**Institutional Linkages for Skills development in the Nigeria Building Industry: The Case Study of NIOB/ SURE-P Partnership**

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Abstract

*This paper uses the collaboration between the Federal Government's Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and the Nigeria Institute Building (NIOB), to provide Upskills training to artisans and tradesmen in the building construction sector, as a case study to assess the effectiveness of institutional linkages for skills provision in Nigeria. It outlines the basic challenges, identifies some of the key institutions that have been involved in vocational training. It then focuses on the NIOB SURE-p program, challenges incurred in the course of its implementation, benefits derived, lessons learned, and issues to be considered in the design of future programs*

**1.0      INTRODUCTION**

The huge population of Nigeria throws up a paradox of sizable human resource potential that is characterized with quantitative and qualitative mismatch of skills supply and demand. The development precipitates yawning skills shortage in the productive sectors of the economy and accentuates a high rate of unemployment.

This has been attributed to the fact that Nigeria's skills development (technical and vocational education and training - TVET ) sector is "currently largely characterized by a problem of disconnect between the needs of Nigerian industry and the nation's output of trained technical workers ( **Stambler, 2012**). As **Abubakar et al (2013)** noted, "whereas in many other countries, TVET is an integral part of economic development strategies, in Nigeria, rather than creating the necessary synergy between education and industry, the TVET system has largely deteriorated over the past three decades."

The severe shortage of diverse skills, in terms of availability, capacity, and competencies, has negatively impacted on the development agenda of the country, with key sectors like oil and gas, manufacturing, and especially the construction industry experiencing a disturbing influx of artisans and tradesmen with identifiably better skills and competences, from other nationalities. The asphyxiating implications on our national economy and the attendant challenges of security in the face of the trending global terrorism presents some serious case to ponder.

Several approaches and institutional interventions and programs have been introduced to redress the situation. Notable amongst these are the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Alleviation Program (NAPEP), and Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment

(SURE-P).

 A critical look at all these approaches, good as their intentions were, could easily reveal that desired skills gap evaluation was not undertaken, and that no proper industry sector needs indemnification strategies were allowed to impact the process. The abysmal outcome being the virtual absence of essential horizontal and vertical linkage between the institutions involved in skills training and development, and the respective relevant industry sectors, most especially, in the realms of value addition and responsive job placements. Zeroing on the peculiarities for the building construction industry, **Nduka (2014)** highlighted that “the value expectation is that artisans and craftsmen up skilled through the specified training guidelines and models will acquire requisite workmanship and skills that will mitigate the challenges posed by the widely manifesting building trades skill gap, and accordingly stem the associated poor quality delivery currently haunting the building construction industry”.

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To highlight through literature and practical experience of the authors, the Construction Industry Challenge with respect to skills development.
2. To review the execution of the 2014 NIOB/SURE-P partnership for upskills as an examples of a success story of public-private partnership.
3. To highlight challenges experienced in the NIOB/SURE-P partnership to guide future programmes.

**2.0 CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

The building industry is one of the economic sectors that will continue to play an important role in contributing to national economic development. The opportunities provided by the industry need be viewed from the depth of its impact on the economy and the derivative influence on the sustainability initiatives for infrastructural growth and development. Low productivity generally pose some serious challenge.

In a developing country like ours, with heavy reliance on a large pool of unskilled and foreign labour, dynamic changes in production materials, endless innovations in technology and delivery methodologies, uniqueness of products, peculiarities of construction sites, the competencies and skills base of our labour workforce –artisans and craftsmen- need be consciously and continuously upgraded to match the trending times and situate the needed assurance paradigms for cost effective, good quality, safe and successful building project delivery.

**Fashola(2013)** accentuated the concerns further when he opined that “If we talk about an expected seven per cent growth(UNDP projection) in the African and Nigeria’s economy, and we fail to provide opportunity for tradesmen and artisans to thrive; that economy will not perform……Our population is growing daily and the wealth of the nation can only be built by artisans. It is the artisans that have helped to build all the great nations of the world. Any nation that must prosper must pay attention to what the artisans are doing.”

The challenges of apparent lack of harmonized structure, statutory guidelines, and demographic statistics for situating the desired industry-wide index guidelines, and responsively address the demand criteria for such skilled workforce development, training, and availability have become more manifest over the years.

These include limitations posed by the absence of dedicated funding, and apparent lack of consistency by successive governments at all levels to implement, promote and sustain policies that will align skills development and training to a harmonised national development agenda.

These divergent efforts, and unreconciled approaches undermine the opportunities of positive synergistic outcomes and accordingly limit their effectiveness for addressing emergent and perceived challenges.

The involvement of professional Institutions (NIOB, NSE, CORBON,  COREN, etc.), the Organised private sector organizations(MAN, CAN, Cement Manufacturer Association etc..),  Government owned organisations/MDAs(Nigerian Railways, Nigeria Ports Authority, NIPP, NCC, Ministries of Works, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Labor, Industries, Power, Communications , etc.) and specialized training institutions (ITF, National Directorate of employment, Registered manpower training  and other skills/Trades organisations), and non-Governmental organizations is a welcome development.

However, the Achilles heel is the absence of a central body to define and establish a qualification framework that will be set against required competencies, and capable of being cross matched throughout the skills value chain and across industries. The development limits the employment opportunities and effective mobility of beneficiaries of many of these programs.

**3.0 The NIOB/ SURE-P TRAINING PROGRAMME: A STRUCTURAL REVIEW**

**3.1 Key Concepts**

(a). SURE-P: was set up by Federal Government to improve critical infrastructure and social safety –net projects, encourage wealth creation, and job generation towards mitigating youth unemployment in Nigeria​

(b). ​SURE-P TVET is an arm of the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) of the Federal Government responsible for implementing its Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) component of the "safety net" program through investment in technical vocational training for unskilled young Nigerians, as well as improving the training facilities required for delivering the trainings

(c). NIOB – THE PREFERRED TRAINER

SURE-P whose mandates included Sectoral Intervention Programmes identified the mass housing sector as one likely to have meaningful impact with capacity to generate employment for trained artisans and craftsmen. Relying on the mandate assigned to builders, as provided in the National Building Code, NIOB was selected as partners  to provide training and job opportunities for the target beneficiaries – artisans without requisite training or certification in line with SURE- P-TVET /PIU programmes.

**3.2 SCOPE OF THE WORK**

(a) Training: The training was expected to focus on the up-skilling of the following artisans- Masons, Plumbers, Electricians, Tilers, Painters, Iron Fitters, Carpenters, Roofers, POP Installers, Welders - and NIOB was expected to provide the training infrastructure and all the necessary training tools.

(b) Objectives

The intent of the collaboration as espoused in the MoU  is to ensure sustainable training and employment of artisans in the mass housing / construction industry. The targeted number of trainees for the first tranche was to be one thousand, and the projected duration of the training was to be 6 months per trainee

**3.3 Duties and obligations of partners.**

The MoU assigned specific duties to the respective partners as follows:

**SURE – P TVET PIU:**

a. Undertake Demand Analysis to identify sectoral skill gaps

b. In collaboration with NIOB carry out profiling and selection of trainees

c. In conjunction with NIOB carry out the orientation, documentation and placement of trainees in designated training centres.

d. Fund the training programme.

e. Evaluate, monitor and supervise the training programme.

**Joint roles of the partners:**

a. Selection and placement of trainees

b. Orientation, documentation and placement of trainees in designated training centres

**3.4 Implementation and Associated Drawbacks**

Once the MoU was signed, some ominous signs suggesting lack of commitment from the other party started manifesting, and there was concern as to whether this was just another illusion, coming after similar experience with other agencies in the past.

The setting, however, became clearer at the turn of the year when it was observed that:

i) The "representatives" we'd been dealing with were actually 'consultants' to SURE-p, and had done all preparatory work for the program including selection of centers etc.

ii) the budget could not accommodate the program as envisaged and there was need to review duration and scale down the program.

iii) NIOB was required to provide sites and employment for the trainees and possibly take care of their stipends from there.

iv) envisaged stipend could only be provided for 3 months

v) training to be dispensed with quickly as the provision was for the previous year

It was also discovered that although the institute was seemingly contracted by SURE-p, all arrangements  had to be cleared with, and funding obtained from the Ministry of Labour.

No doubt, these changes were sufficient to frustrate the program, but the felt need for this intervention motivated the Institute to decide to proceed, almost to the chagrin and surprise of the sponsors.

**3.5The Training Programme**

The program was broken into two stages preceded by a training of trainers session in Abuja. Although no provision was made for this, the institute decided to reach out to the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE ) as well as the Lagos State Vocational Education Board, a move which has had considerable beneficial spin off vide the recent recognition and assignment of roles to NIOB and CORBON as awarding body and sector skills council respectively.

Furthermore, essential value engineering on the programme advised the inclusion of an evaluation, assessment , and a programme-end certification component to the delivery architecture by NIOB. The intention was to convey visibility to NIOB, give validity to the training outcomes, and secure wider buy-in by artisans, government institutions, and industry stakeholders alike.

The first phase, scheduled to take place at six centers across the geopolitical zones, was designed to be a one-week cross  industry skills training workshop on basic trade appreciation, health and safety, quality, functional communications, basic entrepreneurship  and marketing (job sourcing , estimating, etc), numeracy and digital literacy, as well as soft skills/personal effectiveness ( discipline, commitment to work, goal setting, personal motivation, work etiquette, and interpersonal relations both on and off site), and management of personal finances

The second phase was to be a 10-day on-site practical training spread over 10 weeks (saturdays or as may be determined by the state chapter/training coordinator) on specific skill and competence requirements for the various afore listed trades.

**3.6 Assessment**

The formative assessment aspect was designed to comprise of 3 theory tests and  8 practical tests spread throughout the duration of the training. The applicable details and modalities which were to be determined by the Artisans and Craftsmen's committee in collaboration with the Exams committee of the institute, had the intention of ensuring that the certification is appropriately matched with the respective individual trainees' educational level, experience and demonstrated competence

**3.7 Examination / Certification**

It was suggested that the institute issue craft  license/skill ID renewable annually at a rate to be determined and for this to be categorized in line with NVQF levels ( from apprentice to master craftsman level ) which is to be vigorously promoted and publicized to be the basis of employment and wage rate for the trades.

**3.8 Motivational Awards / Prizes**

To encourage participants and boost interest of other artisans and craftsmen, awards/prizes it was suggested that prizes be given to the best participants (either best 3 from all trades in each zone, or the best in each trade in each zone)..

In all, the criteria for the assessment/award/certificate were proposed to include attendance(min. 80%), test/practical performance, and ability to relate effectively with other participants and operatives during the workshop and on-site practicals.

These were to have been presented along with certificates to all participants, during the 2014 AGM of the institute, but it did not materialize for some obvious reasons that precipitated the low points of the programme.’

**3.9 project Budget and Scope of Training**

A sum of fifty million naira was approved for the partnership and the implementation budget is shown in table1 while the scope of training is shown in table 2.

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| Table 1. Project Budget   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **S/No** | **ITEM** | **EXPENDITURE** | | **1** | **Zonal Workshops** | **N9,000,000** | | **2** | **On-Site Training** | **N10,000,000** | | **3** | **Training Materials/ Manuals** | **N15,000,000** | | **4** | **Incidentals** | **N1,000,000** | | **5** | **Facilitators** | **N5,000,000** | | **6** | **Net Revenue to NIOB** | **N10,000,000** | |  | **Total** | **N50,000,000** |   Table 2. Scope of Participants   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **S/NO** | **Zone** | **Center** | **NO. of Trainees** | | **1** | **North Central** | **Abuja** | **30** | | **2** | **North East** | **Gombe** | **Not held** | | **3** | **North West** | **Kaduna** | **30** | | **4** | **South East** | **Aba** | **30** | | **5** | **South West** | **Ibadan** | **30** | | **6** | **South West** | **Yenagoa** | **30** | |  | **Total** |  | **150** | |

**4.0 THE SUCCESS**

1. The event enjoyed very wide publicity and steered the attention of the public to the unique roles of builders

2. The profession and by extension, the Institute harvested political capital in the sense that the programme became a cornerstone of the transformation initiative of the Federal Government.

3. The artisans found favour in the programme hence enhancing all our past efforts at organizing the building trades artisans and craftsmen under one umbrella.

4. The programme provided the opportunity for intra zonal interface between State Chapters in the zone.

5. The state Chapter Chairmen effectively mobilized the trainees despite the short time frame availed and all the training venues were filled to capacity

6. The training modules prepared in booklets for this programme will serve as a permanent resource property of the Institute and will serve as a basis for the design of future related training programme.

7. The artisans were registered and encouraged to form associations that will be responsible to the respective NIOB zones.

**5.0 CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION**

1. The urgency attached to the commencement and completion of the program frustrated virtually every effort at effective planning since  locational  peculiarities  and other contingent development stampeded the management of the program out of scheduled paradigms.

2. The program which otherwise would have lasted 5 working days had to be reduced to 4 working days in some instances hence presenting a tight schedule limiting the time for training and needed interaction

3. The tight budget prevailed could not  drive the programme to expected ends. Zonal coordinators along with their respective State Chapter Chairmen, had to restore the integrity of the Institute by yielding personal funds and other sacrifices  for the actualization of the objective. Even as at date, the these additionally incurred costs are yet to be settled/refunded.

4. SURE-P  and Ministry of Labor officials tacitly advised against the hosting of the programme in the North East zone in the face of the prevailing security challenges in the country.

5. The expected payment from SURE-P direct to the trainees was unduly delayed, haphazardly handled and never got to some of the participants.

6. The second level training at state levels did not take place as a result of breach of trust between the trainees and SURE-P over selective payment in the first phase.

**6.0 CONCLUSION** **AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite the challenges, the NIOB SURE-P program turned out to be the flagship program of the Federal Government in recent times. It placed a lot of demand on all those involved, and exposed the disconnect between stakeholders particularly employers who the sponsors did not deem it necessary to involve, and the dearth of requisite infrastructure even in federal establishments, specifically set up to provide these.

We could see from the unfortunate experience that large dedicated financial commitment needs to be invested, and properly managed in order to carry out such large scale country wide training.

NIOB's ability to reach out to other establishments including the NBRRI, ITF, Ibadan and Kaduna polytechnics serve as abject lesson and testimony to what can be achieved through effective institutional linkage.

Having earned a lead role as awarding body, the institute is now poised to advance its objectives, establish standards in the sector, and enhance the career prospects and opportunities available to its members who may not just limit their practice to the traditional areas of project management and supervision but also responsively act as trainers, assessors and verifiers in line with the spirit of the National Building Code(NBC).

It is hoped that the highlighted outcomes of the programme will help to:

1. Promote and project the needed strategy for harvesting the beckoning opportunity of mobilizing and registering the vast population of building trades artisans and craftsmen,

2. Consolidate the role of NIOB as an awarding body under the NBTE prescribed NVQF framework.

3. Excite interests from construction industry stake holders, banks, funding agencies, and government policy organs to ensure that adequate financial resources are availed through sufficient budget prioritization for the sustenance of skills development project in Nigeria.

On the other hand, The Federal Government should in line with the prevailing CHANGE mantra, situate a properly worked out policy thrust to excite employment creation through coordinated skills development and training programmes for the unemployed youth. The approach should not only provide a roadmap for skills upgrading for improvement of the quality and quantity of those in employment but also attract the new potential workforce into the construction market

Furthermore, government at all levels should consider granting tax rebates, and other NON CORRUPT special business concessions to organisations that key into the desired linkage agreements for the skills development and training of artisans and craftsmen. The approach if adopted will stimulate interests for involvement, improve production of human capital that is critical for growth and poverty reduction, and accordingly impact the oft touted development agenda priorities for the competitiveness of goods and services produced in the country, most positively.

All industry stakeholders, on their own part, should key into the skills development and training programme by availing their facilities for training as well as showing willingness to accept placements and or offering employments to certified trainees. No doubt the commitment of employers to hire persons trained to meet the needs of the industry is imperative if the intended good results must be enjoyed.

Finally, if institutional linkages in skills development in Nigeria’s construction industry must effectively thrive, if we must harness and harvest the opportunities offered by our bourgeoning youth population, and if must stand the pyramid of building construction industry on its proper base, then it would be imperative we tinker on the Alaska model, among many others.

1. Situate a data bank that captures trade-by-trade quantity, peculiar competencies and skills, and demographic spread, of our artisans and craftsmen. It is by so doing that we will be able to monitor our workforce skills gaps.
2. Increase the access to industry wide information, support services, training and employment

through effective outreach and marketing of construction related occupations and careers.

II. Provide and implement a nation wide acceptable quality education and training model that provides Nigerians with the requisite skills necessary to competitively secure employment in construction related occupations.

III. Obtain employment for all who successful complete training and demonstrate that they have the skills necessary to be competitive in Nigeria’s labor force and beyond.

1. Insure that Nigerians who choose to enter the construction workforce have the supports necessary to complete training and stay in the workforce.
2. Set up industry-standard-targeted central board, with stakeholder shared values, privately run by the industry stakeholders to monitor the industry operators and provide oversight for skills training development plans, and programme implementation such that the operations of the member organisations will not be frustrated by arbitrary training schedules

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