

# Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme: A Key to Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

Wide-spread poverty and insecurity emanated from gross unemployment of youths seemed threatening the realisation of individual and societal socio-economic progress as well as the nation's sustainable development and nascent democracy. Youths in their numerical, energy, and creative strength are the most reliable change agents. Unemployment in any form globally propels youth restlessness, crime and associated vices and the attendant threats to nation building, peace and security. In a bid to tackle unemployment and other fundamental problems, the State Government of Osun under the visionary leadership of Mr. Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola embarked on six action-packed people programmes that guarantee development with citizens' participation in the Education, Rural and Urban Renewal, Infrastructural Development, Agriculture, Health, Entrepreneurship and Job creation-christened Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) to fast track development and banish hunger and poverty. This paper examined the challenges and prospects of OYES vis-à-vis its implications in the development of the State. Structured questionnaires were administered to gather relevant information from total sample of 120 OYES cadet members in three local government areas in the State. Data collected were analysed using correlation analysis. The results of the study showed: that there is significant relationship between youth empowerment and State development; that the general objectives of OYES are achievable. On the basis of the results of the study, the researcher recommended that governments' empowerment programmes should be encouraged, centred on participatory approach: government should reach out to more youths, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, educational background and geographical or political affiliation, and that the scheme should be legislated so that new/succeeding government would not obstruct its continuity for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Youth, Development, Sustainable, Unemployment, OYES

## Introduction

Nigeria as well as many other countries in the world is facing the worst burden of youth unemployment. Many Nigerian youths roam the streets in rural and urban towns/cities without gainful job and the danger of this situation has far reaching implications on the social wellbeing and security of the country because the idle hand is the devil's tool. The implications of youth unemployment are found in socio-economic, moral and political areas. It is getting too dangerous to ignore as it portends risks to national security, peace and harmony and development. Ujah and Komolafe (2012) stipulated that "economic growth dropped to 7.6% in 2011, unemployment rose to 23%". Those who suffer most from this problem are millions of youths who resorted to criminal means for survival through cyber crime, armed robbery, prostitution, insurgency, kidnapping, political thugs, etcetera.

The Bureau of Statistics according to Osun Defender (2012) reported that the overall national unemployment rate has been on the steady increase since 2005. For instance, it increased from 11.9% in 2005 to 21.1% in September, 2011 while unemployment rate in the State of Osun had doubled from 6.30% in 2007 to 12.6% in March, 2009. The determination to arrest the ugly trends necessitated the current effort by the Governor of State of Osun, Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola to not only empower 20,000 youths in Community Development Programmes (CDP) but also embarked on developmental projects aimed at taking the State and citizenry out of poverty to socio-economic prosperity. This study therefore investigated the phenomenon and provided workable suggestions.

## Objective of the Study

The purpose of this research work is to:

- i. Discuss the challenges and prospects of Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES).
- ii. Clarify youth empowerment as means of facilitating development in the State of Osun.

## Literature Review

Youth empowerment could be defined as the process whereby the creative potentials of the young people between the ages of 18 and 30 years old are developed to gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement pragmatic changes affecting their lives. It ranges from economic empowerment to social, ideological, educational, technological and political/leadership empowerment to keep the youths gainfully engaged in productive activities.

The urgent need for youth empowerment cannot be overemphasised because the current “23.9 percent unemployment rate is quite worrisome, having reached a frightening dimension in our country that it now constitutes an affront to government’s development effort, *The Tide* (2013)” reported. Unemployment problems could be “traced to many well known factors among which are: Non availability of jobs both in the private and public sector of the economy, lack of required skills among job seekers and absence of loan facility to those who deserve it for self-employment among others (Ogbonnaya, 2010).” *The Leadership* (2012) submitted: “Although Nigeria is often referred to as the richest country in West Africa, unemployment has been a major problem in the country since 1980, when the nation’s economy took a nosedive. The menace has been described as a time bomb that might explode anytime if no serious attention is paid in engaging the growing army of unemployed youths that have taken over the streets of the nation.”

OYES, six-in-one marketable and applied skills acquisition/employment programme, is a means of encouraging young people to gain the practical skills, knowledge, moral values and exposure that will allow them to face, address and overcome obstacles to better life. Youth empowerment is the outcome by which youths, as change agents, gain the skills that impact their own lives within and outside host communities. Levels of youth empowerment according to Omotere (2011) are: *Individual level is exercising power over one’s life by being skilled, critically aware, and active in creating community change. Youth empowerment at the organisation level is the implication of culture, vision, and system that supports youth empowerment at individual level Skill development level is the process of strengthening the skills of youth so that they know how to effectively make decisions positively and interact with their peers. Critical awareness level is the process of providing youths with the information and resources necessary for analysing issues that affect their lives and environments as well as strategise on ways to act as change agent. Opportunity level deals with the process of providing youth the platforms for decision making and engaging them in community development/change.*

### **The Concept of Osun Youth Empowerment**

The inauguration of OYES was a demonstration of one of Governor Rauf Aregbesola’s campaign promises to make the State of Osun an industrial haven in which youths as leaders of tomorrow would be catered for in the area of skills acquisition, poverty alleviation, job and wealth creation. Fulfilling his promise to create 20,000 jobs within 100 days in office as governor, OYES a palliative livelihood for 20,000 out of 250,000 jobless youth applicants was launched by Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola in the year 2011 as a planned action aimed at bringing youths into the productive chain of the economy, tackle the problems of unemployment and physical development in the State of the Virtuous (Ipinle Omoluabi - honest, courageous and rational) in order to rescue the State of Osun from poor governance and install progressive governance making the state a better place for you and me to live, work and prosper.

The State did not only target the youths who are seen as engines of economic and social development but also primary school children who are enjoying free feeding (O’Meal) and the O’Elders a welfare package for old age (Agba Osun) usually called a social safely network for the eiders/aged people that are helpless for free Medicare and ₦10, 000 monthly stipend. One thousand six hundred of such senior citizens receive ₦1.6 billion monthly. Therefore, it was joyous and memorable when on the 26th of November 2010 the Ibadan Division of the Court of Appeal adjudged Mr. Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola the duly elected Governor of Osun State in the Gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections held on April 14, 2007.

**OYES Objectives.** Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme is a voluntary and interventionist community services organisation (CSO) with the following aims, (i) To help channel the lateral potential young people into productive social and economic activity, whilst at the same time being mindful of their current livelihood conditions and capabilities, (ii) To restore sense of community, individual, self-esteem and worth to our youths, 20,000 of who were selected impartially as pioneer members, (iii) To create a moral and ethical overhaul by remoulding the value of our youths to make them pursue honour and integrity/virtuousness, and (iv) To give the candidates entrepreneurship opportunities through new skills training/acquisition.

#### **Systematic Empowerment**

Having identified the implications of youth unemployment and the prominence of their roles on the state development, the State Government of Osun decidedly empowered the youths and adults of Osun through marketable and applied skills acquisition embedded in OYES schemes to address youth unemployment in the State for future developmental purposes using the following modalities:

**Attitudes Re-Orientate Training:** This meant to expose the youth to leadership skill, discipline and imbibe them with the virtue spirit that will make them free from any misdemeanour in discharging of their duties.

**Oyes-Tech:** Information technology (IT) has become phenomena in the world today and which had created much opportunities for the jobless in Nigeria is that of technology. Hence the OYES officials decided to educate cadet members with computer technology training ranging from computer repair, dismantling and assembling of GSM handsets and related devices, training of computer packages such as CorelDraw, Microsoft Office, PageMaker and many more. The corps also chose the time convenient for them in the tutorial. This is a

plus for the government on her commissioned \$50 million RLG-Adulawo Technology City in Ilesha town in the State of Osun for commercial production of computers, telephones and accessories as well as many other electronic devices and related items. Apart from providing jobs the computer company will boost transfer of technology and create sustainable wealth for teeming youth population and the state.

**O' Chicken (Broiler Programme):** The State Government of Osun imbibed the cadet members into poultry farming so that they would become self-reliant after their graduation instead of seeking white collar jobs endlessly without success. The government provided necessary financial and technical supports for the cadets to enable them succeed in their chosen trade.

**O' Beef/O' Ram** programme is designed for the corps to exploit cattle rearing business because of the economic advantages that pervaded the business and for economic sustenance.

**O' Reap:** Osun rural enterprise and agricultural programme is designed for food production and food security. The cadet members were trained in the agro-allied production ranging from animals husbandry, fishery, yams, cassava and cocoa plantations, maize, beans, vegetables, honey production, etcetera as well as the processing of agricultural product into finished or semi-finished goods for both industrial customers and private consumers usage. Youth employment in agriculture not only ensures food sufficiency but also reduces unemployment rate, idleness and poverty.

**O' Meal:** Osun elementary school feeding and health programme is another people's programme by the State Government of Osun. It entails free feeding of the 380,000 children from elementary one to four in public schools at a cost of 3.6 billion naira annually to check not only malnutrition and poor enrolment but also enhance physical and mental learning alertness and capabilities. O' Meal boosted enrolment into elementary one from 170,000 pupils in year 2010 to 304,000 pupils in year 2013. O' Reap trained cadets would be major suppliers of raw food items from their agro-allied businesses to food vendors, state and local governments not only in Osun but also other neighbouring states in Nigeria.

**O' Tour** is a deployment of OYES members into the tourism destinations so as to be creative in nature and try as much as possible in promoting tourism orientation and make Osun a most tourism centre like that of Dubai. The cadets were also trained as Tour Guides/Crowd Control teams.

**Sanitation Czars:** This is for environmental beautification, landscaping and sanitation of the State to promote all-round cleanliness, good health of the people because health is wealth, and also to attract foreign investors who cherish safe, clean and conducive environment.

**O' Clean Plus/O' Green Gas:** This acquisition of skill is for the cadet members deployed to learn the process of generating cheaper, safe and clean gas energy supply in the State. It would enable the trainees to study, turn waste-to-wealth and produce alternative (Bio-Gas) by converting collected wastes to bio-gas or green-gas for cooking. Bio-gas/Green-gas to a larger extent would conserve economic trees; improve environmental pollution and climate change management.

**Green Gang:** Some of the corps was also deployed to the green gang for State security purpose both at the daytime and night for the protection of citizenry and government installations.

**Traffic Marshals:** Some of the OYES cadets were deployed to Traffic Control System in the State of Osun because of the over conjunction of the traffic law abiding with the assessment of vehicle document for road worthy.

**Public Works Brigade:** The State of Osun deployed some of the OYES cadets to the public works such as road repair and maintenance, and dredging works for flood prevention and management, etcetera.

**Paramedics and O' Ambulance:** Osun Rescuing Accident Mission is a dedicated programme for good health and cleanness in case of accidents, hospitalisation. Some of the youth cadets were also trained and deployed into this segment to deal promptly with emergency cases on citizens' health 24 hours, 7 days.

**Teacher Corps:** Some of the cadets having teaching qualifications were deployed to the teachers' corps segment so as to train and educate pupils and students at different levels of public primary and secondary schools to give them sound educational background.

**Sheriff Corps** is equivalent to the Federal Government Road Safety Corps to address issues on high roads. The cadets are also involved in educating the motorists to be conscious when driving and be traffic law abiding.

### **Youths in the Development of State**

Sustainable development, according to Oyeshola (2008:161), *"is a process in which the natural resources base is not allowed to deteriorate. It emphasises the hitherto unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and quality of life. It is a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which is compatible with the preservation of the environment."*

Youths occupied a prominent place in any developing or developed nation. "Apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-age. Besides numerical superiority, youth have

energy and ideas that are State potentials (Anasi. 2010).” Federal Government of Nigeria (2001) on National Youth Development Policy asserted that: *“Youths are the foundation of a society: their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation defines the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation founds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose, and because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation or state is assured.”* The above statement acknowledges the role of youth, as the most active segment of any society, in determining the spate of security, peace, economic and political stability needed for developing a nation.

### **Youth Empowerment and National Development**

Bokova (2012) observed that: “The wellbeing and prosperity of young people depend more than ever on the skills that education and training can provide. Failing to meet this need is a waste of human potential and economic power”, necessary to make changes in developing a nation. Nation building is associated with national integration, national consciousness, national unity, construction and modification of socio-political and economic structures so as to move with the global trends. It is concerned with the overall development of a nation socially, economically and politically. This view is corroborated by Ona (2012) who described the youths as a *vibrant group; the educated and empowered youths can easily be mobilised positively. They can form formidable pressure groups to press home desirable changes in the political leadership at any tier of the government. They can use their energy, determination and enlightened position to disseminate information to others so as to create political awareness and consciousness against evil and selfish political machination. If youths are empowered, one can predict with some degree of certainty a more transformed Nigerian nation, most probably devoid of corruption, nepotism, political manipulation which has for long characterised Nigeria’s political landscape.”*

Ifaturoti (2012) remarked that “unemployment compounds the problems the youths are facing in Nigeria: by being idle, they are prone to such vices as prostitution, armed robbery and rape.”

### **Challenges of OYES Scheme**

Safe for the governor’s commitment and strong political-will, it has not been palatable for the State to pay/inject into grassroots economy 200 million naira basic allowances (BA) monthly apart from smartly kitting 20,000 youngster cadets for group identity and high morale. Some of the other challenging areas include huge logistic issues in the management of 20,000 young people; managing the transition of corps into permanent jobs and viable livelihoods, partnering with banks for the provision of credit facilities so that the cadets can engage gainfully in small scale businesses and activities as well as creation of substantial volume of permanent employment for the pioneer OYES cadets. Commenting on the challenge, the Commissioner of Finance, Economic Planning and Budget, Bolorunduro (2013) said: “OYES and other development programmes cost the state government a lot of money and the financial burden actually rest on the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Budget.”

### **Prospects of OYES Scheme**

OYES was inaugurated purposely for the development of the State of Osun which cannot be achieved in a day but through a gradual process which could take a couple of years. With aggressive agricultural practice, massive road networks construction, rural towns and urban cities renewal, establishment of community development associations (CDAs), provision of electric power transformers, tourism destinations and formal launching of Omoluabi Garment Factory, Abere which has capacity to engage 3,000 workers in September 2013 signalled a brighter future, job security and sustainable development, not only for the people but also the state in particular. OYES schemes have been able to reduce tremendously the rate of crimes associated with society urchins, joblessness and multi-faceted insecurity in the state. The story has changed for better clean environment, diseases epidemic free, sustainable employment opportunities, peace and harmony, physical development as well as reliable security, for life and properties, required for thriving socio-economic and political activities in the state. Through OYES over ₦4.8 billion was injected into the Osun State economy for two years under review.

Ifaturoti (2012) recounted the other prospects of Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme as follows: “Full infrastructural maturity of the on-going vocational training programmes for the cadets. Access to donor or development funds and increased global recognition. The development programme is targeting to bring 500,000 youths of the State of Osun into the scheme to boost employment among the youngsters to the highest stage.” OYES is economic empowerment, par excellence, which reduced social inequalities, improved standard of living as well making the youths better-off and reduced crimes that are often associated with idle hands.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The researcher used structured questionnaires and personal interview to obtain relevant data. It is generally

believed that the larger the sample size, the smaller the sampling error and also that a good sample is a good representation of the population from which it was drawn. Sample of 120 OYES corps in the population with equal and independent chances of being selected were randomly selected for this research.

**Hypothesis I**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between challenges and prospects of youth empowerment in the State development.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant relationship between challenges and prospects of youth empowerment in the State development.

**Hypothesis II**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and the State development.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant relationship between youth empowerment and the State development.

**Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation**

The researcher prepared and distributed 120 structured questionnaires among the cadets in three Local Government Areas (LGAs). The OYES cadet members were randomly selected based on their availability. A total of 105 filled questionnaires were recovered from the respondents in three local government areas as follows: Olorunda 36, Ede North 35, and Egbedore 34 respectively.

Table 1: Youth empowerment reduced unemployment in the State of Osun.

Alternatives	Respondents in Ede LGA	Respondents in Olorunda LGA	Respondents in Egbedore LGA	Percent %
Strongly Agree	17	16	13	43
Agree	12	14	15	39
Disagree	3	2	2	7
Indifferent	3	4	4	11
Total	35	36	34	100

Sources: Field survey, 2013.

From the table 1 above, it could be seen that 43% of the respondents strongly agreed. 39% agreed, 7% disagreed, while 11% were indifferent that there are challenges facing the implementation of OYES in the State of Osun. 35 respondents in Ede North, 36 in Olorunda, 34 in Egbedore local government areas respectively responded to the questionnaires administered.

Table 2: Youth empowerment scheme facilitates development in the State of Osun.

Alternatives	Respondents in Ede LGA	Respondents in Olorunda LGA	Respondents in Egbedore LGA	Percent %
Strongly Agree	15	13	12	39
Agree	13	16	17	43
Disagree	4	5	2	10
Indifferent	3	2	3	8
Total	35	36	34	100

Sources: Field survey, 2013.

Table 2 above showed that 39% respondent representing various local government areas strongly agreed; 43% agreed. Summarily 82 percent of the cadets agreed that peoples-oriented programmes especially OYES scheme facilitated development in the State of Osun. However 10% of the respondents disagreed while 8% were indifferent to the question.

**Testing of Hypothesis**

For the reason that one hypothesis may be accepted or rejected does not indicate that as for this research and OYES are concerned, they only show to be correct and reasonable. Since the acceptance or rejection of hypothesis is based on the result of a sample taken from the respective population or a certain number of people, so at this junction the researcher needed to calculate the relationship between two (2) variables through correlation coefficient techniques in order to know and show how they are related.

- Represent responses
- Y - Represent percentages
- N - Represent number or the respondents

**Hypothesis II**

This hypothesis was designed for the cadet members to know whether youths empowerments facilitate

development of State of Osun.

Table 3 was designed to test this hypothesis correlation coefficient for hypothesis

N	X	Y %	XY	X <sup>2</sup>	Y <sup>2</sup>
Strongly Agree	40	39	1560	1600	1521
Agree	46	43	1978	2116	1849
Disagree	11	10	110	121	100
Indifferent	8	8	64	64	64
Total	105	100	3712	3901	3534

$$\begin{aligned}
 R_{x-1} &= \frac{\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}} \\
 &= \frac{4(3712) - (105)(100)}{\sqrt{[4(3901) - (105)^2][4(3534) - (100)^2]}} \\
 &= \frac{14848 - 10500}{\sqrt{[15604 - 11025][14136 - 10000]}} \\
 &= \frac{4348}{\sqrt{4579 \times 4136}} \\
 &= \frac{4348}{\sqrt{18938744}} \\
 &= \frac{4348}{4351.87} \\
 &= 0.9991
 \end{aligned}$$

**Interpretation:** There is positive strong correlation and it shows that youth empowerment is significant to development in the State of Osun. This confirms the FGN's (2001) statement that the extent of the youth's responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country.

### Summary of Findings

The findings revealed that the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) has succeeded in empowering the beneficiaries in terms of skill acquisition for self-employment. Although the programme is still ongoing, there are still more to be expected. OYES in all ramifications is a successful project which has empowered 20,000 youths (Batch 1) that had hitherto lost all hopes of survival. OYES has contributed tremendously to fostering state development. Moreover, the scheme did intervene in the plight of the youths by providing them opportunities for acquisition of vocational/ entrepreneurial skills of varied kinds which made them not only to be self-reliant but also empowered them to be more efficient in the discharge of their responsibilities to their individual family members, communities and Nigeria at large. Investigations revealed that the beneficiaries were able to set up their own businesses such as O' Tech., O' beef, O' Gas, O' Reap, and O' Ram after graduating from the training programmes. There was an improved sense of commitment among the participants in OYES projects. This was evidenced by their prompt, enthusiastic response on experiences gathered during the training periods, the new change in their socio-economic status as a result of the skill acquired, and the fact that most of them were not only self-employed but also employers of labour. The then voluntary scheme turned to permanent self-sustaining opportunity.

### Conclusion

This study attempted capturing the role of youth empowerment scheme in the development of the State of Osun. The future belongs to the youths who make productive use of their knowledge, skills and character to positively affect the development of the state. This can only be through skill acquisition and positive orientation seminars. From all indications youth unemployment is a menace in Nigeria and constitutes a real danger and a threat to the State development of Osun. Against this background, there is the need by government at all levels and other stakeholders to embark on massive youth empowerment schemes for the envisaged development of the community around them and that of the nation. If a state requires developing socio-economically and politically, it needed to advance natural and human resources available in a multidimensional way.

The findings revealed that the Osun Youth Empowerment through its various trainings did re-orientate cadets' attitudes towards self and societal development: inculcate in trainees the appropriate entrepreneurial skills and attitudes for creativity, innovation and enterprise which enabled them tackled unemployment and contributed to the economic wellbeing of their communities and the state.

### Recommendations

Excessive reliance on the government for the provision of every required socio-economic resources and jobs creation has been the bane of development efforts in Nigeria. Government alone cannot provide all facilities due to her limited resources and population explosion. Government must as a matter of urgency place her priority right; create an enabling environment for the private sector/peoples' participation programmes in building the State to an enviable level.

Osun State Youth Empowerment Scheme should be totally supported, and expanded for continued promotion of employable skills, value orientation and leadership training aimed specifically at empowering youth for self-sustainable job/trade not only to banish poverty and hunger but also check the ugly trend of crimes within and outside the Land of the Virtue (Ipinle Omoluabi).

There is a growing need for creativity in the modern society. The State Government of Osun should ensure continuity and improve on distribution of updated Tablet of Knowledge (Opon Imo) to public tertiary institutions and secondary schools students who as from year 2015 would write computer-base-test (CBT) examinations in West African Examinations Council and Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations because education is the best pivotal legacy on which sustainable development rests.

State Government of Osun, should reach out to more youths, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, and educational background, and geographical or political affiliation.

State government should as a matter of sincere of purpose and necessity legislate OYES developmental programmes so that new or succeeding government would not obstruct its continuity for sustainable development.

Zonal leadership development centres should be established in the State for leadership, job ethics and entrepreneurial/vocational training which would enable the youths and adults who are interested in capacity development efforts of the State to promote sustainable self-empowerment to gainfully discover their potentials and cultivate a habit of excellence as unique brands, establish and manage their own businesses to take them out of crimes and become productive, self-reliant and development conscious.

The State Government of Osun is encouraged to embrace Public-Private-Partnership on which the sustainability of OYES is benched, with reputable organisations and/or groups to join hands in bringing succour to the burdens and challenges facing its management on financial, technical and managerial issues for the benefits of all stakeholders.

All other tiers of government in Nigeria should emulate State Government of Osun's hands-on approach to youth's empowerment and peoples' programmes to check the rate of unemployment and fast-track building the nation, meet the Millennium Development Goals and collectively become one of the world's 20 Strongest Economy Nations in the year 2020.

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