



# HIGH POVERTY RATE AMIDST EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES: THE IMPACT OF SKILLS ACQUISITION ON POVERTY REDUCTION IN RURAL CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine skills acquisition and its effect on poverty reduction in rural Cross River State, Nigeria. Thus, providing policy guide towards government effective implementation of skills acquisition programmes in the state in order to reduce poverty at the grassroots. Survey method of research was utilized to obtain information from households and communities. Five thousand and four (5004) respondents were selected using ballot method. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation ( $r \times y$ ). The findings of the study show that the skill acquisition programmes organized by Cross River State Government has not significantly reduced rural poverty in the state. The study concluded that despite government intention to provide skills to the rural people in order to be functionally relevant in their local environments, there were some obnoxious practices which served as obstacles to the successful implementation of these programmes in the rural areas of the state. Some of these include: the supply of obsolete equipment, dishonest attitude of the programme managers and prebendal selection of beneficiaries. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the government should increase the quantity of items and materials given to the trainees. One cannot acquire skills without equipment. It amounts to giving somebody training without creating job opportunities. It is as good as nothing. Therefore, if government is serious with poverty reduction programme, trainees should have their materials ready at the point of graduation or passing out. Capacity building demands that availability of materials as the basis for success on a given task should be given prompt attention.

**KEYWORDS:** Skills acquisition; poverty reduction; rural poverty; Empowerment; Rural Cross River State Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Skill acquisition as a form of government programme is directed towards reducing rural poverty.

It is a fundamental issue that has attracted academic interest in recent time. This is because skill acquisition enhances the potentials and performance level of individuals, households and community based associations.

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Skill acquisition also leads to wealth creation, gives prestige to an individual, and may result in expansion in industry.

Academic studies (Eteng, 2005; Agbor, 2006; Ering, 2006) have revealed several factors that are responsible for the continuous existence of poverty in the society despite the huge amount of money annually budgeted by the government for poverty reduction. These scholars also highlighted that apart from poor income and incentives of workers, the major problem facing rural poverty reduction is the lack of functional skills (professional or technical) among many people particularly young university graduates. This situation has resulted in total dependence on government for "white collar" jobs which presently are not provided easily due to lack of skills.

Eteng (2005) for instance, argued that sadly enough, the type of education in modern Nigeria merely provides "job seekers" and not "job creators". The result is abundant supply of school leavers or young university graduates who are functionally irrelevant to themselves. The above findings are quite revealing and calls for urgent policy directives by the government of Cross River State towards rural poverty in all its ramifications and with total resources in the state.

The role of world bodies such as World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, WHO, FAO etc. facilitated global concern for poverty reduction. UNESCO for instance as "the voice of the people" led to global rethinking about the conditions of the poor and the need to ameliorate the deplorable conditions of hunger, affliction, pains, destitution and lack of security suffered particularly in the rural societies. At the turn of the century, however, many World bodies began to perceive the problem of poverty as "a cross over target to be met through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)" (Ndiyo, 2008). It was in line with the goals of the MDGs that many nations including Nigeria in which Cross River State is an integral unit decided to introduce several poverty reduction strategies in which skill acquisition forms the major tool to reduce rural poverty.

Over the years, successive Government of Cross River State had invested huge amount of resources toward skill acquisition programmes, so as to reduce rural poverty in the state. But the reality on ground, in terms of the living conditions of the grassroots indicates that majority of the rural dwellers are living in abject poverty despite the

Government humongous efforts toward skill acquisition programmes in Cross River State. Does it mean that skill acquisition programmes organized by the Cross River State Government has not significantly reduced rural poverty? It is on this background that this study examined the effect of skill acquisition programmes of Cross River state Government on rural poverty reduction. The hypothesis stated for this study is that: there is no significant relationship between skill acquisition programmes of Cross River state Government and rural poverty reduction.

## MATERIALS

### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The two main variables in our study that needs to be clarified for the purpose of easy understanding and avoid attempt to follow a winding course in our inquiry are: skills acquisition and poverty reduction.

**SKILL ACQUISITION:** This is the ability to do well or perform expertly on a job using effective knowledge obtained through training. It is a talent(s) or expert knowledge which an individual gets in a particular field which may be professional, technical or scientific in nature.

In this study, skills acquisition will refer to skill knowledge that an individual obtained through training over a period of time and which enables him to create wealth, improve performance level and be functionally relevant in his environment. This is the reason why it is pivotal to the government poverty reduction in rural Cross River State as a tool for wealth creation.

**POVERTY REDUCTION:** This refers to the various strategies of reducing poverty in the society through the mechanism of job creation, access to information and technology, and creating an enabling environment which guarantee peace, happiness, love, protection of human rights and discourages all forms of primitive accumulation of wealth. It is the basic concern of World Bodies such as World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO. In this study, the term poverty reduction will refer to the strategies adopted by the Cross River State government in the rural areas to achieve poverty reduction programme in line with the definition above and in fulfillment of the World Bank poverty line of not less than \$1 USD a day.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, we shall attempt to identify and assess the existing knowledge or previous academic work that scholars have conducted on the subject of our enquiry. The main aim for this exercise is to be able to identify what particular research work that may have been conducted on skills acquisition and rural poverty reduction in Cross River State. The importance of this approach is that it provides us with the guide to discover what is already known about our research problem. It is also intended to fill the gap in literature and see how we can add value or essentially build on the existing foundation of what is already known about skills acquisition and poverty reduction. In line with this expectation, this study will utilize two main approaches namely, conceptual review and Cross-Country analysis.

The conceptual review will be utilized in our review of skills acquisition. On the other hand, we shall adopt a Cross-Country Analysis of poverty reduction in our study. This approach will enable us to see the practical steps other nations in the world adopted to reduce poverty in their domain.

## SKILLS ACQUISITION:

In this section, the study will be focused on reviewing series of recorded body of knowledge existing about our research problem. This will provide clarity and guide to what we are looking for. Commenting on the idea of skills acquisition generally, Fowler and Fowler (1969) defined skills acquisition as: "the ability to perform expertly, facility in performance, dexterity, and tact" (Cited in Osuala, 2004). In his contribution towards skills acquisition programme in Nigeria, Osuala (2004) defined skills acquisition as: "a training given to an employee to make him perform more expertly on his job by using his knowledge effectively and readily in execution of his performance".

On the other hand, Okorie and Ezeji (1988) referred to skills acquisition as: "a means of increasing the productive power of any nation" (cited in Udo, 2015). They further postulate that: "The behaviour of an individual in a society or the behaviour of a nation in a community of nations may be influenced by the skills and competencies possessed by that individual or nation" (cited in Udo, 2015). Ekpenyong (1988) viewed skills acquisition as: "The ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution of performance, technical expertness, a power or habit of doing any particular thing competently" (cited in Udo, 2015). In a study conducted on skills

training and workers' productivity in formal organizations in Cross River State, Nigeria, Agba, Eteng, & Coker (2016) opined that "Skills training should be seen as a catalyst for improved organizational performance, thus, line managers should be made to be involved in the appraisal and the assessment of training needs of their subordinates".

The implication of this is that skills acquisition as instrument to reduce poverty in rural Cross River State should be "well designed and goal oriented" (Agba, Eteng & Coker, 2016).

Similarly, Indeed Editorial Team (2021) conceptualized skills acquisition as: "talents and expertise often obtained through education or experience". Commenting generally on the usefulness of skills acquisition in Nigeria, Nwokike (nd) maintained that the "best thing" to any person is to acquire skill. He advised university graduates who read Accountancy, Medicine, Pharmacy and Engineering to conduct a survey within their environment to know how many of them are currently gainfully employed in Nigeria and their annual income. In conclusion, he maintained that: "Many after graduation end up doing nothing or working with a law firm where they are paid 30k per month and same with medical doctors working with private clinics". The various views by scholars point to skills acquisition as a veritable tool for wealth creation, competence that enhances sustainable development at the grassroots and promotes "fulfillment in the labour market" (Udo, 2015).

## POVERTY REDUCTION: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Poverty reduction is the strategy or programme of action which government adopts to reduce or solve poverty problem among its citizens. It is focused on the citizens. In this section, the study will center on the steps other countries in the world adopted in order to reduce poverty in their territories. We shall begin our analysis with the studies conducted on Bangladesh for the World Bank by Ravallion and Wodon (1998 cited in Baker 2002). This study was a collaboration work by the government of Bangladesh and World Bank. The study which was titled, "Evaluating a targeted social programme when placement is decentralized" was aimed at increasing primary school enrollment as well as give support or hope to school attendance. To achieve this goal, materials such as wheat, rice, etc were given to selected households.

However, 3,625 rural households were selected for the study (cited in Baker, 2000). The outcome of this evaluation in which data were collected through an “instrumental variable technique” indicated improvement in school enrollment and sudden increase in school attendance.

The Thailand Baan Mankong programme is illuminating and revealing in its achievements towards reducing poverty in the country. Launched in the year 2003 under the National Housing Authority, the programme was aimed at tackling poverty reduction through community participation and partnership with the local authorities in the land. This is intended to improve the living conditions of the poor in terms of housing, health, environment and create access to basic services like water and electricity. The success of the programme has positively raised the hope of the down trodden who occupy the lowest echelon of the society, many of whom live in slum settlements in Thailand. The outcome of this programme was impressive and positively impacted on the lives of the people who for long have been yearning for better conditions in their land. The programme led to improvement in housing and health conditions of the people at the grassroots thereby reducing mortality rate in Thailand (cited in Nyelah Mitchell, 2021).

In Bolivia, a study was carried out through the help of the World Bank by Pradhan, Menno, Rawlings and Riddler (1998, cited in Baker, 2000). The subject of enquiry was “The Bolivian social Investment Fund: An Analysis of Baseline Data for Impact Evaluation”. The main objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of the government social investment fund in Bolivia and ascertain whether it has positively touched the lives of the people at the grassroots. The study revealed that there was positive impact in the areas of education and health. This however, led to a reduction in mortality rate as well as increase in school enrollment.

The impact evaluation programme of road projects in Vietnam was impressive. In 1999, under the auspices of the World Bank, the study was carried out by Van de Walls and Dominique to determine whether creating rural roads will lead to improvement in the living conditions of rural households (cited in Baker, 2000). This study which was titled, “Assessing the Poverty Impact of Rural Road Projects,” successfully resulted in

more employment opportunities and wealth creation among rural dwellers.

In Nicaragua, the school reform programme was successful with positive transformation on the lives of the people. The project titled “Assessment Educational Management and Quality in Nicaragua” was carried out by Rawlings and Laura (2000, cited in Baker, 2000). The aim was to encourage learning through policy decentralization in decision making process. The outcome of this programme was improvement in the learning process of students as well as improvement in school management techniques and better quality of teachers.

Despite what we observed in some parts of the world as successful poverty reduction programmes embarked upon by government, yet studies reviewed that in some parts of Africa such as Tanzania under the late President Nyerere and Zimbabwe under President Robert Mugabe, poverty reduction programmes failed because of certain internal and external contradictions which marred the policy seriously. For instance, the land reform programme in Zimbabwe failed because of its political implication.

#### **SKILLS ACQUISITION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN RURAL CROSS RIVER STATE**

Assisting individuals, households or community based associations through skills acquisition is fundamental to poverty reduction in rural Cross River State. This does not only promote sustainable development at the grassroots, but enhances performance level and wealth creation. As part of the need to reduce poverty at the grassroots, the government introduced some profitable skills among the people and these vary according to the value and interest of the individuals. Expectedly, being a rural area where majority of the people are poor, some of these skills requires little funding to start the business which has enabled many village dwellers to be solving other peoples’ problems. Some of these skills introduced by the government include:

**BARBING AND HAIR DRESSING:** This skill is to make customers look attractive and loving. In the rural areas, majority of the people are farmers and lack the time to make themselves look good. Therefore, during market days when many rest from farm labour, they prefer to barb their hairs. Fortunately, this is one of the lucrative businesses which does not need huge capital but requires socializing well with the customers such as

engaging a customer in an interesting conversation while attending to him. This helps to attract customers for wealth creation which reduces rural poverty in Cross River State. The government assisted individuals by providing equipments like hair clippers, powder, and sanitizer to trainees at the end of the training.

**COBBLER:** This skill involves shoe designing. Often many go beyond making foot wares into designing and making bags. Many rural dwellers love to wear outfits that matches with their clothes. Therefore, they go to the cobbler and bag makers seeking for shoes that match in colour with their clothes, cap or hair gear. This skill helps to reduce poverty. Government helps to provide materials and tools to the people.

**FASHION DESIGN/TAILORING:** This skill attract job orders particularly when an individual skill is overwhelmingly creative. Rural dwellers in Cross River State love celebrations such as child dedication, marriages, night parties or clubs. Therefore, when an individual is good at sewing, there is the chance of adequate job order that enables the individual to create wealth and reduce poverty. Government provides sewing machines to deserving citizens.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Rural people like the city dwellers love to keep record and memories of their childhood, youthful days, or particular celebration of achievement such as yam title holding, marriages or burial of their parents. Since pictures are documentary, people generally love pictures. This business is attractive usually takes place during weekends, school or church activities. It is a means of wealth creation to rural dwellers in Cross River State and reduces poverty. Government provides cameras and other gadgets to ease operation.

**BAKING:** This skill requires making chin-chin, fish rolls, meat pie, cake, egg-rolls, peanuts, etc. An individual who acquire this skill stands the chance of making money through supplies to hotels or eateries where the demand is high. You bake for friends who in turn may recommend you to other friends in a chain-like manner thus increasing your popularity and financial status as a means to poverty reduction.

**DRIVING:** Government may register an individual in a professional driving school to learn how to drive. At the expiration of the individual's training, such a person may be engaged as a taxi driver which helps him to earn income as a way of reducing poverty.

Government also provided motorcycles, tricycles to assist the people to create wealth. This has eased rural transportation which in the past was movement by foot through the village bush paths that are dangerous at night.

**MANICURE/MAKE UP/PEDICURE:** This skill needs an individual to be well versed with colour and have a good customer relationship which makes the customer happy. Most students, professionals, men and women love it because they want to look young and attractive always. It is a fast means of creating wealth and reducing poverty.

The above variety of profitable skills which government provides to the rural dwellers in Cross River State generally enables an individual or household to promote personal or community greatness. It provides happiness, affection and love, joy peace, and reduces criminal activities as well as youth restiveness which for long had been a dominant feature of most rural communities in Cross River State. Therefore, armed robbing, hostage taking (kidnapping), prostitution and other social vices have been considerable reduced because of skills that have profitable engaged most youths in wealth creation thereby reducing poverty.

### THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

A threefold approach to poverty reduction will be adopted in this study. The first is the individual attributes theory. This theory assumes that everybody has equal chances of getting out of the vicious cycle of poverty. The theory holds that those who remain in poverty merely chose to be there. In short, the theory assumes that in any reward system, an individual's position is caused by the individual concern. Thus, the theory assumes that an individual's quality as a natural attribute determines the quantity of resources he gets. Based on this assumption, the theory maintains that those with weak abilities occupy the lowest echelon with poverty because they cannot make money while those with good qualities simply occupy the highest level of authority or responsiveness which enables them to create wealth. However, this assumption does not apply to all cases. For instance, Akeredolu – Ake (1975) argued that: "The individual attributes operate only within a structure of possibilities...defined by forces outside the scope of the individual" (cited in Eteng and Agbor, 2006).

The second is the corruption theory which assumes that corruption "fertilizes" poverty.

The main reasoning here is that public office holders particularly among the Third World Countries use their new found positions to amaze public wealth and deny the poor of the resources needed to better their lot. This has made the craze for public offices to be competitive and deadly.

The third approach is the power theory. The basic assumption of this theory is that the size of poverty in the society is predominantly based on the structure of power existing in that society. The theory assumes that the few powerful elites who occupy important positions of authority in government organizes the economy to favour them and marginalizes the vast majority of the people. The idea is that many do not want to return to their original poverty situation which they inherited before being appointed or elected into government. However, based on our subject matter of enquiry, this study shall rely on the assumptions of the corruption and power theories to highlight skills acquisition and poverty reduction in rural Cross River State. The theories are fundamentally relevant because they represent and picture in clear terms corruption and use of power for primitive accumulation thereby denying the poor masses useful resources that could have been channeled to reduce the level of poverty in the society.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, the survey research method was adopted to assess the correlation between skills acquisition and poverty reduction in rural Cross River State. Data were obtained from households and communities. To seek information from households, the study considered the following characteristics: income, consumption level, location, education, occupation, production, employment, health as well as nutritional status of the households. To provide information on communities, the study focused on community facilities and services. Five thousand and four (5004) respondents were selected as sample size of the study out of 2,892,980.2 being the total population of the state (2006 National Population Commission, Abuja). This figure comprised of 450 artisans, 1474 farmers, 500 small scale traders, 380 technicians, 1400 unemployed and 750 other occupations. The selection of this figure was purposeful. This was to give the researchers the free hand to choose respondents that have knowledge about the subject of our enquiry.

The State consists of eighteen (18) local government areas which are geo-politically divided into three (3) Senatorial Regions: North, Central and South. The North consists of Obanliku, Ogoja, Obudu, Bekwarra, and Yala. The Central Senatorial Region comprises of Yakurr, Abi, Etung, Ikom, Obubra and Boki while the South consists of Biase, Akamkpa, Odukpani, Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Akpabuyo and Bakassi.

Nine (9) local government areas, three (3) from each Senatorial Region were used for the study being randomly chosen. The researcher(s) prepared three (3) separate containers which were labeled letters X, Y, Z. Letter X for the North, Y for the Central Senatorial Region and letter Z representing the Southern Senatorial Region. The names of all the local government areas in each Senatorial Region were written on pieces of paper that were rolled into paper balls and were put in each container according to their Senatorial Region. Accordingly, they were shaken thoroughly and the researcher(s) picked and recorded the name of the local government area that was randomly chosen from each of the Senatorial District. This exercise was repeated until three (3) Local Government Areas in each Senatorial District were finally chosen for the study. The process was also utilized in the selection of the rural communities in the Local Government Areas chosen from the three (3) Senatorial Districts. The researcher sampled 556 respondents from each of the nine selected Local Government Areas.

On the other hand, data was obtained through observation, interview, questionnaire and documentary records. Tables were utilized to present the data collected while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (rxy) was utilised to analyse the data. The researcher adopted 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule is as follow: Decision rule1: the null hypothesis should be rejected if P value is less than 0.05. Decision rule 2: the null hypothesis should be accepted if P value is greater than 0.05. However, five thousand and four (5004) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. Out of this number, only four thousand nine hundred and fiftyfour (4954) questionnaires were retrieved giving the attrition rate of one percent (1%). Find below tables 1 and 2 showing the respondents view on skills acquisition and poverty reduction in rural Cross River State as well as the correlation analysis result.

The researchers encountered a lot of daunting challenges in the course of this study. One of the

limitations was that some of the selected local Government Areas / communities had poor road network. There were pockets of waterlogged on the roads to these communities. The researchers worked on foot to these communities.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

**Table 1: Respondents views on skills acquisition and poverty reduction in rural Cross River State in percentage table**

| S/N | TRADE               | QUESTION 1<br>THE GOVERNMENT HAD ORGANIZED SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMME(S) / TRAINING FOR THE RURAL DWELLERS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA |              |              |           |           | QUESTION 2<br>I HAVE PARTICIPATED AS A TRAINEE IN SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMME(S) ORGANIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE RURAL DWELLERS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA |              |    |           |           | QUESTION 3<br>I WAS GIVEN STARTER PACKS / KITS OR FUND AT THE END OF THE SKILL ACQUISITION PROGRAMME(S) / TRAINING ORGANIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE RURAL DWELLERS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA |                  |        |             |               |
|-----|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----|-----------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------|-------------|---------------|
|     |                     | SA                                                                                                                                        | A            | UK           | D         | SD        | SA                                                                                                                                                                | A            | UK | D         | SD        | SA                                                                                                                                                                                                  | A                | U<br>K | D           | SD            |
| 1   | Farmers             | 1000<br>67.8%                                                                                                                             | 462<br>31.3% | 2<br>.1<br>% | 3<br>.2%  | 7<br>.5%  | 712<br>48.3%                                                                                                                                                      | 750<br>50.9% | 0  | 4<br>.3%  | 8<br>.5%  | 80<br>5.4%                                                                                                                                                                                          | 35<br>2.4%       | 0      | 80<br>5.4%  | 1279<br>86.8% |
| 2   | Unemployed          | 700<br>50%                                                                                                                                | 691<br>49.4% | 0            | 3<br>.2%  | 6<br>.4%  | 1091<br>77.9%                                                                                                                                                     | 300<br>21.4% | 0  | 8<br>.6%  | 1<br>.1%  | 60<br>4.3%                                                                                                                                                                                          | 150<br>10.7<br>% | 0      | 100<br>7.1% | 1090<br>77.9% |
| 3   | Technicians         | 150<br>39.5%                                                                                                                              | 221<br>58.2% | 0            | 5<br>1.3% | 4<br>1.1% | 317<br>83.4%                                                                                                                                                      | 54<br>14.2%  | 0  | 4<br>1.1% | 5<br>1.3% | 5<br>1.3%                                                                                                                                                                                           | 65<br>17.1<br>%  | 0      | 15<br>3.9%  | 295<br>77.6%  |
| 4   | Artisans            | 100<br>22.2%                                                                                                                              | 341<br>75.8% | 0            | 6<br>1.3% | 3<br>.7%  | 341<br>75.8%                                                                                                                                                      | 100<br>22.2% | 0  | 7<br>1.6% | 2<br>.1%  | 10<br>2.2%                                                                                                                                                                                          | 70<br>15.6<br>%  | 0      | 20<br>4.4%  | 350<br>77.8%  |
| 5   | Small scale traders | 450<br>90%                                                                                                                                | 41<br>8.2%   | 0            | 7<br>1.4% | 2<br>.4%  | 391<br>78.2%                                                                                                                                                      | 100<br>20%   | 0  | 4<br>.8%  | 5<br>1.0% | 15<br>3.0%                                                                                                                                                                                          | 50<br>10.0<br>%  | 0      | 30<br>6.0%  | 405<br>81.0%  |
| 6   | Others              | 600<br>80.0%                                                                                                                              | 141<br>18.8% | 0            | 1<br>.1%  | 8<br>1.1% | 591<br>78.8%                                                                                                                                                      | 150<br>20.0% | 0  | 6<br>.8%  | 3<br>.4%  | 30<br>4.0%                                                                                                                                                                                          | 100<br>13.3<br>% | 0      | 40<br>5.3%  | 580<br>77.3%  |

**Source:** authors field work 2024

From table 1, it is clear that the respondents agreed that the government has been organizing skill acquisition programmes for the rural dwellers in Cross River State and majority of them had participated as trainees in the programmes. But they most of them noted that they were not given starter packs or fund at the end of the programmes. Accordingly, 92.2 percent (86.8% and 5.4%) of the farmers noted that they were not given materials after their training. Also 85 percent

(77.9% and 7.1%) of unemployed rural dwellers affirmed that starter kits were not given to them after their training. Similarly, majority of the artisans, technicians, small scale traders and members of other occupations noted categorically that after their participation as trainees in government organized skill acquisition programmes, they were neither given starter kits nor fund to take off.

**Figure 1: Correlation analysis result for skills acquisition and rural poverty reduction in Cross River State.**

|                         |                     | Skill Acquisition | Rural Poverty Reduction |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Skills Acquisition      | Pearson Correlation | 1                 | -.356                   |
|                         | Sig. (1-tailed)     |                   | .278                    |
|                         | N                   | 5                 | 5                       |
| Rural Poverty Reduction | Pearson Correlation | -.356             | 1                       |
|                         | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .278              |                         |
|                         | N                   | 5                 | 5                       |

**Source:** authors field work 2024

From figure 1, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient between skill acquisition and rural poverty reduction is -0.356 and the P value is 0.278, which implies that there is no significant relationship between skill acquisition and poverty reduction. Consequently, the null hypothesis which says that there is no significant relationship between skill acquisition programmes of Cross River state Government and rural poverty reduction is hereby upheld because 0.278 which is our P value is greater than 0.05 which is the significance level. The result reveals clearly that the skill acquisition programmes organized by Cross River State Government has not significantly improved the conditions of living of the rural dwellers. In addition, State Government organized skill acquisition programmes were not properly thought out and implemented.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the foregoing, it has been observed that what constitute skills acquisition for poverty reduction in rural Cross River State was mainly skills and training in petty trades/businesses such as tailoring, barbing and hair dressing, photography, baking, driving, manicure, make-up and pedicure. It has also been observed that what the government does to enhance performance level on the job was to provide materials, equipments or tools to some of the trainees at the end of their training programmes. Some of these materials, equipments or tools include flour for

baking, sewing machines, cameras, motorcycles and cooking vessels. Others were given petty cash which government distributed through political patronage.

A critical assessment of the quantity of these materials which the government distributed to the trainees shows that the materials were grossly inadequate. For instance, in Abi Local Government Area with a population of over 900,000 people, only 20 sewing machines were distributed to the people between the year 2016 and 2020. Flour bags distributed were 30 while 30 cameras were distributed to the trainees within the same period. The implication is that not more than five (5) trainees got sewing machines, 6 got flour, and 6 got cameras within the timeframe under consideration. The same applies to other local government areas of the state. In effect, 360 sewing machines, 540 flour bags and 540 cameras were distributed to the people in the 18 local government areas of the state with a population of over 2 million people. This is grossly inadequate and cannot be taken for a serious poverty reduction programme in the state.

Secondly, the quality of equipment distributed to the trainees was obsolete and sub-standard. Some of the beneficiaries interviewed across the state complained of equipment breakdown within three months of supply by the government. For instance, one of the beneficiaries (who claimed anonymous) complained that her sewing machine was substandard and was merely occupying

space in her shop because she cannot put it to use as she has no money to repair it. The distribution of substandard and obsolete materials that are out of date and can no longer be used shows that Government is not serious with the type of poverty reduction programme it is embarking upon. A good poverty reduction programme will entail as a necessary part the process of monitoring and evaluation to avoid programme failure.

Thirdly, political patronage is the bane of poverty reduction in rural Cross River State. The activities and interest of the political elites were clearly shown in the manner in which the various materials were distributed to the people at the grassroots. The elites prefer their kinsmen, family members and political supporters during electioneering campaigns and want to fulfill the promises made to them. They targeted individuals or communities that supported and voted for them during election, to benefit from the poverty reduction programmes. Those who did not give them any support during election were either marginalized or sidelined. The implication is that communities that failed during elections to support the Government officials or lack influential persons in Government were lagging behind.

Fourthly, it has been observed that the attitude of some of the programme managers was inimical to the success of the government poverty reduction in rural Cross River State. Under the Care of the People Programme (COPE), government gives a petty cash support of N5000.00 (\$22 US dollar equivalent) monthly to all trainees who at the completion of their training awaits the supply of equipment promised to them by the government. Regrettably, some of the programme managers short-changed these people with excuses that their names were erroneously omitted from the payment list by the computer. In effect, huge sum of money unpaid was diverted into their private pockets for personal gains. Besides, the sum of N5000.00 is grossly inadequate to cater for the wellbeing of any individual for a month. Therefore, what this amounts to in practical terms is alms giving and not poverty reduction as government makes the public to believe in the face of threat by government to remove fuel subsidy. Finally, the attitude of many trainees (some of whom are youths) towards skills acquisition is discouraging. A lot of them showed low interest in their skills for competence. Others spend their training hours playing with their mobile phones without switching

them off. Still, many others fail to sit down and learn practical skills which will enhance their future but rather prefer to engage in discussions about sensual matters.

## CONCLUSION

This study essentially examined skills acquisition and poverty reduction in rural Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper made attempt to highlight some of the potential skills acquired by the poor at the grassroots. Some of these skills include barbing and hair dressing, cobbler, photography, fashion design or tailoring, baking, make-up, manicure and pedicure. Regrettably, the study observed that despite government intention to provide skills to the rural people in order to be functionally relevant in their local environment, there were some obnoxious practices which served as obstacles to the successful implementation of the programme in the rural areas of the state. Some of these include: the supply of obsolete equipment, attitude of the programme managers and prebendal selection of beneficiaries, etc.

However this study concludes by suggesting that capacity building for individuals and community development requires proper targeting of the poor, financial strength, availability of equipment or materials, and an enabling environment. As a continuous process, poverty reduction in rural Cross River State should be given serious attention, and adequate funding provided as a catalyst to enhance performance of individuals, community based associations and create wealth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of these observations, this study recommends as follows that:

The government should increase the quantity of items and materials given to the trainees. One cannot acquire skills without equipment. It amounts to giving somebody training without creating job opportunities. It is as good as nothing. Therefore, if government is serious with poverty reduction programme, trainees should have their materials ready at the point of graduation or passing out. Capacity building demands that availability of materials as the basis for success on a given task should be given prompt attention. This forms the bedrock of individual success. The quality of materials, equipment or working tools given to the trainees should not be substandard.

The situation where there is frequent equipment breakdown because they are obsolete creates frustration on the job. Thus proper monitoring and inspection of equipment at the source and before distributing to the people should be on the top agenda of the programme managers. This is because the power to perform creditably depends on availability of good and functional machines or equipment.

The distribution of materials or equipment based on political patronage should be discouraged among the political elites. The situation where political leaders choose their family members, friends or those who voted for them as beneficiaries should not be allowed to continue. Proper monitoring and evaluation techniques will help to eliminate or at least minimize these prebendal practices. There should be an enabling environment for all persons on the basis of open approach to operate successfully without discrimination.

The attitude of the programme managers should be properly monitored to prevent corrupt enrichment and nepotistic practices of some of them. The state Anti-corruption Law should be re-enforced and offenders punished. This will serve as a deterrent to others with evil intention in the work process. Finally, the practice of giving N5,000.00 monthly to trainees who awaits the supply of equipment from government needs to be improved upon. This monthly petty cash is too small and should be increased because even gardeners in the state don't earn such low monthly income. Besides, many were short-changed under the ploy that their names were omitted by the computer in the payment vouchers. Capacity building requires individuals to be strengthened financially. This will enable them to perform their assigned tasks creditably. This will also help them to solve their problems or challenges with minimal stress.

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