

Empowering Employees for Self-Employment in a Depressed Economy: Challenges and Prospects of Skills Development in the Nigerian Multinational Corporate Sector

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Abstract. With the global economic meltdown and consequent negative implications on employment and job security, the economic situation in Nigeria has become more daunting to the extent that many multinational corporate sector operators have not only reduced production, some have shut down completely with hope for improved business climate while some multinational corporations (MNCs) have relocated to neighbouring countries. The net effect of these trends has been increase in the number of the unemployed who have very little hopes of securing employment in the nearest future as the economic situation in Nigeria remains on the downward trend. With this scenario, this paper aims to probe the issue of skills development in the multinational corporate sector. Its central concern is to ascertain the level to which MNCs' training and skills development programmes empower employees to be self-employed beyond the employing organisation and industry. The paper argues that although MNCs are viewed as custodians of skills and technology deployed for production globally, with their many years of business operations in Nigeria, skills shortages abound while unemployment have increased. What are the factors responsible for this situation? The paper situates the discourse on human capital theory. Its findings are based on interviews conducted in three skills development and utilisation agencies – State policy making institutions, multinational corporate sector and organized labour. The paper concludes that concerted efforts are required on the part of

government to ensure that MNCs' skills and training programmes are tailored and implemented in line with Nigeria's national aspirations on human capital formation.

1. Introduction

The “health” status of an economy has a great implication on the social wellbeing of the people. From the Mid 1980s, the buoyant Nigerian economy began a slow decline leading to unemployment that has aggravated over the years with graduates of Universities staying at home for years in search of gainful employment. While the government has adopted various programmes such as the Structural Adjustment, Privatisation and Commercialisation in attempt to revamp the economy, the unemployment situation has remained on an upward trend. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of Nigerians that became unemployed rose from 11.92 million in the first quarter of 2017 to 13.58 million and 15.99 million in the second and third quarters respectively (NBS, 2017). The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), from its survey also gave a startling revelation that about 226 companies have either closed shop or downsized between 2015 and 2016 in the country and their employees have been thrown out of jobs (Onuba, 2018). The hope of securing employment becomes deemed with the number of multinational corporate sector organisations folding up, some multinational corporations

(MNCs) reducing their productive capacities and others relocating to other countries out rightly.

Considering the perspective that MNCs are viewed as custodians of technology and with the claim that these companies provide trainings to their employees to make them acquire skills relevant for entrepreneurship among other objectives, unemployment becomes a serious concern in Nigeria. MNCs operating in Nigeria employ many Nigerians, yet unemployment has increased. Some of the MNCs in Nigeria have operated for several years. To this extent, this paper probes into the activities of the multinational corporate sector with the intent of examining the training and skills development programmes imparted to employees. The objective is to ascertain the extent to which MNCs training and skills development programmes empower the employees to be self-employed and to be productively relevant in the larger economy beyond the employing industry where training was imparted. Specifically, the paper attempts to examine the following issues: What types of trainings go on in MNCs? What are the challenges to ensuring that the training provided by MNCs empower the workers?

2. Skills Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and is endowed with an abundance of natural and human resources. Nigeria had an estimated population of 173.62 million people in 2013 (World Development Report, 2014), which ideally could trigger industrial production and also provide a large workforce for economic development, if the workforce were appropriately skilled. However, the country lags behind in economic and social progress. For instance, the 2014 United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index Report

ranked Nigeria at 152nd and 118th respectively out of 187 countries surveyed. Over 62% of Nigeria’s population still lives below the poverty line (less than one dollar a day) (CIA Fact book, 2014; Ajibola, 2013).

Some analysts have argued that national industrial skills development is of utmost importance to Nigeria’s quest for industrial development (Ogundele and Abiola, 2012). Inadequate skilled human resource has remained a perennial problem in many sectors, notwithstanding Nigeria’s efforts at ensuring skills and human resource development for the nation. For instance, shortly after independence from Britain in 1960, Nigerian leaders formulated a comprehensive plan for overall development encapsulated in national development plans: 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980 and 1980-1985. The first plan led specifically to establishment of the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Manpower Board (NMB) in 1962. These were to act as think tanks for government in the area of developing relevant skills for national development. Other institutions have also been established for the training of human resource for different sectors of the economy.

Demographically, the country has a huge young population, with 63 percent under the age of 24 years (NBS, 2014). This has impacted on the limited opportunities available for education, training and skills development. From about 15, 000 applications to tertiary institutions in the 1970s, 1.7 million applied for admission to tertiary institutions for acquisition of high level skills provided by tertiary institutions in 2014 (Ademola, Ogundipe and Babatunde 2014: 56). Despite over stressed facilities, table 1.1 below presents the number of applicants who applied to acquire high level skills over a five year period (2010 - 2014).

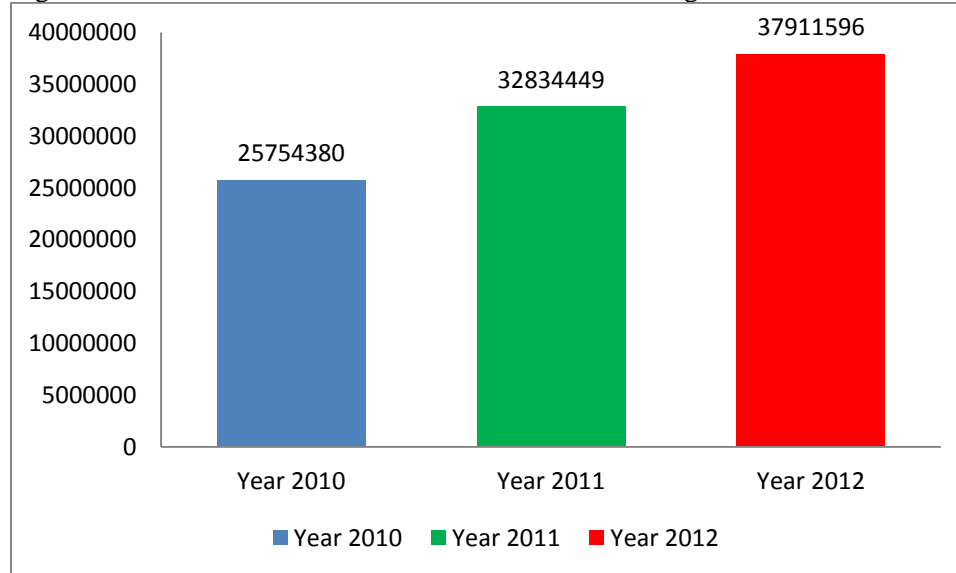
Table 1.1: UMTE Applicants and Tertiary Admission 2010 - 2014

Year	No of Applicants	No Admitted	% of applicants admitted
2010	1, 182,381	148,000	12.5
2011	1,375,652	360,000	26.2
2012	1,493,604	400, 000	26.8
2013	1,503,889	500,000	33.3
2014	1,670,833	520,000	31.1

Source: World Educational Services. An NGO, available at wenr.wes.org

While the data presented above were provided by a Non-Governmental Organisation, based in the United States, The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2015) revealed the increasing enrolment of Nigerians for education and skills acquisition despite inadequate funding between 2010 and 2012. The number of students enrolled in the formal education sector in Nigeria in 2010 stood at 25,754,380 which increased by 27.49% to 32,834,449 and by 15.46% to 37,911,596 in 2011 and 2012 respectively, showing an average growth rate of 24.48% for the period (NBS, 2015),

Figure 1.1: Total Formal School Student Enrolment in Nigeria 2010-2012



Source: Nigerian Formal Education Sector Report 2010-2012. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2015.

As the figure 1.1 illustrates, just as the number of enrolments have increased, the number of tertiary institutions have also increased. From one University College in 1948 and few technical schools for the development of medium and high level human resource, the number of tertiary institutions in the country stood at 549 comprising of federal, state and private institutions in 2014. Table 1.2 shows the number of schools and proprietors:

Table 1.2: Institutions and promoters or Owners

INSTITUTIONS	FEDERAL	STATE	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Universities	40	39	59	138
Polytechnics	21	38	25	84
Colleges of Education	22	46	14	82
Colleges of Agriculture	17	19	-	36
Monotechnics/Specialised Institutions	23	02	02	27
College of Health Technology/Allied Institutions	09	40	01	50
Technical Colleges	19	110	03	132
Total	151	294	104	549

Source: Compiled in 2014 from the official websites of NUC, NABTE and NCCE.

With the increase in population and high demand for education and skills, the number of institutions has also risen over the years. However, while Nigerians crave for education and high level skills, the increase in number of schools has not witnessed a commensurate level of funding to ensure appropriate development of medium and high level human resource. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommends that at least 26% of annual country's budget should be devoted to education. Regrettably, Nigeria is far from attaining this recommendation. This is revealed in the table 1.3 below, showing the percentage of national budgetary allocation to the Nigerian public educational system by the federal government for five years.

Table 1.3: Percentage of budgetary allocation to public education (2010- 2014)

YEAR	PERCENTAGE OF NATIONAL BUDGET
2010	7.32
2011	9.32
2012	9.86
2013	10.21
2014	10.63

Source: www.statistense.com

Considering the low percentage of budgetary allocation given to the education sector and the existence of poorly funded human capacity building institutions, how can the products of poorly funded human capacity developing institutions compete favourably within the global economy in a knowledge, technology and skills driven age? Indeed, the ripple effects of dimly low budgetary allocation to the education sector in Nigeria are: Inadequate and dilapidated physical infrastructure; insufficient and outdated instructional materials; and irregular payment of teachers' salaries culminating in low morale and attendant negative values (see Adedipe, 2013). Arguably, this scenario contributes to the skills mismatch and skills shortage experienced within the Nigerian economy and perhaps heightens the desire of government to look outwards for FDI through MNCs.

Governments have become conscious of the potential contributions of FDI to economic development. Indeed, FDI is now widely recognised as an alternative source of acquiring funds due to declining concessional aid to developing countries (Muogbo and Kayar, 2012:1). Foreign direct investments through MNCs potentially boosts the growth of a country by crowding in other investments with an overall increase in total investments, as well as hopefully creating positive 'spill-over effects' from the transfer of technology, knowledge and skills to domestic firms (Dulupçu and Demirel, 2009). It could also stimulate economic growth by spurring competition, innovation within the economy. The indirect impacts of FDI through

MNCs on the domestic economy, particularly in the area of developing local skills, are the main reasons for the intense political focus on MNCs in Nigeria and this may well account for the unprecedented levels of public subsidies, diplomatic shuttles and promotional activities to attract investors, especially after the return to democracy rule in 1999. Among the incentives are tax holidays, tariff protection, accelerated depreciation allowances and import duty relief for imported inputs (Aniekan, 2011:182).

Notwithstanding that these laudable programmes and incentives exist, and despite the fact that a large number of graduates from the universities have remained unemployed, numerous expatriates are still found within the various MNCs. In reality, local technologies are yet to be developed and the anticipated technologies are not yet transferred despite the institutional frameworks put in place to achieve this objective. These challenges persist despite several years of profitable business activities of MNCs in Nigeria. These are critical issues of concern in this paper.

The skills development discourses in Nigeria reflect the need for technology transfer, domestication of technology, skills portability or adaptability, employment generating skills and, above all, development of indigenous skills. To this extent, therefore, several questions can be raised about the activities of MNCs in Nigeria considering their several years of operation in the country. For instance, what are MNCs' training and skills development strategies and how do they impact on indigenous Nigerians?

What kinds of skills are developed? What skills do MNCs impart? What factors informed their skills programmes? Are they in line with national objectives? If not, what factors account for this? Since the Nigerian government has signed Memoranda of Understanding between certain countries, as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements, what are the activities of the various government regulatory institutions towards ensuring that the country derives maximum benefits from multinational business activities in Nigeria? These questions constitute the problematic of this paper.

3. Theoretical Framework of analysis

3.1 Human Capital Theory

The fundamental role of human capital for socio-economic transformation is well espoused in the literature (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961; Friedman, 1962; Sweetland, 1996; Xiao, 1999). Conceptually, the foundation of human capital is based on knowledge and skills acquired by an individual through education, vocational training or other learning activities (OECD, 2009a: 2). Human capital therefore implies investments that are made in people or that people make in themselves to improve their creative potentials or skills, empower themselves in the labour market and by extension increase productivity (Rosen, 1999). In effect, training and capacity building invested in people (employees) for better productivity are all embodiments of human capital. Frank and Bernanke (2007:355) explain that human capital is “an amalgam of factors such as education, experience, training, intelligence, energy, work habits, trustworthiness, and initiative that affect the value of a worker's marginal product”. According to Sheffrin (2003), human capital is “the stock of skills and knowledge embodied in the ability of labour to produce economic value”. To Rodriguez and Loomis (2007), human capital is “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being”. To this extent, therefore, investment in human capital plays an important role in a country's economic development. This assertion is corroborated by Barro's (1991)

empirical evidence from 98 countries. In a study covering the period 1960-1985, Barro found a positive relationship between initial human capital and the growth rate of real per capita GDP. In essence, this means that when all other factors are controlled, countries with higher human capital may have higher economic growth. A higher level of human capital has a correlation with a nation's productivity which is considered a very important source of social and economic transformation.

In a comparative study of Western and developing countries, Todaro (1986) concluded that the economic growth and transformation of Western countries were clear indicators of their investment in the improvement in skills or human capital as the leading source of their economic growth and development. As Schultz (1992:6) asserts, competent and skilled manpower is not only important in the quest for development but empirical evidence reveals that it was the “secret” for the quick recovery of Western Europe and Japan after the devastating effects of the Second World War which almost led to the total ruin of this axis of the world. This perhaps explains the high level of Western countries' investment in education for human development. The fast-growing Asian economies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore are remarkable models of the vital role of human capital to economic growth and transformation. Despite the fact that these countries were not rich in natural resources and minerals, they have managed to grow faster than many other countries, because they have had high quality and highly skilled human capital (Becker, 1993). The success of the Asian Tigers through investment in human capital perhaps added momentum to the quest for skills development in Nigeria. The government has established skills development institutions to facilitate development of human capital in the country. However, the skills challenge still persists in Nigeria due to factors which could be attributable to inadequate funding and capacity development of skills development institutions, among other endogenous factors.

Bryman (2001) observes that since the 1950s, social scientists have applied the concept of

human capital in different ways. Schultz (1961, 1971) assisted in streamlining the concept of human capital into two – formal education and learning, and informal learning and training – all geared towards enhancing human capital and ensuring greater productivity. Although the concept of human capital has been used in different perspectives and is subject to diverse interpretations and applications, the focus in this study is on Gary S. Becker's (1964) perspective. Becker (1992) analysed the concept of human capital within the context of the labour market, and viewed employees to be of prime importance in wealth creation, economic prosperity and the survival of society. Emphasising the core importance of human capital, Becker (1992) concludes that to discuss social and economic growth and development outside the concept of human capital would be as paradoxical as to discuss the former Soviet Union without the doctrine of Karl Marx. This emphasises the centrality of human capital to economic transformation of any country. Human capital is similar to what Marxists refer to as the infrastructure of society upon which the other superstructures rest (Marx, 1890). It serves as the foundation for societal transformation. In Nigeria, the quest for social and economic transformation has not been accelerated due to inadequate investment in the development of human capital. The effect has been the dearth of essential skills necessary for development.

More importantly, the vital role of human capital in development discourse is corroborated by Schultz (1961:1) who observes that even though it is obvious that people acquire useful skills and knowledge, many are not conscious that these skills and knowledge are a form of capital. He emphasises that this capital is a substantial part of a product of deliberate investment that has helped the growth of Western societies at a much faster rate than conventional (non-human) capital, and that its growth may well be the most distinguishing feature of the Western economic system. For developing countries, therefore, Schultz (1961:1) advocates investment in human capital as a way of enhancing the quality of human efforts for improvement in productivity. According to Schultz (1961:2), for a long time economists have known that people are an

important part of the wealth of nations which is measured by what labour contributes to output: the productive capacity of human beings is now vastly larger than all other forms of wealth taken together. Labourers, he asserts, have been transformed into owners of capital not from a diffusion of ownership of corporation stocks, but from the acquisition of knowledge and skills that have economic value. This knowledge and skills, in great part, is the product of human investment and accounts predominantly for the productive superiority of technically advanced countries.

Both Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961) agree that investment in education, training and skills development generate externalities for firms and conclude that it remains the most distinguishing feature of the modern economic system. Without training and improvement in skills, there would only be manual work and many, except for those who have inherited property, would be poor. As Schultz (1960:16) asserts “the man without skills and knowledge is leaning terrifically against nothing”. Becker (1962:11) notes also that many workers increase their productivity by learning new skills and perfecting old ones while on the job. For instance, the apprentice usually learns a completely new skill while the intern develops skills acquired in school, but both are more productive afterwards. On-the-job training, therefore, is a process that raises future productivity (Becker, 1964:21). Skills acquisition is another form of job security, and Becker (1964) observes that employees with specific training have less incentive to quit, and firms have less incentive to retrench them, than employees without specific skills or general training, which implies that quit and layoff rates are directly related to the level of training and skills acquired.

In essence, acquisition of skills has multiplier effects on the trained employees beyond efficiency on the job. On the flip side, lack of skills portends grave consequences for the society. This arguably, accounts for poverty, unemployment and associated criminal activities in the Nigerian society such as the Niger Delta. The Boko Haram Terrorism ravaging the North East of the country that is accredited to be the

poorest region in Nigeria could also be the aftermath of lack of skills, unemployment and poverty. Development of skills especially of the youth might be a sustainable approach to a lasting peace necessary for development in Nigeria. Human capital is seen by Ghalandarzahi and Safdarie (2012:164) as a prerequisite for development because the extent of growth and rate of development depends on the quality and quantity of an efficient workforce. Human capital provides potential and a springboard for change and improvement, optimises the use of physical and tangible capital, increases the efficiency of production, and accelerates the rate of economic growth (Ghalandarzahi and Safdarie, 2012:164).

It could thus be deduced that the most important factor for growth and development of any country is an educated, well-trained and skilled labour force which is used according to the needs of each country and the global community through migration. The modern knowledge-driven society has shown that wealth of each nation goes beyond underground mineral sources, mining or financial investment. Wealth now emanates through each nation's share of knowledge that has become the 'global currency'. Thus, developing countries such as Nigeria have to key into this development paradigm in order to achieve the needed transformation through identification of talents of human capital for optimum use and development. A nation's educational system has a significant role to play towards the realisation of this objective. In addition, it is important to produce new knowledge and technology or transfer it from developed countries and to learn how to use the new technology in different areas. These account for liberal incentives by developing countries like Nigeria to attract FDI through the MNCs to facilitate development of skills that will aid technology transfer, domiciliation and domestication. Developed and skilled manpower can reduce technological gap and reduce comparative costs. In other words, knowledge and skills are key factors in economic growth. Therefore, developing countries need to devote a considerable share of resources annually on educating their citizens.

Human capital is regarded as an essential part of the infrastructure of all economies and a source of permanent development of all countries (Ghalandarzahi and Safdarie, 2012:171). As can be inferred from the foregoing analysis, for instance, MNCs are very much aware of the importance of the human capital, they offer relatively good salaries and allowances to their employees in order to retain them and invest enormously in their training, skills development and capacity building, which enable these companies to maintain a competitive advantage. In sum, the human capital theory is useful in providing explanations of why and how MNCs train their employees and develop their skills for more advantage to the organisation. In Nigeria, the numerous MNCs operating in Nigeria have the potential that could facilitate training and skills development which Nigerians and by extension Nigeria could tap to aid national development aspirations if the enabling institutional framework is provided. This argument reiterates the fact that purposeful leadership with the required political will is essential in achieving this objective.

The Human Capital Theory is useful because of its strength in analysing issues on training and skills development in the socio-economic transformation of any country. In this study, human capital theory is useful as an analytical tool for understanding Nigeria's skills situation as well as efforts of the government to address the skills challenge through the establishment of the skills development institutions. Moreover, conscious of the importance of skills, organised private sector and other stakeholders in the Nigerian economy have also been enabled through appropriate legislation to establish skills development institutions to facilitate human capital development in the country. However, the theory does not interrogate the type of training and skills development imparted on employees in the host countries of MNCs. This fundamental underlying agenda impact on skills development and human capital formation in host countries and remains a challenge for socio-economic transformation especially in the developing world.

4. Methodology

This paper is an extract from a longer study that examined the training and skills development programmes and strategies in the Nigerian multinational corporate sector. The study enables the paper to reflect on the question of whether the MNCs' skills development programmes are relevant to the employees' empowerment and job creation in the event of employees' downsizing, rationalizing or rightsizing as the case may be. The empirical data used in the paper were obtained using a qualitative research methodology and were collected over a five-month period (February and June, 2013).

Primary data were collected by means of key informant interviews and in-depth semi-structured interviews. A review of the relevant literature also provided useful secondary data. Five Key informant interviews were held with relevant officials in the office of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, and Centre for Management Development. The key informants provided information on the federal government's skills development aspirations and agenda. Furthermore, a number of in-depth interviews were held with a purposive sample of shop stewards union officials in the selected multinational companies.

The three multinational companies that served as case studies were purposively selected. They are: Lafarge Cement Wapco Nigeria Plc, the pioneer and leading cement producer; Unilever Nigeria Plc has been a leading producer of household care products since the colonial times and; MTN Nigeria is the pioneer and biggest mobile telecommunication network in Nigeria. Besides, each of the companies has a large labour force and remains very attractive to job seekers. Research participants in these organisations, apart from the union members, were senior officials whose responsibilities were central to skills development and utilisation within the companies.

For the purposes of this paper, the skills development establishments, the multinational companies, and organised labour constitute different "discourse constituencies" vis-à-vis skills development and human capital formation.

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity and the Centre for Management Development are vital government agencies through which skills development programmes and strategies in Nigeria are articulated. They serve as a platform for the enactment of the policy framework within which the other discourse constituencies operate, or are expected to operate. In other words, the environment created helps the multinational companies to do business, while organised labour provides the manpower to make these organisations function. It should be noted that the multinational corporate sector is only a subset of the broader organised private sector in the country.

Interviews conducted in the national skills agencies were aimed at ascertaining their involvement, if any, in multinationals' skills development programmes. The objective was to ascertain how the dominant human capital discourses in the different "constituencies" intersect with the trainings and skills development programmes of the MNCs in Nigeria. While the data analysis focused on a number of important themes, such as: skills for empowerment; skills for employment and job mobility (portability of skills); and skills for entrepreneurship among others, the focus of the analysis in this paper is on skills for empowerment and employment generation.

5. Findings

5.1 Skills development for empowerment and employment generation in Nigeria - State aspiration and focus

There is increasing recognition that citizen empowerment has implications on economic development and poverty alleviation which are issues of serious concern to the Nigerian government, organisations and individuals (Anyadike et al., 2012). With high levels of unemployment, especially among the youth, it has become an issue of serious concern for government for people to have skills that not only empowers them economically, but also for entrepreneurship development and employment generation such that the people with skills can create jobs and become employers rather than

job seekers (Anyadike et al., 2012; see also Siyanbola, et al 2012). This aspiration to develop skills for empowerment and employment generation informed the introduction of a “6:3:3:4” system of education in 1982. This was a system in which a learner received six years of schooling at the primary level, three years at junior secondary, three years at senior secondary, and four years at university level. However, the educational policy failed to achieve the desired objective before it was scrapped in 2010 due to inadequate funding, shortage of technical teachers, inadequate infrastructure among others (Paul-Sewa, 2012). Nevertheless, the government has not relented in the pursuit of empowerment and employment generation programmes. A senior official of the Federal Ministry of Employment and Productivity underscored the same point during the interview:

The idea of establishing the various industrial skills centres in different parts of the country is to create wider avenues for many Nigerians to acquire vocational skills, craft or trades to empower themselves and make them productive. Gone are the days when government has to provide jobs. A person trained in carpentry, autotronics, auto-mechanics, automobile repairs or plumbing is competent to set up his own business and even employ others. The craft centres are also into training hair dressers and tie and dye making which last for about three months after which the trainees get into business. Abeokuta is known for tie and dye business; if you quantify how much they are making from the business in a year, if we can get the statistics, you will be shocked to find out that most of them over there doing tie and dye are not poor.

A similar line of thinking was picked up at the ITF during an interview with a senior official:

Through the training at the industrial skills centres, the trainees are empowered. Not only that, the Centre in collaboration with the Nigerian Employers’ Consultative Association (NECA) has a programme known as ‘Start Your Own Business Plan’. Under this programme, the trainees will be required to write their own

business plans. These plans will be scrutinised and the trainees with the business plans that are considered viable are supported with the basic requirements to start their own businesses. In this way, it is not only imparting skills for empowerment but also assisting the trainees to be self-employed and even generating employment for others, possibly.

The theme of empowerment, entrepreneurship and employability was also evident in the response of an official of the Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment who earlier spoke about digital set-top boxes: “Part of the contract for the digitalisation of communication would be to manufacture the digital boxes locally and train Nigerians on the installation and repair of these digital boxes”.

The approach of the Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment, as the senior official informed the researcher, would undoubtedly lead to empowerment, income generation and employment generation within the country with multiplier effects on the wider society. The officials from the government establishments were essentially highlighting government’s interest in ensuring that Nigerians are trained and empowered to be self-sustaining and generating employment.

5.2 Skills development in Nigeria for empowerment and employment generation: Aspirations of the Organised Labour

For organised labour, skills development for empowerment and employment generation was equally an important issue in the human capital formation discourse in Nigeria. According to interviewees in this ‘discourse constituency’, in the phase of high population, it was becoming increasingly clear that government alone could not provide jobs for the teeming population, hence there was an urgent need to coordinate the efforts of all institutions concerned with developing skills, to empower Nigerians so that they could generate wealth and become employers rather than remain job seekers. The labour movements viewed the MNCs as harbingers of skills whose potential could be garnered for the realisation of this objective, in

an enabling environment and within a functional institutional framework. A senior official of the NLC further elaborated:

Well, developing skills of employees has many benefits to all – the company, the employees and most especially the Nigerian state. The problem is the right political, legal and economic environment to get things done. So many opportunities are open for a skilled person – he has the enablement to get a new and better job; he can negotiate employment terms and conditions better because of his skills and acquired expertise; he values himself more and he is respected and highly prized in the labour market. Then, if the skill is something he could utilise on his own, he can decide to be an entrepreneur by setting up his own business venture. For instance, paint production in this country, paint is the cheapest thing people produce even in their homes today. In those days, we used to hear of Berger Paints, President Paints, but the situation has changed; paints are everywhere now with different names that you can ever imagine today. What happened? In the Sango Ota axis, where you have many companies like Gin Distilleries Company, we had many of them then; during the economic crunch, most of these companies closed down and all of them went into their various rooms and started producing. So what you just need is to get the chemicals, you know the processing formula with which to mix them together and you start producing. Many People are now producing paints of different brands. Painters produce paints for their use at work. So, what it then means is that you are well off even if the company collapses. You get a better job; you tell them that you can do it; and if you are tested and you can actually do it, you become an entrepreneur and even employ others.

A senior official of the TUC suggested that MNCs could develop the skills of the local employees even as these companies were concerned primarily with profit making:

I am not against multinationals making profit, but I also expect that as they make their profits, they also have the moral and legal responsibility to impact on the lives of the people most especially those who help them to generate their

profits. Something that will make their lives permanently better, for instance, good skills. Well, that is under a normal setting where the institutions are strong. This is a major challenge that is faced by the labour organisations but we are engaging all the stakeholders so that the companies do not just use our people, dump them and relocate to another place. I know some multinationals have been able to train people and that have also enabled them to move out of poverty level. I know people who are technicians and artisans as a result of the skills they were able to acquire through working for multinational companies and this has changed their live-styles. You know, ordinarily, they may not be paid like the expatriates, but of course, their salaries are better than they used to be and of course they could as well move to some other companies. And so, that has helped their lives. But what I am talking about is: how many? What is the percentage of the multinationals that are doing this? There are some that are doing that. I will also say I am a beneficiary of some of those skills while I also worked with them (multinationals companies). You know, that has also changed my life and the lives of those around. It has also affected my family, because we live well. In Nigeria now, ‘Abc’ family, we live well.

Key issues which could be gleaned from the responses of the various interviewees on the issue of skills development vis-à-vis empowerment, entrepreneurship development, and employment generation revolve around the following issues: the need for various government and private institutions concerned with skills development to be strengthened to achieve this purpose; the need for effective coordination of programmes on skills development; the role of MNCs in developing skills; and the need to harness the skills development potential of MNCs through appropriate institutional and policy frameworks. It was important to also listen to the views of respondents in the MNC sector, as it represented a distinct ‘discourse constituency’.

5.3 Skills development in Nigeria for empowerment and employment generation: Lessons from the MNCs'

For the MNCs, skills development and training of employees was an important objective and critical to the functioning of the companies. It was a significant part of corporate citizenship. The MNCs claimed enormous involvement and credit for developing skills of their employees. A manager in Lafarge Cement Wapco pointed out:

Here in Lafarge, our workers are multi-skilled as they work in different sections of the factory and that is how uninterrupted production is ensured. And beyond the company, some of these skills could be put into practice at micro level. An electrical technician can still work in small scale organisations as a consultant or set up his own technical services. Many are also encouraged to join the organisation in marketing our products which they have been doing. Indeed knowledge acquired from the training school is very relevant beyond Lafarge.

Lafarge's idea of empowerment echoed that of Unilever, which, according to one Manager, went thus:

In the Nigerian environment, Unilever is called a training school because of the high number of people that have passed through the company to other companies. For example, I know of a man that worked here before and he had to leave; but I don't know the circumstance that led him to leave the company; he started his own small manufacturing company and he produces some of our products for us. So, we contracted part of our own arm of production to him; he produces some of our own products. So, for example, if we can't meet market demand, we contract him to supplement. Apart from that, the skills acquired in Unilever, as I have given you an example, if put together by an individual, that individual can actually stand on his/her own and become an entrepreneur. You work in the factory and you know the process of soap making and all, you can work on your own. You can be a small scale manufacturer, which is what many are.

The managerial official of MTN indicated the type of empowerment which the company had engendered in Nigeria. He stated that:

Quite a number of people who have worked in the company, having obtained knowledge and skills about the workings of the company have left to start their own businesses of becoming service providers to end users. They operate as individual outlets of MTN especially in the marketing of MTN products and services. That is why we have the slogan "everywhere you go". We have empowered people directly and indirectly throughout the nook and crannies of Nigeria, generating income and providing jobs.

The discourse among the MNCs painted the picture of a multinational corporate sector that places a high premium on training and skills development agenda and that encouraged entrepreneurship and employment generation in Nigeria.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The respondents in the three identified discourse constituencies (state, organised labour and MNCs) were unanimous on the importance of developing skills that will empower and facilitate employment generation or self-employment as the case may be. However, theory and practice most often are not the same as the pursuit of common aspiration of self-employment generation might not be with the same zeal due to individual corporate objectives. While the state established a number of institutions to facilitate development of skills for employment generation, are these skills development centres well-staffed and adequately equipped to actualise the state aspirations in this respect judging by the paltry less than 10% allocation to education despite increase in population and against the UNESCO recommendation of 26% budgetary recommendation?

In addition, the organised labour has also chided the government on its inability to ensure adequate and realistic formulation of policies as well as ineffectiveness in the implementation of laudable ideas especially in relation to the operations of MNCs in the country. This lapse

culminates in the companies doing just what they like contrary to what they publicly proclaim. Bakan (2004) cautions that MNCs will do just what they feel like doing in order to maximise profit and secure corporate interest. For instance, an interviewee from Lafarge (one of the companies where the study was conducted) spoke about rotation of employees in different units of production which make them multi-skilled and thus ensure uninterrupted production. The question to ask is: Will such an organisational policy calculated to ensure uninterrupted production facilitate specialisation and professionalisation of vocational and technical skills of employees such that they could be self-employed or generate employment in this age of specialisation? In addition, Unilever's policy of sub-contracting employees after productive live with the company may not really facilitate employment generation per say as the company keeps such employees with potentials for employment generation within its fold. All these are pointers to what the MNCs proclaim and what are subtly practised as revealed by the respondents. Realising this aspiration of self-employment and employment generation would therefore require the concerted efforts of the government to ensure that agreements, rules and operational procedure are adhered to. Otherwise, MNCs will continue to make their profits without the necessary spill-over effect of developing employees' skills that will make them self-employed, not to talk of generating employment for others.

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