

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES IN THE POST-FUEL DEREGULATION ERA: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The deregulation of fuel markets has brought significant economic shifts, impacting various sectors of society. Among those affected, youth populations face distinct challenges and Seizing opportunities in navigating this new landscape. This research investigates youth empowerment strategies amidst the backdrop of fuel deregulation, aiming to identify effective approaches for fostering positive outcomes. Through a comprehensive literature review and empirical research methodology, including surveys and interviews, this study explores the multifaceted dimensions of youth empowerment in the post-fuel deregulation era. Findings reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing youth empowerment, including economic, social, and political dynamics. Opportunities for youth engagement and entrepreneurship emerge alongside challenges such as economic instability, resource constraints, and policy uncertainties. Drawing on these insights, the project offers practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and youth advocates to enhance empowerment initiatives tailored to the unique demands of the post-deregulation environment. By addressing these challenges and leveraging available opportunities, stakeholders can collaboratively shape a more inclusive and resilient future for youth in the post-fuel deregulation era.

Keywords: Deregulation, Youth empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Opportunities, Seizin

Introduction

One of the major reasons why developed nations invest huge financial resources in human capital development, especially among the youthful age is based on the fact that the youth have sufficient energy, creative drives, and desire to change their world. According to United Nations (2019), the global youth population in 2019 is estimated at 2 billion while sub-Saharan Africa youth population is placed at 211 million. Precisely, in Nigeria, the estimated population of the youth between the ages of 18-35 is 52.8percent. Ordinarily, anybody within the age of 18-40 can be categorized as a young person. By implication, 70

percent of Nigeria's population are youth (Fayehum and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2020). Regrettably, the national Bureau of Statistics (2020) reported that the youth unemployment rate was around 53.40 percent in 2020 while the figure continued to shoot up as of January 2021.

Previous governments, both military and civilian, had adopted policy measures to curtail the trend. In recent years, the governments introduced a good number of youth empowerment and skill acquisition Programmes, for the unemployed who fall within the youth age bracket. Some of these Programmes are government-sponsored while others are privately sponsored. Examples of youth

empowerment Programmes in Nigeria include Movement for Youth Actualization International LEAP Africa, Lagos Digital Village, International Centre for Development Affairs, United Nations Youth Network Nigeria, Foundation for Skills Development, Youth for Technology Foundation, Diamond-Crest for Youth Education Foundation, Youth Entrepreneur Support Programme (YES-P) and Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS). Other are Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovative in Nigeria (You Win), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), African Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), The Nigerian Youth Academy (NIYA), National Talent Export Programme, The Bola Tinubu Youth Summit (BTYS), Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme (P-YES) and other capacity-building programmes not mentioned above are working tirelessly to reduce poverty and unemployment among youths.

The deregulation of fuel market represents a significant economic policy shift with far reaching implications for various sectors of society. Fuel deregulation refers to the process of removing government controls and regulations on the pricing and distribution of petroleum industry players (Husain, 2009). While proponents argue that deregulation can enhance market efficiency and stimulate economic growth, critics raise concerns about its potential

adverse effects, particularly on vulnerable populations such as youth (Chong & Calderon, 2000). The post-fuel deregulation era introduces additional complexities to the landscape of youth empowerment. As governments relinquish control over fuel pricing and distribution, market dynamics undergo transformation, impacting various aspects of the economy, including employment, transportation, and consumer spending patterns (Raman & Ganesh, 2014). In this context, youth face both opportunities and challenges in navigating the evolving socio-economic environment.

Concept of Youth

There is no generally accepted definition of youth among scholars. The definitions differ slightly from scholar to scholar and from country to country as well as from concerned organization to another. However, the United Nations (as cited in Unesco, 2021) defined youth as people that fall within the age range of 15 to 24 years. The organization further described youth as a fluid and changing group that needs to be handled with care and utmost attention. It is a period of transition from being dependent to a period when the individual is independent. They further maintained that the definition as stated above is bound to change due to some circumstances such as financial, socio-cultural setting, demographic, economic, etc.

Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (2010) viewed youth as those who are aged between 13-25 years. On another hand, African Union (2006) sees youth as young people who are between the ages of 15 to 35 years. The same definition was

adopted by Ghana's National Youth Policy in 2010. South Africa National Youth policy (2014) described youth as young people under the ages of 14 to 35 years. In Nigeria, a youth is one under the age of 15 to 29 years (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019).

Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment has been a subject of growing interest and importance in the fields of sociology, psychology, and development studies. Empowerment can be conceptualized as a process through which individuals gain control over their lives, resources, and decision-making processes, enabling them to achieve their full potential and participate actively in society (Zimmerman, 1995). Within the context of youth development, empowerment encompasses various dimensions, including economic, social, political, and psychological empowerment (Yates, 2010). Economic empowerment involves providing youth with access to employment opportunities, vocational training, and financial resources to enhance their economic independence and well-being (Kabeer, 2001). Social empowerment focuses on fostering supportive networks, social capital, and inclusive spaces where youth can voice their opinions, express their identities, and participate in community life (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Political empowerment entails engaging youth in democratic processes, advocacy campaigns, and policy dialogues to influence decision-making and address issues affecting their rights and interests (Maton, 2008). Finally, psychological

empowerment refers to the development of self-efficacy, resilience, and a sense of agency among youth, enabling them to overcome obstacles and pursue their goals with confidence (Zimmerman, 2000).

Fuel Deregulation and its Implications

Fuel deregulation represents a significant policy shift with profound implications for various sectors of the economy, including transportation, manufacturing, and agriculture (Chandran & Sharma, 2017). By removing government controls and subsidies on fuel pricing and distribution, deregulation aims to promote market efficiency, attract private investment, and reduce fiscal burdens on the state (Alhassan, 2014). However, the consequences of fuel deregulation are complex and multifaceted, impacting consumers, businesses, and governments in different ways (Ahmad & Bravo-Biosca, 2013). For youth populations, the effects of fuel deregulation are particularly salient, given their reliance on affordable transportation, energy, and basic commodities for daily living (Humphreys, 2015). Increases in fuel prices can lead to higher transportation costs, inflationary pressures, and reduced purchasing power, disproportionately affecting low-income households and marginalized communities (Hepburn et al., 2020). Moreover, fuel deregulation may exacerbate structural inequalities, as wealthy individuals and corporations stand to benefit from market liberalization, while vulnerable populations bear the brunt of rising costs and reduced social protections (Bird et al., 2010).

Youth Empowerment Strategies in the

Post-Fuel Deregulation Era

In light of the challenges posed by fuel deregulation, it is imperative to explore innovative strategies for empowering youth to navigate and thrive in the post-deregulation era. Such strategies should be holistic, context-specific, and participatory, taking into account the diverse needs, aspirations, and capacities of youth populations (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005). Key areas of intervention may include:

1. **Education and Skills Development:** Investing in education and vocational training programs to equip youth with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to succeed in a competitive and rapidly changing labour market (World Bank, 2019).
2. **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Promoting entrepreneurship among youth through access to finance, business development services, and mentorship programs to encourage innovation, job creation, and economic diversification (ILO, 2016).
3. **Social Protection and Safety Nets:** Strengthening social safety nets and welfare programs to mitigate the impact of fuel price increases on vulnerable youth, ensuring access to basic services, healthcare, and nutrition (UNICEF, 2020).
4. **Youth Participation and Advocacy:** Facilitating youth participation in decision-making processes, civic engagement activities, and advocacy campaigns to amplify their voices, promote social justice, and hold

governments and corporations accountable (Yates, 2016).

By adopting a multi-sectoral and rights-based approach to youth empowerment, stakeholders can foster inclusive and sustainable development in the post-fuel deregulation era, harnessing the energy, creativity, and potential of youth as agents of change and progress.

OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

Economic Opportunities

1. **Entrepreneurship:** Fuel deregulation can stimulate entrepreneurship opportunities for youth in sectors such as renewable energy, transportation services, and agribusiness. By leveraging technological advancements and market liberalization, young entrepreneurs can create sustainable business ventures that contribute to economic growth and job creation (ILO, 2016).
2. **Skills Development:** The shifting demands of the post-deregulation economy require youth to acquire new skills and competencies to remain competitive in the labour market. Training programs in fields such as energy efficiency, green technology, and digital literacy can empower young people to pursue rewarding careers and capitalize on emerging market trends (World Bank, 2019).

Social Opportunities

1. **Community Engagement:**

Fuel deregulation may catalyse community-driven initiatives and grassroots movements aimed at addressing local energy needs and promoting sustainable development.

Youth-led organizations and social enterprises can play a pivotal role in mobilizing resources, raising awareness, and implementing solutions that benefit marginalized communities (UNDP, 2018).

2. **Social Innovation:** The post-deregulation era offers opportunities for social innovation and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector entities, and civil society organizations. Youth-driven initiatives focused on alternative energy sources, environmental conservation, and social entrepreneurship can harness the creativity and dynamism of young people to address pressing societal challenges (OECD, 2020).

Political Opportunities

1. **Youth Advocacy:** Fuel deregulation may galvanize youth engagement in advocacy campaigns and policy debates related to energy affordability, environmental sustainability, and social justice. By organizing protests, lobbying policymakers, and leveraging digital platforms, young activists can amplify their voices and influence decision-making processes at local, national, and international levels (Yates,

2016).

2. **Policy Innovation:** The post-deregulation era presents opportunities for governments to enact progressive policies and regulatory frameworks that prioritize youth empowerment and
3. inclusive development. Policy measures such as targeted subsidies, tax incentives for youth-led enterprises, and youth representation in decision-making bodies can create an enabling environment for youth participation and socio-economic advancement (UNDESA, 2017).

Environmental Opportunities

1. **Renewable Energy Initiatives:** Fuel deregulation can serve as a catalyst for the adoption of renewable energy solutions, presenting opportunities for youth to engage in sustainable energy projects. With the increasing demand for clean energy sources, young innovators can explore opportunities in solar, wind, hydro, and biomass energy technologies, contributing to environmental conservation and climate change mitigation efforts (REN21, 2020).
2. **Environmental Education and Advocacy:** The post-deregulation era offers opportunities for youth to raise awareness and advocate for environmental sustainability within their communities and beyond. By organizing educational workshops,

environmental clean-up campaigns, and climate action initiatives, young activists can mobilize public support and drive positive change towards a more sustainable future (UNEP, 2021).

Technological Opportunities

1. **Digital Innovation:** Fuel deregulation opens up opportunities for digital innovation and technological entrepreneurship among youth. With the proliferation of mobile technology, e-commerce platforms, and digital payment systems, young entrepreneurs can develop innovative solutions to address market inefficiencies, enhance consumer access, and promote economic inclusion (ITU, 2019).
2. **Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence:** The availability of data and advances in artificial intelligence present opportunities for youth to harness big data analytics for social impact. By analysing trends, identifying patterns, and predicting market behaviours, young data scientists and tech enthusiasts can inform decision-making processes,

- optimize resource allocation, and
3. drive innovation in various sectors (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Cross-Sectoral Opportunities

1. **Public-Private Partnerships:** The post-fuel deregulation era offers opportunities for collaborative partnerships between the public and
2. private sectors to promote youth empowerment and sustainable development. Through joint initiatives, such as skills training programs, incubation hubs, and mentorship schemes,
3. governments and businesses can leverage their resources, expertise, and networks to support youth-led initiatives and foster economic growth (UNCTAD, 2018).
4. **Youth-Led Innovation Hubs:** The establishment of innovation hubs and co-working spaces provides opportunities for youth to collaborate, innovate, and scale their ventures in a supportive environment. By providing access to infrastructure, funding, and mentorship, these hubs empower young entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses, driving economic growth and social progress (OECD, 2021).

CHALLENGES IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

Economic Challenges

1. **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Despite the opportunities presented by entrepreneurship and skills

development, many youths continue to face challenges in accessing meaningful employment opportunities in the post-deregulation economy. High levels of unemployment and underemployment perpetuate

poverty, inequality, and social exclusion among young people, hindering their economic empowerment and well-being (ILO, 2021).

2. **Financial Constraints:** Fuel price fluctuations and economic volatility can exacerbate financial constraints for youth, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Limited access to credit, savings, and financial services restricts young entrepreneurs' ability to start and scale their businesses, hindering their economic empowerment and mobility (World Bank, 2020).

Social Challenges

1. **Marginalization and Discrimination:**

Vulnerable youth populations, including women, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities, face systemic barriers and discrimination in accessing education, employment, and social services. Structural inequalities perpetuate marginalization and exclusion, undermining efforts to promote social empowerment and inclusion (UNESCO, 2019).

2. **Social Cohesion and Trust:** Fuel deregulation and economic instability can strain social cohesion and trust within communities, leading to social fragmentation, conflict, and violence. Inadequate social support

networks and weak community institutions exacerbate social tensions and undermine collective efforts to address shared challenges (World Bank, 2021).

Political Challenges

1. **Youth Disengagement and Apathy:** Despite opportunities for youth participation and advocacy, many young people remain disengaged and apathetic towards political processes and institutions. Perceived corruption, lack of transparency, and disillusionment with political elites erode trust in democratic governance and hinder youth mobilization efforts (UNDP, 2022).
2. **Repressive Measures and Human Rights Violations:** In some contexts, governments may resort to repressive measures and human rights violations to suppress dissent and protest movements among youth. Restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association curtail youth activism and undermine efforts to promote political empowerment and accountability (Amnesty International, 2021).

Environmental Challenges

1. **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:** The impacts of climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect youth, who bear the brunt of

environmental disasters, resource depletion, and habitat loss. Limited access to clean water, sanitation, and natural resources exacerbates vulnerabilities and undermines efforts to promote environmental sustainability (IPCC, 2021).

2. **Technological Disruptions and Digital Divide:** While digital technologies offer opportunities for innovation and connectivity, they also exacerbate inequalities and deepen the digital divide among youth. Limited access to digital infrastructure, internet connectivity, and digital literacy skills restricts young people's ability to fully participate in the digital economy and benefit from technological advancements (ITU, 2021).

Conclusion

In summary, the literature reviewed highlights the interconnected nature of youth empowerment and fuel deregulation, underscoring the importance of addressing structural inequalities and promoting social justice in policy and practice. Moving forward, it is essential to adopt a holistic and participatory approach to youth empowerment, informed by evidence-based research, stakeholder consultations, and youth-led initiatives. By investing in education, entrepreneurship, social protection, and

youth participation, societies can create enabling environments that empower youth to thrive amidst the challenges and opportunities of the post-fuel deregulation era. The post-fuel deregulation era offers a fertile ground for advancing youth empowerment through a variety of economic, social, and political avenues. By capitalizing on opportunities such as entrepreneurship, skills development, community engagement, advocacy, and policy innovation, stakeholders can foster a conducive environment for youth to thrive and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development efforts. However, realizing the full potential of these opportunities requires coordinated action, investment, and collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and young people themselves. The post-fuel deregulation era presents numerous challenges that impede youth empowerment and development across economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions. Addressing these challenges requires multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches that prioritize youth voices, rights, and aspirations. By investing in education, employment, social protection, and civic engagement, stakeholders can create enabling environments that empower youth to overcome obstacles, realize their potential, and contribute positively to sustainable development efforts in the post-deregulation era.

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