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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Stock Valuation, Translation Exposure and Corporate Profitability of Multinationals in Nigeria – P.U.C. Agundu, N. A. Ukpai, I. C. Obara and B. D. Kiabel; Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt - - - - - 1
2. A Survey of TQM Implementation in Nigerian Transport Organisations – O. Ugboma; C. Ikeogu, A. Ejem and C. C. Ugboma; Federal University of Technology, Owerri - - - - - 7
3. Human Capital Formation and Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nigeria (1999 – 2003) – R. M. Olulu, Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt, and L Ohale, University of Port Harcourt- - - - - 17
4. Economics of Yam Retail Business – Focus on Women Entrepreneurs – Ezenwa, A. Okafor, Madonna University, Okija, Onitsha - - - - - 22
5. Long-Run Relationship Between Agricultural Production and Economic Growth in Nigeria: Evidence from the Johansen's Cointegration Approach – C. A. U. Ighodaro, University of Benin, Benin City - - - - - 28
6. Leadership and Conflict Management in Nigeria: Some Reflections – V. C. Aleke, University of Nigeria, Nsukka- - - - - 39
7. The Design and Development of Adjustable Prosthetic Device for a Leg Amputee Using a Six Bar Link Knee Mechanism – S. I. Iwuoha, Federal University of Technology, Owerri - - - - - 43
8. Towards Improved Human Resource Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects – E. E. Okafor, University of Ibadan and D. Imohnopi, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye - - - - - 48
9. Crude Oil Resource: A Blessing or Curse to Nigeria – the Case of the Niger Delta – S. Tamuno, University of Port Harcourt and J. M. Felix, Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt - - - - - -53

10. Traditional Mining, Poverty and Environment: The Case of Keana Salt Mining Sites in Nasarawa State – A. J. Avre, Nasarawa State University, Keffi - 59
11. A Critical Appraisal of the Process of Implementing Ports Reforms Under Existing Legislative Framework – O. B. Ndikom, Tai Solarim University of Education, Ijebu Ode - - - - - 65
12. Deregulation and Appropriate Pricing in the Downstream Sector of the Nigerian Oil Industry – L. Ohale, University of Port Harcourt - - 74
13. Effects of Mixtures of Pig Manure and Sandy Soil on the Growth of Tomato Seedlings – C. C. Obiazi, G. U. Nnaji and J. O. Ugbohor, Delta State University, Asaba Campus - - - - - 83
14. The Centrality of Effective Leadership and Followership in Group Dynamics – F. A. Fan and M. D. Ekpe (Mrs), Cross River University of Technology, Akamkpa Campus - - - - - 88
15. Book Scarcity in Nigerian University Libraries: A Menace to Effective Research, Teaching and Learning – J. C. Ogugua and N. Emerole, Federal University of Technology, Owerri - - - - - 92
16. Restitution of Crime Victims in Nigeria: A Study of Public Perceptions in Enugu State – U. U. Christopher, University of Nigeria, Nsukka - 98
17. The Role of Education in Combating Terrorism – A. A. Oni, University of Lagos, Lagos - - - - - 106
18. Private Investment and Macroeconomic Instability in the Nigerian Economy 1970-2002 – M. D. Imobighe, Delta State University, Abraka - 113
19. Problems of Resource Control in Nigeria and the Way Forward – S. Aibieyi and O. Osemwota, University of Benin, Benin City - - - 127
20. Impact of Land Degradation on Farming Communities in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State - E. C. Orji, C. O. A. Ugwumba and U. Stephen, Anambra State University of Technology, Uli - - 133
21. Production of Insulating Bricks for Kiln Construction – F. O. Uzzi, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ibojun Campus - - - - 137
22. Recurrent Issues and Problems of Classroom Instruction – M. S. Mbia, Cross River University of Technology, Akamkpa Campus - - - 140

## TOWARDS IMPROVED HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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### Abstract

*Development of society is the major preoccupation of most governments in the third world countries. As a result, human resource has been identified as one of the most important catalyst in the nation's development. Infact it is the major propeller for development. In Nigeria, this unportant and critical resource has not been fully developed, managed and utilized in such a manner that would engender development. Against this background this paper has identified factors responsible for human resource development to include; political unstability, political corruption, poor investment in education, lack of infrastructural facilities, poverty and low technology. Consequently, the paper recommended; improved investment in education, implemmentable policies on human resource development, involvement of private organization in human resource development, ensuring political stability and credibility, as ways of tackling the problem of human resource development in Nigeria.*

*Key Words: Human Resource. Development. Poverty. Education. Technology.*

### Introduction

There have been an expanded and unprecedented development consciousness and high hope for a better economic future in Nigeria in recent times. Such expectations have been evidently expressed in various publications by notable and influential scholars within and outside Nigeria (Yesufu 2000; Fajana, 2002; Obikoya, 2003).

Furthermore, most of these scholars unanimously admit the fact that there are few nations in this world that have been so tremendously endowed with both natural and human resources as Nigeria. This nation is said to be the sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world with her limitless grazing lands, natural landscape of profound scenic beauty that could sustain one of the most viable tourist industries in the world, to mention but few (Yesufu, 2000; Bornschier *et al*, 2005).

It could therefore be deduced from the foregoing that the major problem of Nigeria is not necessarily the lack of natural and human resources, but failure to provide a consistent and viable socio-economic and political environment that could lead to a sustainable human resource development. In the words of Obisi "people make nations and for nations to grow, survive and prosper, it has to invest in the people". The need for an improved human resource development in

Nigeria in the face of socio economic and political changes and challenges is the focus of this paper.

It is reportedly said that the engine behind the Japanese miracle and the Asian Tigers is simply because they have invested in their human capital. Nigeria and other developing countries are getting more and more buried under the monetary veil at the expense of developing their human capital (Sing Yong Lee, 1996; Obisi, 2004; Okafor, 2005a). Hence UNDP report (2002) rates Nigeria low in human capital development.

What then is Human Resource Development? What is the essence of human resource development? What are the socio economic and political changes and challenges in a bid to develop human resources in Nigeria? These and other relevant issues shall be discussed in this paper.

### What is Human Resource Development?

Human resource development has been defined from various perspectives by notable scholars in social sciences and industrial and labour relations. However, it is generally seen as the development of human skills and learning concepts, rules or attitudes in order to increase effectiveness and productivity on a particular job. Others see it as the conscious effort towards the development of human capacity, both intellectual and physical to ensure requisite result and

success (both in life and the environment) on continuing basis.

It is also seen as the combination of multi-variant and multi-dimensional efforts and activities that sustain and improve both man and woman's efforts, not merely to maintain, but to improve on current levels of both economic performance and social welfare (Yesufu, 2000; Fajana, 2002; Okafor, 2005b).

Human Resource Development is also viewed as a consistent process by which nations put to better use, the skills and abilities of its people. Nigeria Economic Submit (2000) emphasizes that human resource development could be seen as the nation's populace that have acquired the relevant education and skills that can be put to positive use towards the development of such nations which also attract positive rewards for such workers. Hence it is maintained that the higher the human resource development of any society, the higher will be the potential for economic and technological development of that society (Obisi, 2004; Bornschiefer *et al.*, 2005).

In the words of Nadler (1970) "Human Resource Development is a series of activities conducted within a specified time and designed to produce behavioral change". It is further described by Frank (1974) as activities covering all functions directed towards working with the existing human resources in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Obikoya, (2003) sees it as activities and functions carried out to update the knowledge, skills and behavioral attitude of the worker so as to enhance his present performance and prepare him for the immediate future.

In summary, human resource development encompasses virtually the whole population. Its target is to see to it that every individual (irrespective of their age, sex or status) is helped or enabled to understand his/her social and economic environment and to be fitted for participative roles in the development of that environment, and through varying stages.

### **The Need for Human Resource Development in Nigeria**

The notion of Human Resource Development has attracted scholarly debates in recent times. To some, measuring Human Resource Development, may involve three skill elements of human life which act as principal indicators of human well-being. Such elements are longevity, knowledge and decent living standards. While the first element is indicated by life expectancy at birth based on adequate nutrition and good health, the second is quite indicated by literacy level which is crude reflection of access to education especially good quality education necessary for productive life (Okafor, 2005b; Onyeonoru, 2005).

The third element is viewed as access to essential resources needed for a descent living. This is more or less measured by the per capita income of the individual members of a country. It is in the light of the above argument that this paper has it as one of its

objective to examine the need or essence of Human Resource Development in Nigeria.

Sambo (1998) explains that in spite of the 40 years of Nigeria political independence, she is still regarded as underdeveloped going by all the parameters for assessing development. Nigeria is still characterized by low Gross National Product (GNP), high level of unemployment, low rate capital formation, poor health care delivery system, low level of literacy, inadequate technical manpower and of course, low *per capita* in Human Resource Development (Obisi, 2004; Okafor, 2005b). These developments actually call for an urgent action from the government to take very seriously the issue of Human Resource Development in Nigeria.

Moreso, no nation is known to have attained and sustained high level of economic development without an ample supply of qualified manpower. Of all the factors that unlock the forces of economic growth and development, a country's human resources is the most important (Nwachukwu, 1988; Akpan, 2005). Studies have shown that changes in the quality of workforce account for the rapid economic development that has taken place in the advanced countries than any other factor. Sing-Yong lee (1996)

In the words of Kuznet:

*The major capital stock of an industrially advanced country is not its physical equipment. It is the body of knowledge amassed from tested findings and discoveries of empirical science and the capacity and training of its population to use this knowledge.*

Human Resource development is very essential in that it will promote welfare of the people in maximizing their skills and potentials. In so doing, it will undoubtedly add to the nation economic growth and development. Studies further show that Human Resource Development is the process of increasing the knowledge, skills and capacities of the people – it is the accumulation of human capital and its effective investment in the overall development of an economy. Hence, such countries like Korea, Japan, W. Germany, to mention but few, are known to have developed not necessarily on the basis of abundant mineral resources, but human resources that have been properly developed and annexed for subsequent economic explosion. Thus, manpower development of any nation is intricately interwoven with her economic and social development (Nwachukwu, 1988; Bornschiefer *et al.*, 2005).

Yesufu (2002) also explains that human resource development is accordingly one of the most important requirement, to ensure the sustenance and improvement of an economy. He further stated that it is a must for any society or nation that wishes to survive under the complex challenges of a dynamic world like ours.

The process of Human Resource Development therefore, transcend age and sex. It is a dynamic and multi-institutional process involving both the family and educational system. It is this massive upgrading of the productive capacity of people that constitute investment in Human Resource Development.

In summary, Human Resource Development undoubtedly constitutes the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Human beings have been seen as the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organization and enhance national development. Therefore, a country which fails to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will hardly make reasonable progress in any other area.

### **Challenges of Human Resource Development in Nigeria**

The quality or otherwise of Human Resource Development in any country is a reflection of the totality of what is collectively designated as the environmental influence. The technical and professional quality of Human Resource Development, resulting from proper education and training must be complimented with a conducive socio economic and political atmosphere. Otherwise, trained manpower may not be able to perform given tasks maximally (Yesufu 2002, Fajana 2002; Onyeonoru, 2004).

A well trained doctor, lawyer, teacher and administrator may not perform to expectation in a chaotic and unstable political and socio economic environment. It is one of the objectives of this paper to examine the socio economic and political environment in Nigeria and how it has affected the effective training, development and utilization of human resources. It is one thing therefore, to train and develop human resources in Nigeria, it is another thing to ensure an ideal atmosphere for the utilization and maximization of such trained individuals.

In spite of the numerous tertiary institutions in the country and the subsequent number of graduates that are turned out every year, no significant impact is still being felt in the nation's economy. This may not be unconnected with the inconsistent and unreliable socio economic and political atmosphere under which they are trained. Such atmosphere is characterized by such factors as political instability, corruption, poverty, low technology, inadequate infrastructural facilities, etc.

**Political Instability:** Political development in Nigeria has been highly unstable and unreliable, considering the several regimes we've had since her political independence in 1960. Such political atmosphere has been most astonishing for any meaningful Human Resource Development. The political environment which has been characterized with incessant strikes by teachers, health workers, state employees as well as

several intra-tribal crises has not helped matters at all(Onyeonoru, 2004).

The indirect effects of these occurrences on Human Resource Development in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. It does not only enhance inconsistent policies and projects of government, it also tend to demoralize individuals and deprive them from maximizing their acquired skills and potentials. To ensure a reliable and productive Human Resource Development in Nigeria, there must be some level of assurance, certainty and consistency in the political atmosphere. It is easy to implement policies and projects of government regarding Human Resource Development in such environment.

It is hoped therefore, that the present democratic government would be of tremendous assistance, not only to make reliable and viable policies towards Human Resource Development, but to ensure that the political environment is conducive enough to encourage the utilization and maximization of such trained manpower.

**Political Corruption:** It is no doubt that the Nigerian political domain has been be-deviled by corruption of various kinds as most of the resources are diverted to private purses. It takes huge amounts of financial resources to embark on a meaningful human resource development. Even after people have been trained, they need capital to get established and utilize their skills maximally. When such financial resources are being hijacked and controlled by few individuals for their own personal and selfish desires, the effects will be tremendous. Except there is a check on the corruptive nature of this country, significant progress may not be made in the area of Human Resource Development. It is not that Nigerians do not appreciate democracy with all the value it places on human dignity and freedom. Rather the citizens are gradually realizing that most Nigerian leaders have bastardized democracy to mean enjoyment by the few on behalf of and at the expense of the vast majority (Okator, 2005a).

**Lack of Infrastructural Facilities:** People perish for lack of knowledge and knowledge is obtained through education and training. Proper education and human resources training cannot be obtained in the absence of improved infrastructural facilities that are essential and germane to such training. Hence, Okoh (1998), Anya (2000) and Bornschiefer *et al* (2005) agreed that Human Resource Development is the product of education which means that any society that is interested in technological development must not just invest in education as a social and economic duty but as a development imperative. To enhance a consistent and reliable human capital development, there is need for the government to upgrade the infrastructural facilities in the Nigerian educational institutions and society in general. Hence a trained doctor or lawyer may not be able to perform to the best of his ability under an

atmosphere of infrastructural degradation (Akpan, 2005).

**Poverty:** Majority in the Nigerian society are living below the poverty line. The per capita income in Nigeria is still very low compared to what is obtainable in the advanced countries. Since education and training is expensive only few are able to afford it. The aftermath effect is nothing but the increase in number of unskilled workers. Government should endeavor to come to the aid of such individuals and help them to develop their skills and potentials which will in turn enhance the economic development of the nation. Even those who have successfully undergone rigorous training and development still find it difficult to utilize and maximize their acquired potentials as a result of lack of fund to purchase necessary equipment for a take off (Okoh, 1998; Okafor, 2005a).

One permanent characteristic of organizational management in contemporary Nigeria is continued retrenchment in virtually all establishments. This has rather aggravated the syndrome of poverty in Nigeria rather than reducing it. It is reportedly noted that the agencies involved in human capital development are hampered by lack of fund and poor infrastructure (Okafor, 2005b).

**Low Technology:** The issue of poverty in Nigeria has tremendous implication on her inability to acquire and utilize modern equipment or technology for human resource development. The world is becoming more sophisticated in terms of technological advancement and no nation can thrive in isolation. But where there are inadequate modern technology for human resource training and development, the effect will be enormous (Okoh, 1998, Akpan, 2005).

All these and other related factors determine the ability or otherwise of any country's manpower to realize the full potentials derivable from the investment in their education, training and other forms of development they might have obtained. The more conducive, consistent and reliable the socio-economic and political environment is, the more realistic the development and utilizations of human resources become in this part of the world.

#### **Meeting the Challenges and Prospects**

The trends of human resource development in Nigeria in the face of the various socio-economic and political challenges have been astonishing. However, suggestions offered on meeting the challenges of human resource development in Nigeria include;

**Improved investment in education:** The inevitability and indispensability of education in the training and development of human resources cannot be over emphasized. To ensure a result oriented educational training in Nigeria, the government as well as private organizations should endeavor to invest more on education. This can be realized by making sure that more funds are made available to produce the

necessary equipment for manpower development. The infrastructural facilities as well as modern technology should be made available in the various higher institutions for proper training (Okoh, 1998; Bornschier *et al*, 2005).

A well trained graduate, equipped with adequate knowledge and skills is a great asset to nation development. Young Lee (1996) writes that "South Korea has no outstanding natural resources except her human capital, hence her citizens tend to have preference for the position of scholars. Learning is considered the only desirable basic procedure for the people of South Korea to achieve fame, wealth and power". He further stated that the education enthusiasm is sometimes called a Korean fever and has provided highly educated people for the labour market. No investment into education can be said to be too high for a nation that desires a consistent and result-oriented Human Resource Development.

**Implementable policies on Human Resource Development.** It is one thing for the government to make policies, it is another thing for such policies to be implemented. In fact, Nigerian Economic Summit (2000) identified lack of policy stability as the major hindrance to both human and national development. It is further stated that in spite of the tremendous human capital and natural resources available in Nigeria, no significant development can be made in terms of technology and human resource development except implementable policies and efforts are geared towards such development by Nigerian leadership.

**Involvement of private organization and other agencies in Human Resource Development:** The issue of Human Resource Development should not be left out in the hands of the government alone. The private organizations should be made to embark on reliable and consistent programme relating to human resource development. This can be achieved in the following ways.

- a. Creating and making available challenging roles for the workers.
- b. Organizing training seminars and workshops for workers
- c. Making special budget and investing substantially in development of people.
- d. Encouraging fairness and ethics in the award of recognition for the employee etc.

**Ensuring political stability and credibility:** To reduce the effects of uncertainties in the polity, workplace actors should avoid actions that are capable of exacerbating intra and inter-group conflicts. Political leaders should be made to embrace transparency, credibility, consistency and honesty. There should be a judicious spending of public funds with all fairness.



### Conclusion

This paper has attempted to unravel a number of issues in relation to human resource development. Its meaning, importance and other related factors that can both hinder or promote a consistent, reliable and result oriented Human Resource Development within the Nigerian context. It has been categorically stated in the course of this paper that the quality of Human Resource Development or otherwise in any country and its subsequent utilization for economic development is not unconnected with the prevailing socio economic and political environment of that country. Suggestions were equally made which could be relevant in ensuring an improved Human Resource Development in Nigeria.

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