produces the specialist practitioners for the various levels of the productive and service sectors in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The process involves on-and on-the job grooming of the trainee by both the institution and the productive and service sectors. Its graduates include skilled operatives skilled workers, technicians, technologists, engineers and scientists who serve the varied economic sectors of any country depending on their individual orientations. TVET graduates are the practical problem-solvers innovators

leaders and employment creators in any society. The availability of these people in large numbers in any country tends to directly influence and determine the country's direction and level of technological development (Hartl, M. 2009). They constitute the critical factor which marks the effective difference between industrialised and developed countries on the one hand and non-industrialised developing or less developed countries on the other. It should be noted that the bulk of the expatriate technical experts and imported technologies come from the ranks of TVET graduates.

UNESCO DAKAR FRAMEWORK GOAL 3

The UNESCO Dakar Framework for Action Goal 3 which focuses on the importance of life skills, specifically on equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes directly applies to the discussion at hand, the integrated skills outreach programmes. The UNESCO Framework ensures that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (Pindiriri, C., & Muhoyi, E. 2000).

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The major concern of the discussion is the gap that exists between the urban communities compared to the rural in so far as access to formal technical and vocational skills training centres are concerned. The rural communities, to a large extent, have been excluded from the formal training. Hence, there is a mismatch between the low participation in TVET of rural communities compared to their urban counterparts.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) paper 2009 contends that human capital is considered to be the driving force of economic growth. On the same note, Hartl(2009) states that lack of development can also be attributed to the lack of an entrepreneurial culture, which can be inculcated through TVET.

On another note, Hartl (2009) further posits that the under development prevailing in most third world countries is attributed to scarcity of TVET and entrepreneurship. Therefore, the “need for achievement”(Richard, N. (2016) is the driving force behind entrepreneurship and economic development. Equipping the rural communities with entrepreneurial skills is the way to go in order for this group of people to positively contribute to national development.

SURA'S PHILOSOPHY

Employers are interested in recruitment of not only educated and professionally trained graduates but also of workers at lower levels for skill-based tasks(Sura, B. 2015). ISOP is one of the methods that can be used to train the lower level skills personnel.

ISOP trained graduates are low-trained and offer basic but invaluable skills to society. These basic skills include basic welding, brick and block – laying, basic sewing and gardening, to mention but a few. To a large extent the rural livelihoods of rural communities rely on these skills without importing them from the urban areas. Empowerment and economic transformation of the rural disadvantaged is crucial for national development as formal knowledge may not be the most important attribute sought by all employers for employment at different levels. What the researcher is arguing for is that the integrated skills outreach programmes by their nature, should be able to provide self-employment to the unemployed and disadvantaged rural communities.

PINDIRIRI AND MUHOYI (2000) STATES THAT:

The theory and philosophy of entrepreneurship development is based on the assumption that entrepreneurs are not only born but can be identified, trained and thus created.

It is imperative that despite the rural people's low educational qualifications, the semi-literate rural communities are capable of being trained in low skilled

hands-on programmes. This paper concerns itself with how these rural disadvantaged can be brought into the main stream of the economy to become entrepreneurs and hence contribute to the economy. This is what the ISOP initiative is all about, empowering skills tools to the non-formal sector that have missed out on formal education and training. This is the gap that, according to Hartl(2009) is seen along Education and Training being, “investment in human capital”, and that accumulation of this human capital is a factor of economic growth as ultimately, a return in investment is realised, both by the individual and society at large. This is the essence of the integrated skills outreach programmes. If successfully conducted, non-formal vocational education and training will play an important role in entrepreneurship development because it will provide the human resources required for the economic development of any nation. TVET and Polytechnic institutions must play their role in imparting skills to the rural communities and create entrepreneurs out of them, and the rural people in turn can then contribute to the economic development of the country. The general thrust of the ISOP training programme was the conviction that development is not possible until a pool of skills exists in rural areas. In addition, it was also believed that the long-term relief of poverty and unemployment could only be effected through self-reliance training.

The programme is therefore designed to provide the rural disadvantaged with an opportunity to earn a livelihood and to effect an immediate improvement in living conditions in rural areas (Kasambira, D. 1987).

The basic assumption and key thrust in conceptualising the ISOP training programme for the rural populace is predicated upon the fact that the curriculum developed responds to the needs of the immediate community and the nation. The objectives which meet the identified skills training needs should be reflected in that curriculum in order to make non-formal education accessible for all, that is, institute measures for people in remote areas, measures for socially disadvantaged persons namely the poor people, marginalised youngsters and the handicapped.

DUMITRESCU'S THEORY

The Second Theory Is Dumitrescu'S(Dumitrescu, C. 1999) Theory Which Argues That:

Formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcome.

Its reinforcement by non-formal educational practices.

Dumitrescu(1999)recommended that governments and appropriate authorities of member states recognise non-formal education as a de facto

partner in the lifelong process and make it accessible for all. This was a clear recognition that formal educational systems alone cannot respond to rapid and constant social and economic change in society. They should therefore be reinforced by non-formal educational practices. ISOP correctly falls in this category of study.

This assumption is based on the premise that vocational and technical education programmes acquisition is closely linked to economic empowerment and poverty alleviation.

It is therefore important that the designs of these outreach programmes and their curricula should be planned to enable the trainees acquire skills necessary for employment, self-reliance and community development (Richard, N. 2016).

DUMITRESCU (1999) STATED THAT:

The Assembly recalls the Final Declaration of the 5th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth in which, European countries were encouraged to promote equality of opportunity by recognising the training and skills acquired through non-formal education and by finding various ways of endorsing the experience and qualifications acquired in this way. It welcomes the setting-up of a "working group on non-formal education" in the Council of Europe.

The acquisition of these vocational skills can liberate the idle minds and transform them into a self-reliant human and therefore empower them economically. The integrated skills outreach programmes that this study sets out to study falls into the same category as argued by Dumitrescu(1999) and thus the need to assess its relevance in providing skills to the rural communities. The proper implementation of ISOP would help to curtail the incidence of

unemployment, youth restiveness and other social vices that are prevalent in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

Integrated Skills Outreach Programme can be Zimbabwe's safety valve to solve the problem of widespread rural unemployment. If rural people are equipped with technical and vocational skills, they can lead sustainable lives and take part in economic development. If all districts in the country embark on the programme, a large number of youths will be equipped with employability skills. They can be able to create employment and actively take part in economic development. Polytechnics and Vocational Training Institutions should redouble their efforts in equipping the youths with requisite skills so that they take appropriate economic roles in society.

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