

**THE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR
MIGRATION (IOM) TOWARDS YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY
REDUCTION IN LOWER NUIMI NORTH
REGION, THE GAMBIA**

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Abstract

Youth empowerment and community development are keys to the development of any nation. When young people are not considered in the national development equation, inadequate recognition of the role young people play, dampens the morale of many young people thereby making so many to feel disenfranchised by government policies which were meant to empower them. The study assesses the impact of International Organization for Migration (IOM) projects on youth empowerment in Barra, Essau and Mayamba, North Bank Region of The Gambia. The objective of the study is to assess the impact of entrepreneurship in the empowerment of youths by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the study area. The study adopted a research survey method and descriptive statistics was useful for the collection of data and techniques used in the analysis. Self-administered survey questionnaires were made and

presented to the respondents through the youth associations which all were returned. Clustered sampling method was used for the study. Data were interpreted using excel and graphs extracted from the survey questions guided by the research questions. The study revealed that less than 1% of the total youth population has been empowered in the studied area however; this is only one organisation contributing its quota to youth empowerment and community development in the study area. Again, results have shown that the projects have an impact on the youth and can contribute massively to community development. The findings assist the central government, project developers and other stakeholders in their approach in improving community development and youth empowerment in the region. The study recommends that the central government through the youth ministry and National Youth Council should build strong youth networks and provision of legislation for youth that would be perceived as a guide and partners for community development programmes and projects hence, there is a need to create more opportunities for youth at all stages to contribute to community development and nation building.

KEY WORDS: Development, Community, Youth Empowerment, Poverty

1. Introduction

Youth empowerment and community development are keys to any nation's development. Youth have a role to renew and refresh the current status of our society including leadership, innovation, skills, participation etc. Youths are expected to be the driving force to a nation's development and emphatically, they have a vital role to play in advancement of technology, education, politics and peace of this country. Youth can be referred to as the period between childhood and adult age. The United Nations defines Youth as persons between the ages of fifteen (15) and thirty five (35) in The Gambia, according to Gambia Bureau of Statistic (GBoS, 2012); Youth is a person between the ages of fifteen to thirty-five (15 to 35) in the Gambia. In the Gambia, almost 60% of the population is under the age of twenty-five. This basically means that over half of the population falls under the youthful age structure. According to the 2013 census, the North bank region constitutes 11.8% of the total population of the country, making it the fourth highest populated local government area. Out of the 221,054 population in the North bank region, about 132,048 people are under the youthful age structure of The Gambia(2010).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the principal UN agency working in the field of

migration. The IOM promotes humane and orderly migration by providing services and advice to governments and migrants. With over 174-member states, a further 8 states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. Over the past few years, the pursuit for socioeconomic advancement-especially among the youth-has driven many to undertake irregular migration with the aim of reaching Europe. Over 35,000 Gambian arrived in Europe by irregular means between 2014 and 2018 (World Bank. (2010). Between January 2017 and June 2020, over 5600 Gambian returnees were assisted. IOM also works with local partners to combat trafficking in persons, promote the health of migration, raise awareness on the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration and promote diaspora engagement to contribute to economic development through knowledge and skill transfer (2010). The Migration Information Centre (MIC), established by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the National Youth Council (NYC), is currently on-going and has been a successful project in Lower Nuimi. Its main objective is to raise awareness on safe migration and assist in providing information to youth and potential migrants through a series of activities. Furthermore, it refers to returnee migrants eligible for reintegration assistance with

IOM and provides advice on opportunities within the region and beyond. Its door is open to all young people.

According to their reports (Gambia Labour Force Survey, 2012), youths aged 15-35 are trained and from 2018-2022, they have trained 65 youths both male and female. The training also includes community leaders, youth leaders, returnees and community women. As part of complementary support provided to the Ministry of Health to promote access to health and mental health services and to de-escalate stigma and discrimination through participatory activities in migrant communities of return, In September 2021, through the UN PBF project, in partnership with health authorities deployed a mobile outreach activity, providing medical consultations, complementary medicines, psychosocial counselling, and health and psych education to migrants and communities. Through the activity, 211 (male 86 and female 125) community members were reached in NBR. In coordination with regional Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) focal points from Ministry of Health (MoH), social workers from Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and youth leaders in Barra, and through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection, a community-based PSS intervention took place in June 2021, involving returnees (14 participants making up 6 Male, 8 Female) (GBoS, 2012). The goal of the activity was to make follow-up to

returnees to understand how they have been coping during the pandemic, from their shared experiences and to use the medium to reinforce community support structures and positive coping behaviours.

Activities carried out

i. Peer Support Group: One of the activities they engage in is supporting female groups by psychologically assisting them through workshops, training, house to house visit.

ii. Business Training: Training is normally conducted for youths for a period of five days where they are trained on small business activities such as training on soap products, training on tie and die, cosmetics business and other related small business enterprise.

iii. Animal Husbandry: Ten executive members are trained on group management from the shipwreck survivors which includes technical training on animal husbandry and farm management.

2. Literature Review

Community Development

Galvin (2009, p.5; 2011) states that “service delivery would be enhanced greatly when the municipality was clear about what it wants to achieve and how to get there, and where it holds service providers

accountable against clearly defined performance objectives and service provision standards. Close monitoring of performance against defined and agreed objectives was essential, regardless of whether the services provider was internal or external to the municipality”. Iwayemi (2013) explains that local government as the driving force of delivery services and achieving sustainable socio-economic development. The fact of the matter is that, if the local government of the North bank region can embrace development and are committed to work with their citizens, youths, groups and other relevant stakeholders, then they will find sustainable ways of meeting their socio-economic needs and improve the quality of lives for both the youths and the community. This can also mean that the government can adapt strategies and programs that could promote socio-economic development in Barra. These strategies and methods could create employment opportunities for youths and decrease unemployment as well as boosting the morale of youths and citizens of the community through training, education, and dialogue and youth’s participation.

New development programs and policies aimed at community development should enhance job creations and be able to initial socio-economic well-being. Other development programs could be promoted through activities such as arts & culture, sport, recreation of

community facilities as well as delivery aspects of social welfare service. Mogale (2003) mentioned that development planners have undermined the need for decentralization and participation of the public. The frustration on the delivery side of public participation has raised skeptical responses. The society's participation in communities is important for human growth, pride, initiative, responsibility, self-confidence and understanding.

Community development could be achieved through self-help initiative as well as through government interference, development projects, youth empowerment, and strategic investment in economic and social infrastructure that benefits the entire community. According to United Nations Development Programme (2013), economic functions in the provinces have suffered from a cycle of recession, stagnation and lack of opportunities for young people causing migration from rural areas. This is a cause for concern and therefore, needs for the government to revisit the policies and processes of facilitating community development to ensure more relevant to emerging issues and challenges. Communities in the rural areas are sometimes termed as disadvantaged communities. And according to Uemura (2011), it basically describes disadvantaged communities as areas which had high concentrations of low-income households, as well as low employment and educational

attainment levels and high unemployment rate. Saunders (2005); Chukwuezi, (2005), mentions that it does not include other societal complexities such as portions of the community who are low-income earners, and live in areas of disadvantaged communities but, by all accounts, are doing well in terms of life satisfaction and social well-being. Community development programs should be able to change people's attitude and behaviours. It should help the majority of youths who have been reluctant, poor and helpless within the community to transform their lives socially, economically and even psychologically.

Empowerment

Empowerment has been conceptualized as the authority or power given to someone to do something. It makes the person stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's right. World Bank (2022) defines empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficiency in communities through identification and removal of conditions that reinforce powerlessness. Akinloye, and Banji (2005) state that empowerment is the process by which people gain control over their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of the environment. Ultimately, empowerment programs are efficient and effective only if it is empowering communities for sustainable development through women

empowerment and youth's empowerment. World Bank (2013), states that empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities. Youth Development Index Research Report (2013) mentionsthat there should be a community services element that engages the youth with their community and offers an opportunity to implement lasting positive change in the community. Dialogue is an important factor of empowerment design in building a sense of understanding and empowerment for youth participants.

Capacity

United Nation Development Program (2003) defined capacity building to cover human resources development and strengthening a managerial system, institutional development that comprises community involvement and creation of an enabling environment. In the context of development, capacity building refers to the dynamic process which enables individuals and organizations to develop the serious social and practical capabilities to identify and analyses complications as well as provide answers. Capacity building is the improvement in an individual's or organization's facility to produce, perform or deploy. At the individual level, the capacity building can be term as the process of changing attitudes and behaviors imparting knowledge and development

skills. The capacity needed by any nation for maintainable development is main dependent on the adequacy and relevance of its entrepreneurship (Brennan, and Barnett, (2006, p.40-97).

3. Methodology

The study adopts a research survey method and descriptive statistics. This is because the study of this nature requires active participants such as the beneficiaries and community members of the studied area to obtain a comprehensive knowledge or information on the actual processes to the study. Descriptive research is preplanned and structured in design so the information collected can be statistically inferred on a population. In addition, the study will consist of both qualitative and quantitative method research design in using pre planned structured questionnaire (self-administered) and conduct of interviews.

The research concentrates specifically on Lower Nuimi of the North Bank Region. Lower Nuimi entails about twelve towns but we will narrow it down to one most renowned town called Barra, Essau and Mayamba. The approximate population of the North Bank Region is about 221,054 people and Lower Nuimi constitutes about 57,088 people. Being the highest region in youth unemployment and most notably, the gate to the Backway, Barra, Essau and Mayamba of Lower Nuimi are

essential to the region and will help accomplish the task and also help to better understand the roles, impacts, effects of community development programs in youth empowerment.

4. Results of Findings from the Study

Table 1: Description of the impact of IOM in the study areas

Town	Number Of Respondent	Gender Respondent		Knowledge About IOM		IOM Project Beneficiary	
BARRA	51	16 M 35 F	31.37% 68.63%	15 YES 36 NO	29.41% 70.59%	15	0.28%
ESSAU	51	14 M 37 F	27.45% 72.55%	12 YES 39 NO	23.53% 76.47%	31	0.32%
MAYAMABA	51	21 M 30 F	41.18% 58.82%	13 YES 38 NO	25.49% 74.51%	30	5.18%
TOTAL	153	51 M 102F	33.33% 66.67%	40 YES 113 NO	26.14% 73.86%	76	5.78%

Table 1 above shows the results of the objective of the study. It shows the people involved in the community development programs, the awareness in the community and the aim of the project. Results show that the females are more aware of the development programs carried out in their community compared to the males. Out of the 153 sample size of the respondents from three different communities, 102 females which are 66.67 % of the total are female and 51 males which take 33.33% are males.

This shows that the females are more particular with their surroundings than the men of the communities and therefore led to a higher proportion of female awareness than men awareness. Again, results have shown us that 26.14% of the total respondents are aware of the development programs compared to the 73.86 % of total unawareness. The difference is significant and therefore, leads to a significant high value. Again, results have shown that less than 1% of Barra and Essau population are benefiting from the project which is an insignificant value.

Do IOM empowerment schemes impact youth in Lower Nuimi?

Based on the research findings in table 1, it was observed that the people involved in the community development programs, the awareness in the community and the aim of the project. The finding has shown that about 5.78% of the youth are beneficiaries of the projects which are relatively small considering the total number of youths in the studied area. Results show that the females are more aware of the development programs carried out in their community compared to the males. Out of the 153 respondents from three different communities, 102 are females and 51 are males. This shows that the females are more particular with their surroundings than the men of the communities and therefore led to a higher proportion of female awareness than men awareness. Again, results have shown us that less than 1% of Barra and Essau

population are benefiting from the project which is of very insignificant value while the total beneficiaries are less than 6%. Based on this, yes, the scheme had impacted youth in the region but to a limited number at a low percentage.

The findings of the study have shown that there is a co-relationship between youth empowerment and community development. For a community to prosper, youths in that community have to be empowered and thus create poverty reduction. It is true that the results in the finding have extracted that less than 6% of the total youth population has been empowered in the studied area however; this is only one organization contributing its quota to youth empowerment and community development in the studied area –to reduce poverty and improve community development in the study area, a big gap must be covered.

5. Conclusion

The main reason for this study is to assess the role of the International Organization for Migration on youth empowerment and community development toward poverty reduction in Lower Nuimi of The Gambia; Youths are the assets of change that present us with both promise and huge risk. Youth empowerment and community development are keys to any nation's

development. Youth have a role to renew and refresh the current status of our society including leadership, innovation, skills, participation etc. Youths are expected to be the driving force to a nation's development and have a vital role to play in advancement of technology, education, politics and peace of this country. Community participation assists youth become empathetic citizens who could potentially continue similar work when they become adults and responsible for the nation. Youths who give back to their communities develop leadership skills, learn the importance of assisting and gain work experience. Targeting progressive and development plans ranging from educational programs through capacity building, training, teaching to adding skills, and knowledge to the young people.

Most of the people in Barra, Essau and Mayamba especially the youths are illiterate, disempowered and majority of the people are poor but might be benefiting from the development programs. Enhanced individual development provides youth with opportunities to generate real community change and thus contribute immensely to community development and reduction in poverty. Results have shown that there is a positive relation between community development and youth empowerment and therefore, the need to empower the youth of Lower Nuimi for the development of North bank and the country as a whole. Youths of Lower Nuimi are

crying for help and their needs cannot go unaddressed and therefore, community development programs should create more opportunities for youth at all stages to contribute to community development and nation building.

The study recommends that:

- i. The government through the youth ministry and National Youth Council should build strong youth networks and provision of legislation for youth that would be perceived as a guide and partners for community development programs and projects.
- ii. The policy makers should factor youth participation in decision making at every stage to translate the established objectives into creating impact. Sustainability is vital and therefore, all community development programmes should be geared towards sustainable development goals thereby reducing poverty amongst youths in the country.

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