



REINVENTING THE 'NWABOI' APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM: A PLATFORM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROMOTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is by far the most entrenched and vibrant entrepreneurship promotion vehicle in Nigeria and it plays a major role in the growth and development of micro, small and medium scale enterprises. The system is a big driver for wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction and thus economic growth and development. The paper starts with a brief historical background and it is contended that the system is strongly rooted in Igbo culture. There are basically two major types of 'the Nwaboi apprenticeship system: 'Imu-Oru Aka' (Learning a craft or skill) and 'Imu-Ahia' (Learning to trade) and the scope is wide; ranging from all kinds of trading to various crafts and skills. The system is very informal, not integrated with the organized private sector and virtually outside the ambit of government oversight and support. However, in a bid to tackle the growing rate of youth and graduate unemployment, the Nigerian government took an unusual positive step and established the National Directorate of Employment in 1987 to equip young people with marketable skills that will help them to become employable or self-employed. Unfortunately, like many government initiatives in Nigeria that are prone to inconsistency and short life cycle, most if not all the programmes put in place as part of the NDE initiative are now either not functional or on the verge of becoming moribund. Some of the challenges facing the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System are explored while recommendations on how the system can be improved and reinvented for the 21st Century include the realignment of the anti-industry dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystem to promote the embedding of the enterprise culture; provision of physical, scientific and technological infrastructure; the establishment of a good legal framework to guide and formalize the system; establishment of entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition centres to promote the training and development of apprentices on basic and technological literacy and on entrepreneurship skill-sets such as technical, management and entrepreneurship skills and the promotion of linkage with well managed local organizations and multinational corporations. The paper concludes that the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has the potential to significantly increase the level of entrepreneurial metabolism and to stimulate the rate and pace of new venture creation and thus a viable platform for entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria.

KEY WORDS: Nwaboi Apprenticeship System, Entrepreneurship Triangle, We Work, Co-creation Hub (CcHUB).



INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian economy is exemplified by weak industrial base, dependence on the oil sector, low foreign direct investment, high rate of importation of basic consumer goods, poor economic performance and high level of youth and graduate unemployment. But the admixture of growing youth population and graduate unemployment is a toxic cocktail that portends great danger for Nigeria; particularly in terms of reinforcing poverty and accentuating insecurity. As Ejo-Orusa (2019b, p.6) poignantly observed: 'The young unemployed are already posing serious security challenges to Nigeria as armed robbers, kidnappers, Niger Delta militants, Fulani Herdsmen and deadly Boko Haram terrorists.' The situation is made worse by the fact that the number of young people and Nigeria's population generally is projected to increase significantly when the population in other parts of the world is decreasing (Bloom, 2010). In fact, Nigeria is projected to become the Third most populous country ahead of the United States of America and behind China and India by about 2050. Worryingly, even before the full manifestation of the predicted population explosion, Nigeria has retrogressed from being a middle-income country to become the poverty capital of the world ahead of India. Following Joseph Schumpeter's incontrovertible insights as early as 1911, entrepreneurship remains the best-known instrument that could be used to stimulate Nigeria's economy and put the country on a new trajectory of economic growth and prosperity (Schumpeter, 1961; Braunerhjelm, 2010; Orugun & Nafiu, 2014; Ejo-Orusa, 2019a). In particular, given the extremely weak industrial sector that cannot create employment opportunities for the growing army of unemployed youths and young graduates, self-employment is an option of necessity for Nigeria (Sutter, Bruto & Chen, 2019; Birch, 1979) and expectedly, entrepreneurship has become an objective that is widely canvassed by Nigeria's policy makers and economic managers.

But, whereas the need to promote entrepreneurship in Nigeria is as urgent as it is important, the entrepreneurship process is poorly understood and there is unfortunately no integrated framework for such an exercise. We therefore have to deepen our understanding of the entrepreneurship process and open up the idea-spaces so that we can reasonably model tomorrow. One lesson from latest entrepreneurship research is that just as social



science theories are unique to the environment from where they are derived, each entrepreneurial ecosystem is unique to a specific environment and it cannot be universalized and uncritically transferred to another environment. Thus, no entrepreneurial ecosystem can be imported full-blown and neither can one be created *de novo*. Therefore, any good entrepreneurship promotion programme must be anchored on the entrepreneurial ecosystem that underpin the society and by drawing from, and building on, the society's peculiarities and idiosyncrasies and of course good management practice as well as lessons from successful enterprise promotion initiatives from across the world (Ejo-Orusa, 2019b). However, even in the midst of the neglect of entrepreneurship promotion by government(s) in Nigeria, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has consistently remained vibrant. Therefore, the system stands out as the natural foundation for any attempt to kick-start the process of embedding the enterprise culture and for promoting entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

The apprenticeship system is a training and skill development initiative practiced all over the world and it has long been used to prepare workers to gain occupational skills in many countries (Lerman, 2012). The system varies from country-to-country and sometimes from one region to the other even within the same country. However, the common feature is that the system focuses on developing a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession with on-the-job training which is sometimes accompanied with study. In some countries, the apprentice gets some certification or license to practice a particular trade or profession at the end of the training period. The system has immense potential including addressing skill mismatches, wage inequality and high youth unemployment. Every country tailor's its apprenticeship system based on its culture, economic history, the level of economic development, socio-economic institutions and legal environment. The Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is a system developed by the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria but is now practiced in all parts of the country. Although the system is rather informal and given little or no attention by government, it has nevertheless made and is still making significant contributions in entrepreneurship promotion and the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), wealth and job creation, poverty alleviation and economic growth and development of the country at large (Mpi, 2019). There is therefore need to



promote, redevelop and bring the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System to the 21st Century because it has the potential to boost the economy in many ways and it is one tried and tested approach for entrepreneurship development that will create employment opportunities for the rapidly increasing army of youths and young graduates, promote the development of entrepreneurship skills and complement the formal education system for human capital development.

Brief Historical Background of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System

Apprenticeship is the process of learning and skill development through enlistment with a master-craftsman or an experienced business person. The system of the young learning on the job from an experienced Master has its roots in traditional African society when blacksmiths, carvers, farmers, native doctors (traditional healers) and others with specific skills took members of the younger generation (usually close relatives) into their households to give them specialized training over a period of years. According to Olulu and Udeorah (2018), the apprenticeship system that is practiced in Nigeria existed in various forms dating back to centuries. In particular, it was the principal form of education and for going into any occupation or profession before the advent of the colonial administration which introduced Western type education to Nigeria. After the introduction of Western education to Nigeria, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System became the norm for young people who did not have any type of formal education but it progressed to include those who had primary school education but the bar later shifted to include those with secondary education but could not proceed further. However, in the last thirty years, due to the high number of young people graduating from the increasing number of tertiary institutions every year without the availability of employment opportunities, the system has become a veritable platform for the unemployed including young graduates to explore in pursuit of self-employment opportunities. What makes the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System different, unique and vibrant is that at the end of the training, the apprentice is supported to start his or her own business or workshop (Adekola& Ezekiel, 2013). The system is therefore an important first stage of the entrepreneurship process, by far the most entrenched and vibrant entrepreneurship promotion vehicle in Nigeria, a major contributor to the growth and development of micro, small and medium scale enterprises and a big driver for wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction and thus economic growth and



development. This paper therefore reviews the Nwaboi apprenticeship system highlighting the challenges and proposing mechanisms on how the system can be transformed to serve as a useful platform for effective entrepreneurship promotion in Nigeria.

Whilst the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has a very long history, it increased in intensity and went through a paradigm shift after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. According to Alake (2018), the Civil War dislocated the Igbos from other parts of Nigeria to their Eastern Nigeria ancestral homeland which incidentally was the epicenter of the war. At the end of the war in 1970, most of them had lost their investments and businesses; not only were they not able to continue their pre-war position at the forefront of education, public administration, the military, industry or commerce; they found themselves outside the mainstream of all the economic sectors of the Nigerian economy and society. Also, due to lack of capital and near exclusion from the financial sector, they could not benefit from the indigenization policies of the 1970s that transferred ownership of many foreign owned businesses to Nigerians. Being excluded from most of the sectors of the economy and financially handicapped, petty trading became one of the few options open to them to make a living and it became a survival strategy for the Igbo people. They initiated an unwritten rule of 'zero tolerance' for youth and adult idleness and interestingly many of them flourished over time.

Those who were able to restart their lives as traders and craftsmen took in more apprentices at a higher level than before the Nigerian Civil War. The system was mutually beneficial to the business person and to the apprentice. To business people, the motivation was a rational economic decision to use cheap labour for the augmentation of limited resources, while to the young people whose parents did not have the resources to send them to school, apprenticeship offered them sustenance, the opportunity to acquire new usable skills and the hope of becoming self-employed while reducing the financial burden on their families. The system is now an integral and important part of the Igbo culture and they (the Igbos) customized and adapted it to tackle economic challenges as they arise. The system is also robust and self-adapting. For example, as new technologies diffuse into the economy and as entrepreneurs discover new lucrative businesses, they birth apprentices who eventually become full-fledged entrepreneurs. These new entrepreneurs have the tendency of infusing competition and stimulating creativity even if it is merely a



differentiation strategy. A good example of this form of adaptability can be seen in the Nollywood Movie Industry which has grown to become the Third Largest in the World in a relatively short space of time. The same goes for the computer and telephone repair business that was not even known some twenty years ago but has now become a dynamic business arena with many successful entrepreneurs.

A significant proportion of Igbo entrepreneurs today are products of the Nwaboi apprenticeship system and Winifred (2018) quite rightly posits that the Igbos have developed their own system of entrepreneurship. Today, there are many variants of this system or model but they all involve an apprentice working with an experienced individual on some agreed terms to learn skills that will help them build their own businesses. Some entrepreneurship researchers have been advocating for this sort of model which is natural to the Nwaboi apprenticeship system (Kask & Linton, 2013; Linton & Kask, 2017). The huge success recorded over the years popularized and intensified the Nwaboi apprenticeship system in the country and it has become a popular model that is practiced throughout Nigeria and in Africa generally. Alake (2018) posits that the Igbos forged a reputation after the Civil War as savvy business people who rose from the ashes and ruins of the Civil War using the apprenticeship system as the platform to become successful entrepreneurs. It should also be added that success in entrepreneurship has helped the Igbos to be reintegrated into the Nigerian economy and society. Also, the system has created a sustainable and enviable local innovation, mentorship, ideas incubation, hatching, training and investment solutions that are widely accepted as good practice among entrepreneurship educators all over the world.

Quite clearly, some innovative approaches that have become normal in entrepreneurship promotion and education have their roots in the Igbo entrepreneurship culture. For example, Igbo businesses are predominantly involved with buying and selling and most of them operate in clusters and they have long understood the importance of business clustering and have been adopting the approach long before scholars latched on the construct. Using Port Harcourt where the present writers are based as an illustration, there are many business clusters or hubs dominated by the Igbo entrepreneurs in the city. For example, the Ikoku Axis is known for motor and other machinery spare parts; the Garrison and Artillery Axes are known for telephones, computers and related gadgets (sales, repairs



and maintenance); the Ojoto/Ilo-Abuchi Axis is known for sales, repairs and maintenance of electronics and house hold appliances; the Mile One Axis is the centre for printing and sale of printing materials and stationeries; the Mile Three Axis is known for Building Materials, the Mile Four Axis for Furniture while the Okija Axis is known for electrical fittings. There are many other business clusters in Port Harcourt apart from the above. Igbo entrepreneurs are found throughout Nigeria and business clusters have expectedly evolved around them. It is important to note that business clustering which is native to the Igbo entrepreneurship culture has been powerfully advocated for starting an entrepreneurial revolution even in the heartland of big business and capitalism - the United States of America (Isenberg, 2010) and as a smart regional strategy for promoting entrepreneurship (Hölund& Linton, 2018). With limited government regulation and support, these clusters set-up their own regulatory regimes and modes of operations some of which are sometimes inadequate for proper business functioning. For example, with the level of unemployment rising astronomically in Nigeria, the businesses within these clusters cannot provide enough opportunities for the number of people who want to join the apprentice schemes. The result is that we now have many unemployed people who are not technically learning any trade or skill hanging around most business clusters posing as business owners or apprentices and soliciting for business. The false entrepreneurs and apprentices sometimes hike the price of goods, sell fake and defective products and defraud customers; developments that reflect negatively on the apprentices and businesses within the clusters.

Further, Alake (2018) posits that the Igbo **We Work** and Co-creation Hub (**CcHUB**) are the progenitors of the contemporary system of nurturing tech companies in incubation hubs and ideas hatching centres. Essentially, We Work is a hub and ideas hatching centre that gives small businesses and entrepreneurs the opportunity and platform to interact and exchange ideas with others and thus ensure that their dreams of starting their businesses are birthed. We Work helps to build, develop and refine skills and competencies and ensures that business ideas get to the market. It is like an extended brainstorming session. The interrelated Co-creation Hub Nigeria, commonly called or christened **CcHUB**, is a multifunctional, multipurpose organization where engineers, technologists, entrepreneurs and investors interact to synthesize creative ideas, develop unique and new skill-sets and competencies, share creative solutions and build business networks. These innovative



business development approaches are largely informal in nature and not funded by the government or established financial institutions; although very good ideas often attract what may look like venture capital. However, the lack of written rules and legal protection in the form of enforceable contracts or copyright often lead to abuse and hijacking of business by capital providers who are often not different from roadside money lenders or loan-shacks. Nevertheless, the common goal behind these approaches is the promotion of business start-ups and the American journalist cum author bullishly declared that the Nwaboi(Igbo) apprentice system is the largest business incubator platform in the world(Neuwirth, 2018).

Whereas the Igbo business incubator platform predates the Industrial Revolution of the 18th Century and the colonization of Nigeria by Britain, but like many other inventions that originated in Africa, the West has unfortunately claimed ownership of business incubation, ideas hatching hubs and business clustering as its contributions to entrepreneurship development. Expectedly, the failure rate of theNwaboi new business start-ups is very low particularly because when the apprentices complete their training, the Masters set them up in business, often in the same business line where they already have useful networks, and sometimes loyal customers that move their patronage to them. The down side however is that the certainty of becoming an entrepreneur in a predetermined business stifles innovativeness and does not conduce to the creative destruction which is central to Schumpeter's technological entrepreneurship (Ejo-Orusa, 2019a; Ejo-Orusa, 2019b).

The Nwaboi Apprenticeship Model

According to Mpi (2019), this unique form of apprenticeship allows a male or female (depending on the type of business), family or community member to spend time and work with another family or community member or in some cases, not necessarily a family or community member, usually a successful business man (entrepreneur). During this period of time, the apprentice receives mentorship and training from the businessman or craftsman. Alake (2018) contends that as part of the Igbo business culture, the established businessmen (the nurturer) in a town, street or locale has a responsibility to take-in teenagers and young adults (the apprentice) from their homes and give them informal business training and mentorship. For Orugun and Nafiu (2014), the Nwaboi apprenticeship



system is a kind of informal and unstructured training programme scheduled for an agreed period of time which a person undergoes in order to acquire a desirable aspect of entrepreneurship knowledge. It is learning-by-example in its purest form where the apprentice gets raw, real life and practical cut-throat business education; the type and quality of which dollars cannot buy even from the best Business Schools and it is the classical example of the mentor - mentee relationship.

Though these apprentices are often not paid, they are provided accommodation, transportation costs (where necessary), feeding and clothing (ie physiological needs). It takes roughly 3-7 years, depending on the age and academic qualifications of the apprentices, learning capacity and of course the nature of the business, trade or craft. During this period, the apprentice learns the trade of his/her Master and also receives mentorship. At the end of the agreed or stipulated period, the Master has a responsibility to establish the apprentice; either by setting- up a separate but similar business and or providing money or tools to settle the apprentice as the case may be (Winifred, 2018; Onwuka, 2015; Alake, 2018). During the training period, the apprentice develops entrepreneurship skill and learns all the intricacies involved in the business such as supply-chain management, quality control, marketing and dealing with customers, forecasting, human relations, book keeping and accounting, negotiation skills ,inventory control and analysis and opportunity recognition and utilization. There is usually no established curriculum, formal learning procedure or pedagogies and so the apprentice learns from or through observation, imitation, and in some cases, trial and error. Usually, the apprentice learns on the job by direct instruction and is punished for making mistakes (Adekola& Ezekiel, 2013). Therefore, the extent to which the apprentice will learn will be dependent on the capacity and management style of the Master/mentor on the one hand and the learning capacity and drive of the apprentice on the other. The learning, mentoring and settlement models apply to virtually all the micro, small and medium scale enterprises and most sectors of the economy.



TYPES AND SCOPE OF NWABOI APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

There are basically two major types of apprenticeship under the Nwaboi apprenticeship system. They are 'Imu-OruAka' and 'Imu-Ahia'.

- 1. 'Imu-OruAka' (Learning a Craft or Skill):** in this type of apprenticeship, the apprentice is handed over to a master or professional craftsman for mentorship and training over an agreed period of time. The time frame for this type of apprenticeship is between 3- 5 years depending on how fast the apprentice is able to learn the craft or skill.
- 2. 'Imu-Ahia' (Learning a Trade):** this is another type of apprenticeship under the Nwaboi system. In this case, an apprentice is sent to a successful businessman; often a trader. The apprentice undergoes mentorship and training during the agreed period of time. The time frame for this type of apprenticeship is between 3-7 years which is still dependent on how fast the apprentice learns the trade.

In either Imu-Oru Aka or Imu-Ahia, the businessman or craftsman in charge of the apprentice is called the 'Master' (also called 'Oga') or 'Madam' (if a woman).The Oga may decide to collect money as payment for the training and mentorship of the apprentice. Where payment is not made, the apprentice is expected to serve the 'Oga' in different capacities (in most cases including responsibility for domestic chores) while undergoing the apprenticeship. According to Olulu and Udeorah (2018), payment is usually accompanied with some drinks meant for the entertainment of witnesses who are usually relatives, fellow tradesmen or craftsmen within the environment in which the trade or craft is to be learnt. It is important to note that whether payment is made or not, drinks for entertainment of witnesses is mandatory. It is a form of ritual and initiation process for the apprentice. During this process, the apprentice(s) gets to know the 'Ogas' and other apprentices within the environment and in that line of trade or craft. Also, the Master or Madam is expected to mentor and train the apprentices in the particular line of business or craft and also guide them in the development of skill-sets such as planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and decision-making that are essential to run the business effectively. Therefore, when the system is looked at closely, it is noticed that it is envisioned to be a proper entrepreneurship training and management development programme; albeit of an informal nature and limited only by the expertise of the Master and the learning capacity of the apprentice.



Expectedly, the danger is that in areas where the Master is deficient, the apprentice will also acquire some negative entrepreneurship skills which may be difficult to unlearn.

Generally, the Igbo entrepreneur is a person who seeks opportunities to make profit through innovativeness, creativity, customers' satisfaction and efficient utilization of scarce resources by coordinating the use of the factors of production. Thus, he or she is visionary, enthusiastic and result driven. These are not far from the rationale behind their motivation for taking business risks; sometimes in situations where others see chaos and failure. Even in the midst of unfavourable business environment, poor infrastructure and lack of institutional support, these uniquely resilient entrepreneurs of the Igbo genre often manage to find success. Thus, Igbo entrepreneurs truly epitomize the position of Stevenson and Gumbert(1985) that entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity beyond the resources one currently controls. The influence of Igbo entrepreneurs is wide ranging and people throughout Nigeria depend heavily on their initiatives, inventions and high entrepreneurial metabolism for new products and services and indeed improved quality of life and economic wellbeing. But less known is the fact that the Igbo entrepreneur is a teacher, mentor, entrepreneurship promoter, investor in human capital development and a key stakeholder in economic development.

The Igbo entrepreneurs have established dominance of the Nigerian business environment and they are now key players in the West African Sub-Region and beyond. In fact, wherever there is business of buying and selling, they are not left out and they are found today even in far-away China. The businesses of the Igbo entrepreneurs are not only bringing returns on investments, they are also mentoring and training future entrepreneurs as apprentices. Some of the businesses where the apprenticeship system is practiced include:

- i) Transportation and Haulage Business
- ii) Handset and Computer Repairs
- iii) Trading(All kinds of Products)
- iv) Auto-spare Parts Dealership
- v) Car Mechanics, Vulcanizing, Welding
- vi) Repairs and Maintenance of Electrical & Electronic Appliances
- vii) Fashion Design, Tailoring, Hair Dressing & Shoe Making



- viii) Draughts man ship, Building Construction, Electrification, Plumbing
- ix) Carpentry& Furniture Making
- x) Film Making, Photography

From the above, it is observed that the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is very broad in scope and it covers most businesses and all facets of the society. As entrepreneurs enter new lines of business, they birth a coterie of apprentices. Most businesses where you have successful entrepreneurs (even unsuccessful ones) also have apprentices. This organic and mutually reinforcing relationship between the entrepreneur and apprentice translates to what is perhaps the largest and most vibrant entrepreneurship development initiative in the world. This system has helped many young people, particularly those from poor homes who could not afford formal education to acquire useful skills to become self-employed, self-reliant, to create wealth and to contribute meaningfully to the society. It has also been argued by writer such as Olulu and Udeorah (2018) and Onwuka (2015) among others that the system has a wealth redistribution mechanism that ensures that wealth is spread from the rich (the entrepreneurs) to the poor (the apprentices and their families). Given the scope and breathe of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System, and the number of successful entrepreneurs that are alumni of this system, we go further to contend that the Igbo entrepreneurship model is the biggest Corporate Social Responsibility regime in Nigeria and possibly the world.

REGULATION OF THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

The law of contract of apprenticeship in Nigeria is regulated by the Labour Act 2004, Sections 49-53. One major requirement of the Act is that every contract of apprenticeship must be in writing and attested to by an authorized Labour Officer. However, the requirement of a written contract of apprenticeship undoubtedly excludes customary laws and practices. Before the contract can be valid in law, the Authorized Officer must satisfy himself that the consent of the apprentice has not been obtained by fraud, coercion or undue influence or as a result of misrepresentation or mistake. Secondly, that the apprentice has been medically examined and certified by a qualified medical practitioner to be physically and mentally fit to be employed and trained in the employment specified in



the contract. Thirdly, that the parties to the contract have fully understood the terms of the contract before signing it or otherwise indicating consent and that provision has been made in the contract as to the manner in which any remuneration in cash or otherwise due to the apprentice shall be determined and as to the scale of increase in remuneration during the course of apprenticeship. Finally, that provision has been made in the contract for adequate shelter and basic amenities for the apprentice as well as ensuring that the contract is in conformity and not contradictory with other regulations made by the Minister in-charge of Labour.

Under the Nigerian Labour Law, there are two categories of apprentices; first, is the children apprentice between the ages of 12-16 years. This category of children can only be apprenticed to a master by their parents, or in the case of an orphan, by the guardian. The Law Officer shall appoint a fit and proper person to act on his behalf as guardian. The second category of apprentices comprise of young persons of sixteen years and above. This category of apprentices may lawfully apprentice themselves out to a Master. From the provisions of the Labour Act, the minimum age at which a person can enter into apprenticeship is 12 years. This requirement allows for the child to obtain some basic formal education like primary school before entering into an apprenticeship to acquire vocational skills.

The Labour Act also sets a limit at the maximum length of apprenticeship which is put at five years, without any possibility for a renewal or an extension. At the end of the five years, the contract of apprenticeship automatically lapses irrespective of whether or not the apprentice has finished learning the trade or craft. Where a dispute arises between the parties, a Magistrate Court is vested with the jurisdiction to hear and determine any question arising out of the apprenticeship contract. The Labour Law (2004) confers on the Labour Minister the right to provide for other matters concerning apprenticeship by way of subsidiary legislations and these include; the form of contracts of apprenticeship, the terms and conditions upon which such contracts may be lawfully entered into and the duties and obligations of apprentices and their masters. The Minister may determine the number of apprentices who may be apprenticed to an employer during a specified period as well as the technical and other qualifications of employers that entitle them to train apprentices.



The Labour Minister can also legislate on how examinations of apprentices are to be held at the end of the apprenticeship period and determine the certificate to be awarded based on the results. It is an offence under the Nigerian Labour Law to remove or attempt to remove an apprentice over the age of 12 years and under the age of 16 years from Nigeria without the authorization of the Minister in writing. Such offender(s) shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding N500 or imprisonment for period not exceeding one year, or both. It is also an offence if a person has employed an apprentice for more than six months on a contract which has not been attested or attempts to induce any apprentice to quite the service of his employer. Such offender shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction shall be liable to a fine not exceeding N200 or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, or both. Although there is a Law regulating the practice of apprenticeship in Nigeria, written apprenticeship contract is still the exception rather than the rule(Olulu&Udeorah, 2018). Also, little or no effort is made on implementation or enforcement and there is no form of awareness to the relevant parties involved in the apprenticeship system as most of these entrepreneurs and the apprentices are either uneducated and part of the informal economy. Again, most of the apprenticeship contracts are made under customary laws and practices which are outside the Nigerian Labour Law and as such the stipulated penalties for infringing sections of the Law do not apply or are too lenient to serve as a deterrent.

False Start at Reinventing the Apprenticeship System: The NDE Initiative

In response to the shrinkage of the manufacturing sector following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1980s and the implosion in the rate of youth and graduate unemployment that ensued, the government made what could be called the first concerted effort to address the apprenticeship system. The Ibrahim Babangida led Military administration on the 26th March, 1986, set up the Chukwumah Committee to look into the problems of growing graduate unemployment. Based on the recommendations of the Committee, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established on 22nd November, 1986, and formally launched on 30th January, 1987. However, the law that established the NDE initiative is Decree No. 29 of 1989 which was replaced with Act CAP 250 of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.



The core of objective of the National Directorate of Employment initiative was to drive job creation programmes that will promote attitudinal change, employment generation, poverty reduction and wealth creation. Broadly stated, the initiative was set up with the aim of assisting youths; particularly young graduates to acquire marketable skills with a view to ensuring that they become self-employed (Ikande, 2018). The Directorate is empowered to operate as an employment creation agency statutorily charged with the following mandate:

- i) To assist Nigerian youths in acquiring marketable skills with a view to ensuring that they are gainfully employed.
- ii) To design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment and to articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials.
- iii) To promote self-reliance among the youths by assisting and encouraging them to set up cottage industries.
- iv) To stimulate the economy by providing employment opportunities for Nigerian youths through training and resettlement.

The initiative was launched in January 1987 with a lot of fanfare in all the States of the federation with a focus on Vocational Skills Development, Entrepreneurship Development, Agricultural Skills Training and Public Works Programme. Some specific programmes put in place to achieve the above objectives are:

- 1. Waste to Wealth Programme:** this initiative was designed to encourage the conversion of hitherto neglected raw materials into useful and marketable products. Apart from creating employment opportunities for those involved, this scheme aimed to help in developing a culture of innovativeness and self-reliance in resource use, thereby curtailing wastage and to reduce the importation of items that can be produced or sourced locally.
- 2. National Open Apprenticeship Scheme:** this was aimed at providing unemployed youths with basic skills that are needed in the economy by attaching registered youths as apprentices and interns to companies, ministries, agencies, and professional craftsmen and women with adequate training facilities.



- 3. School on Wheels Scheme:** the directorate recognized that there are few organizations in the rural communities capable of offering apprenticeship training to the youths and therefore the danger of encouraging urban migration. School on wheels involves taking fully equipped mobile vocational training facilities in specially designed trucks to rural areas to train the youths on specific vocations relevant to them and the development of their communities.

The NDE initiative has been in operation for over thirty years now and a lot of progress has been recorded (Anyebe, 2016). But unfortunately, like many government initiatives in Nigeria that suffer from inconsistency and short life cycle, most of the programmes put in place as part of the NDE initiative are now either not functional or on the verge of becoming moribund. In some cases, the unsustainability can be attributed to the tendency of new political regimes abandoning programmes that are initiated by preceding administrations and replacing them with their own policies, programmes and schemes even when these provide less social or economic benefits.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE NWABOI APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

The challenges facing the apprenticeship system(s) in Nigeria are numerous (Nwanoruo, 2004; Fajobi, Olatujoye, Amusa & Adedoyin, 2017) but some of those that relate directly to the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System include the following:

- 1. Non-Settlement of Apprentices:** Dishonesty on the part of the Master or the apprentice has tended to dent the good intentions of the Nwaboi apprenticeship system. It has been observed that towards the expiration of the agreed apprenticeship period in some cases that Masters accuse the apprentices of frivolous crimes and send them away just to avoid their contractual obligations and thus deprive them of the settlement entitlements. Similarly, due the fears of this scenario and sometimes due to inherent dishonesty, apprentices also run away with their Master's money or properties. It has been contended that this type of mistrust is an obstacle to the future and survival of the system (Olulu & Udeorah, 2018).
- 2. Abuse of Apprentices:** The traditional apprenticeship system in Nigeria involves hardship, discipline and loyalty especially on the part of the apprentice (Adekola &



Ezekiel, 2013). This is the case particularly where payment is not made by the apprentice. The apprentice is therefore expected to serve the Master in different capacities in domestic duties as a 'houseboy' which is in fact the origin of the name 'Nwaboi'. These apprentices are used as domestic and house helps and are expected to perform their duties at their places of training as well. This dual responsibility can be very stressful for the apprentices.

3. **Child Labour/ Abuse:** In most cases, the system is seen as a practice for the poor and the less privileged who cannot afford formal education. Hence, underage children whose parents cannot afford formal education are sent or given out as apprentices to either learn trade or craft in order to fend for themselves even against the laws of Nigeria.
4. **Inadequate Legal Framework to Guide the System:** This is possibly the most critical challenge of the Nwaboi apprenticeship system. Although the Contract of Apprenticeship in Nigeria is regulated by the Labour Act 2004, it has been contended that the system is a far cry from what is obtainable in other countries in terms of mode of operation, regulation, rewards, structure and implementation. In fact, the general view is that the Nigerian Labour Act that incorporates the rules and regulations of the apprenticeship scheme is quite inadequate and does not encourage the development of skills and craftsmanship among the youths and young graduates. Further, no programme have been put in place to promote the awareness of Law Act to the populace, Masters and the apprentices neither are there mechanisms to sanctions those whose actions contravene the letters of the Act (Oluluand Udeorah (2018). The provisions of the Labour Act to regulate apprenticeship in Nigeria are at best merely good intentions and consequently, the laid down rules are never adhered to or implemented. Therefore, order and formalization which the Labour Act was trying to create was a mere pretense and Nigeria still operates an unorganized, unregulated and broadly informal apprenticeship system without a defined vocational profile or framework.
5. **An Informal Apprenticeship System in an Informal Sector:** Most of the businesses that take-in the apprentices are part of the informal economy and this makes it difficult to



bring them under the ambit of the laws governing the apprenticeship scheme in Nigeria and for government to introduce new initiatives and for the them to raise capital.

6. **Lack of Education during the Training Period:** Apprenticeship in Nigeria is often misconstrued as a programme for young people who have no opportunity of going to school or those who can only grasp practical skills and not theory. It is therefore instructive to note that most of the apprentices start the programme with very limited education and very often they complete their training without formal education and as illiterates (Olulu&Udeorah, 2018). The inability to read and write, coupled with technological illiteracy is unacceptable in the technology driven world of the 21st Century and this is what makes it very difficult for many entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and to become major players nationally and internationally.

Toward a Framework for Reinventing the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System

From the above *tour de horizon* of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System, it is safe to conclude that the system has the potentials to increase the entrepreneurial metabolism in the country, equip a large pool of entrepreneurs to establish micro, small and medium enterprises and thus significantly contribute to employment and wealth creation, poverty reduction and of course present a clear basis for tackling the challenges of insecurity. Given the importance of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System, conscious steps should be taken to formalize, reposition and make it more effective and mainstream. Further, given the fact that the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is an integral part of entrepreneurship process and indeed the first step in the entrepreneurship journey for many apprentices, all the factors within the Nigerian entrepreneurship ecosystem are critical for embedding the enterprise culture, stimulating new venture creation and they are consequently fundamental for improving the system. Some specific recommendations will include:

1. Reinventing the Nigerian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Unlike the apprenticeship system in other parts of the World that prepare people for employment and the professions, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is unique in the sense that people are prepared to become entrepreneurs. Nwaboi apprenticeship is therefore the first step in the entrepreneurship journey and tackling the challenges flowing from the entrepreneurial ecosystem is the first step for transforming the apprenticeship system and



for entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. However, we obviously cannot fully address the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem in the limited space available but we have to underline the point that most of the dimensions of the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem such as national culture, economic development policies, legal system and property rights, physical, scientific and technological infrastructure, enterprise support networks, financial institutions, science and technology policy, local machinery and equipment production and education and human capital development are highly anti-industry, stifle new venture creation and are ineffective for embedding the enterprise culture. Therefore, the starting point for transforming the apprenticeship system is the realignment, refocusing, reframing and reinvention of the dimensions of the entrepreneurship ecosystem to ensure that weaknesses are turned to strengths and threats to opportunities (Ejo-Orusa, 2019b).

2. Education and Training: Focusing on the Entrepreneurship Triangle

Many years ago, there used to be the debate on whether entrepreneurs are born or made. Whilst we concede that there are natural born entrepreneurs, there is ample evidence that confirm that entrepreneurship is not mysterious and that it has nothing to do with genes. It is quite clearly a discipline that can be learned (Drucker, 1986; Klein & Bullock, 2006) and entrepreneurship education has grown into a big industry and a vibrant research domain (Yatu, Bell & Loon, 2018; Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2005). The new approach is due to the fact that the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution such as computers, the internet, 3-D Printing, nano technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and many others have emerged as a true example of Schumpeter's creative disruption and they are significantly impacting on how we live, work, do businesses and learn and this process is projected to accelerate (Ejo-Orusa, 2014; Ejo-Orusa, 2019a). Therefore, the skill-sets that worked before are ineffective today and they will be more so in the Fifth Techno-economic Paradigm which is already unfolding. Expectedly, the apprentices of today require different entrepreneurship skills than what made their Masters to be successful and new forms of learning starting from primary to tertiary institutions are important for success. Also, technological infrastructure such R & D establishments, specialist research centres and engineering consultants are essential for the development of a technical manpower base; a prerequisite for entrepreneurship development. Unfortunately, these are deficient in Nigeria. It is absolutely



critical that apprenticeship training should help the trainees to master the technologies of today and to develop the individual's mindset, behavior, skills and capabilities that can be applied to create value in a range of contexts, particularly in new venture start-ups. This point is perhaps more critical for apprentices who are preparing to start their entrepreneurship journey. One major problem with the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is the low educational entry level for joining the scheme and lack of education, formal training and certification within the system. The problem is accentuated by the fact that most of the apprentices start the programme at a very young age and have limited education while the entrepreneurs (Masters) who are supposed to train and mentor them are also often poorly educated. We therefore agree with Mpi (2019) that the Nwaboi apprenticeship system should be fused into the educational system as practiced in Germany, Switzerland and many other countries and that certificates or licenses should be issued by authorized bodies at the end of the apprenticeship and the successful completion of some tests and examinations to remedy the common educational deficiencies among the apprentices. Also, Nigerian universities and technical colleges have to adopt innovative approaches that are now the norm in many parts of the World for the training of apprentices and entrepreneurs (Fellinhofer, 2019; Linton & Kinton, 2019; Yatu, Bell & Loon, 2018).

Quite clearly, the business environment is becoming highly competitive, knowledge intensive and technology driven and good entrepreneurship education and formal training will obviously help to equip the apprentice of today to become superior business people than their Masters and to compete effectively in the globalized business environment. In fact, the entrepreneurs under whom the apprentices learn their craft or trade will equally benefit from education and training. Good education will not only help them to become more professional and to improve their business performance, it will equip them to become more effective as trainers and to add value to the apprentices under their mentorship. Many apprentices come from traditional village backgrounds and it is expected that from the time they join the system to the period they are ready to become entrepreneurs, that they would have undergone a measure of transformation. Not only should continuous learning be made an integral part of the apprenticeship process, there should be conscious effort to develop the three-entrepreneurship skill-sets -**technical, management and entrepreneurship**- (Kutzhanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein, 2009; Kelley, Bosma & Amoros, 2010)



which constitute the entrepreneurship triangle (Ejo-Orusa, 2019b). The entrepreneurship skill-sets are presented in table 1.1 below.

As a word of caution, it must be noted that the list is not exhaustive but designed to serve as an illustrative example of the competences expected of an entrepreneur in the 21st Century. To promote the development of the skill-sets, Entrepreneurship Development and Skills Acquisition Centres should be established to complement the technical colleges, universities and specialist entrepreneurship development centres.

Table 1.1: Entrepreneurship Skill-Sets

<u>Technical Skills</u>	<u>Management Skills</u>	<u>Entrepreneurship Skills</u>
Skills specific to the Business/Trade/Industry	Planning	Innovation Capacity
Engineering Capability	Project Mgt.	Creativity
Design/Manufacturing	HRM/Motivation	Personal Maturity
ICT & Tech. Know-How	Marketing/Selling	Ability to Take Risk
Environmental Alertness	Decision Making	Intuitive Decisions
Communication	Finance	Inner Discipline
Product Knowledge	Budgetary Control	Change-Orientation
R & D	IT	Strategic Thinking
	TQM	Passion/Persistence

i) Development of Technical Skills

The Nwaboi Apprenticeship System has two distinct components - 'Imu-Oru Aka' (learning a craft or skill) and 'Imu-Ahia' (learning to trade). But whereas, Imu-Oru Aka has an older history, Imu-Ahia has become the dominant type of the Igbo entrepreneurship and indeed of apprenticeship. This is a reflection of the evolution of the Nigerian economy where production is rapidly going out of fashion while buying and selling has grown to become the dominant economic activity with the result that we now have skill shortages in many areas. Greater emphasis is therefore required to develop technical skills that are critical for the production of goods and services at the quality demanded by customers. As part of



government effort to create a positive entrepreneurial ecosystem, educational institutions should provide opportunities within the formal curriculum for practical experience in technical, engineering and IT studies. Also, entrepreneurship and skills acquisition programmes targeted particularly at the youths and young graduates should be established to address the needs of various businesses, skill shortages and areas where the society has comparative advantage. It is expected that youths and young graduates who are undergoing apprenticeship programmes and indeed entrepreneurs generally should have the opportunity to acquire ICT and other technical skills which are critical for the efficient and effective functioning of businesses. Not only are the apprentices expected to obtain technical skills, the learning process should continue even when they have become fully fledged entrepreneurs to ensure that they continuously meet the ever-changing technical needs of the business environment. Even the apprentices that are 'learning to trade' should be trained to develop good knowledge of the products and services in their markets.

Perhaps more importantly, due to the concentration of entrepreneurs in buying and selling, and the near total neglect of production, the rate of unemployment is growing astronomically in the midst of skill shortages. This is a worrisome development. For example, there are significant skill shortages in areas such as draughts man ship, bricklaying, masonry works, tiling, painting, roofing, plumbing, carpentry and furniture making to mention only but a few in the building construction industry. The situation is the same in all sectors of the economy where craftsmen skilled artisans are needed. The resultant effect is that better trained craftsmen from the West African Sub-Region have come in large numbers to fill the gap (Ejo-Orusa, 2019b). This development is beyond logic because with Nigeria as the most populous country in the Sub-region, the expected flow and pattern of migration would have been in the opposite direction. Worryingly, but expectedly, the master-craftsmen and top-notch technicians who have the expertise to train and mentor tomorrow's skilled craftsmen and technicians are also fast becoming endangered species. It has to be noted that the availability of skilled craftsmen in the countries of the West African Sub-Region and their influx into Nigeria is not an accident. It is precisely because the apprenticeship training programmes in these countries are better organized, professional and more effective relative to Nigeria. Therefore, apprenticeship initiatives focusing on intensive development of technical skills with a slant on skill shortages and mismatches and



in areas where the economy has comparative advantage and or the potential to grow will help to promote new venture creation opportunities and to reduce growing unemployment.

ii) Development of Management Skills

The quality of management is one critical factor that separates successful organizations and those that are laggards and management skills are very important for the entrepreneur and for business success generally. To appreciate the importance of management skill, it should be understood that management is the effective utilization and application of limited resources (people, time, money, materials, machinery and equipment, information etc) for the achievement of defined business goals. Therefore, no matter how brilliant a business concept may be, the venture will have difficulty to grow and flourish unless resources are efficiently and effectively managed. Entrepreneurs should therefore be trained to gain a minimum degree of competence in the functional areas of management as well as in decision making, total quality management, business planning, IT, budgetary control and book keeping. The educational establishments like the universities and technical colleges should play a key role in this direction and they should also have programmes to promote literacy in general and technological literacy in particular.

iii) Development of Entrepreneurship Skills

New approaches are required for entrepreneurship education today and the challenge facing the apprentices is not just how to learn the positive entrepreneurship skills but how to 'un-learn' the negative ones they may have internalized from poorly educated Masters that actually stifle entrepreneurship. Interestingly, some entrepreneurship researchers and educators have argued for a shift from the traditional educational approach to an alternative 'appropriate' model (Gibb, 2010; O'Hara, 2011; Henry, Hill & Leitch 2003). Entrepreneurship researchers such as Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski&Earley, (2010) and McGrath & MacMillan (2006) have gone further to identify some common areas of emphasis in contemporary entrepreneurship education which has been summarized thus: "This model advocates for emphasis on behavioural attributes like capacity for creativity and innovation; personal maturity which is exemplified by self-awareness, accountability, emotional intelligence, ways of thinking, communicating, organizing, seeing, doing things and learning; the effectuation process and the entrepreneurial mindsets, cognitive adaptability; strategic thinking and management of change; scenario planning and intuitive



decision making; dealing with uncertainty and complexity; network management and learning-by-doing and re-doing” (Ejo-Orusa, 2019b). Given the qualitative, multidimensional and socio-psychological nature of the issues, it is argued that effective entrepreneurship educators should include psychologists, particularly cognition experts and successful entrepreneurs who can provide real life examples of successes and mistakes. Further, the universities, technical colleges and entrepreneurship and skills acquisition centres should adapt their learning environments, teaching methods and pedagogies to these innovative approaches that are the norm in many parts of the World (Armstrong, 2016; Linton & Kinton, 2019; Fellinhofer, K. 2019; Yatu, Bell, Robin & Loon, 2018).

3. Other Limitations from the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Most new venture initiatives require the design and production of new machines, equipment, techniques etc. Unfortunately, the capital goods sector (machine tools and machine building industries) that will design and produce these essential inputs is broadly absent in Nigeria. Therefore, these have to be imported with serious consequences for foreign exchange, delays and mistakes. This is a very serious limiting factor for new venture creation which must be attended to as a matter of urgency. The promotion of local machinery and equipment production is therefore critical for enterprise promotion broadly construed to include the apprenticeship system. Further, poor infrastructure- electricity and the transportation system - is legendary in Nigeria and there a dearth of proactive and well-resourced financial institutions that can provide venture capital for new innovative ideas that have potential for success and that can significantly impact on the economy. Addressing these limitations is critical for entrepreneurship promotion in general and the apprenticeship system in particular. Also, the industrial policy which is hinged on import substitution and tariff regime is stifling innovation, entrepreneurship and new venture creation. A move to export promotion will be a more rewarding option.

4. Rebuilding the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System from Within

Although the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is now practiced all over Nigeria, South Eastern Nigeria is its indisputable birthplace. The system has helped to promote the entrepreneurial metabolism of the Igbos but a lot can still be achieved if the States and local governments of the South Eastern States and of course other states where you have high concentration of



Igbo business clusters play the leading role in promoting the system for others to emulate. Some of the steps that can be taken will include:

Legislation: The governments of the South East States where the 'Nwaboi' system has its root and corporate history should make legislations to formalize the apprenticeship system. Such legislations should draw from the Nigerian Labour Law but designed to comprehensively address the limitations inherent in the current law. For example, the system should clearly specify the minimum age and qualification for an apprentice and secondary school certificate could be made to be a minimum entry level qualification. Legislation should be used to integrate the system with educational system and a body or agency should be established to monitor, regulate and administer certification for the apprenticeship system. Also, the penalty for contravening the law should be pitched at a level where it can serve as a deterrent.

Entrepreneurship Promotion Infrastructure: The Nwaboi Apprenticeship System should be integrated with the Enterprise Support Networks. Essentially, States and local governments should establish well-resourced entrepreneurship development and skill acquisition centres near the hubs where the entrepreneurs ply their trades and crafts.

Equity and Share Ownership: Whilst the common model of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System which is to grow entrepreneurs is a novel idea and should be encouraged, the system should be redesigned to incorporate lessons from other business environments. For example, the system whereby apprentices are established all the time creates a big financial burden on the entrepreneurs and makes it difficult for them to accumulate resources and to grow their businesses. Also, not only is the financial burden real, the exit of quality apprentices sometimes comes with the erosion of business networks and customer base and these are some of the reasons why most of the indigenous businesses perpetually remain small. Modalities could be established for entrepreneurs to retain apprentices as co-owners on the expiration of their training with share ownership options as against starting them in new businesses.



5. Other Measures: NDE and the Adoption of Good Management Practices

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) initiative remains the best well thought-out entrepreneurship promotion and apprenticeship initiative in Nigeria. The NDE initiative has some positive features and it has to be modified, restructured and redeveloped to serve as the key building block for crafting an apprenticeship regime in Nigeria that is suited for the 21st Century. In particular, it should be noted that some initiatives associated with NDE or designed to create employment and to reduce poverty such as NAPEP, PAP, SURE-P and YOUWIN produce very short term gains only because they do not focus on the skill shortages and mismatches in the economy and they therefore fail to empower the beneficiaries with economically useful, sustainable and marketable skill-sets and competencies. Secondly, one of the most heated issues in current development debates relates to the role played by multinational corporations (MNCs) in economic development (Rugraff & Hansen 2011). Multinational corporations invest a lot in research and development and they are carriers of modern technology and management techniques (Zelle, 2014; Glass & Saggi, 2002; Hoekman, Maskus & Saggi, 2004). However, issues of inappropriateness and technological dependence surround them. But, despite the controversy on the role of MNCs in the development of Third World countries, particularly the fact that they have become a sort of 'rent-a-villain' responsible for underdevelopment in its various ramifications in many countries, a lot of lessons can still be drawn from their operations and practices towards reinventing the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System and entrepreneurship development. Indigenous entrepreneurs in engineering and other technological fields have to copy the MNCs and begin to invest more on research and development as well as some of their good management practices.

Further, MNCs have helped many LDCs to domesticate engineering and ICT skills, repairs of handsets and other technological hardware and even basic applications used for petty cash accounting and sales are all products of multinational corporations (Akpanabia, 2013). Sometimes, multinationals corporations also train people from host communities in skills acquisitions as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the host countries while others acquire useful technical skills through working with multinational corporations. These skills can be transferred to others using the Nwaboi apprenticeship system. Another lesson



drawn from the multinational corporations is economic interdependence and networking and local businesses can learn from them. The multinational corporations can also help to improve the Nwaboi Apprenticeship system and entrepreneurship generally in the following ways:

- i. **Raising Funds for Investment:** shortage of investment capital is a major challenge limiting new venture creation all over the world. The problem is real for entrepreneurs generally but particularly pronounced for apprentices who may have joined the scheme on the understanding that they will be helped to become entrepreneurs on completion of their apprenticeship. Even when settlement is an option, it is not uncommon for the Masters to default in their obligations to settle the apprentices due to poor business performance and financial difficulties. In such situations, the apprentices either stay much longer with their Masters, source for funds on their own to start their new businesses or go into the employment market without any marketable certification. This problem could be reduced if businesses that have apprentices are made to contribute to a fund which they can draw from to grow their businesses and to settle apprentices when they complete their training. Multinational corporations (MNCs) can also partner with government agencies to raise funds from which grants and or loans can be given to apprentices to start their new ventures on completion of their training. This could be designed as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of MNCs and it will encourage more entrepreneurs to take in apprentices and also motivate quality youths and young graduates to join apprenticeship programmes.
- ii. **Internship:** the 'Nwaboi' system is very vast; covering most areas of the economy; from the production of goods to the delivery of services. One problem faced by entrepreneurs in Nigeria is lack of exposure and poor understanding of better ways of doing things. Therefore, some MNCs and big local companies that have the capacity to promote human capital develop should be encouraged to take quality apprentices as interns. The exposure of apprentices to the formal sector and better run organizations will help them to become better managers and to run their businesses efficiently and effectively when they become entrepreneurs.
- iii. **Establishment of Modern Skills Acquisition Centers:** although some of the multinational have established modern skills acquisition centers in their host communities, this can



be expanded to cover the larger society. They also have the capacity, skills and funds to establish the apprentices after acquiring the needed skills. If multinational corporations set up or are associated with entrepreneurship and skills acquisition centers, there will be an influx of youths and young graduates willing to join such schemes because people know that they have the technical capacity to provide them with first class training and the financial wherewithal to help them to establish their new ventures.

- iv. **Transfer of Technology:** multinational corporations as carriers of technologies can also partner with local entrepreneurs and supply them with more appropriate tools and techniques for their businesses and for the training of the apprentices.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nigeria is challenged with high rate of youth and graduate unemployment, extreme poverty, weak industrial base and high level of insecurity and overt emphasis on the oil sector. Increased rate of new venture creation and greater entrepreneurial metabolism are critical for tackling these challenges. First, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is an integral part of the Nigerian entrepreneurship ecosystem and all the dimensions that are impacting negatively on entrepreneurship development including innovation and new venture creation have to be realigned, refocused, reframed and reinvented as part of Nigeria's economic development agenda. Secondly, the Nwaboi Apprenticeship System is an innovative entrepreneurship promotion vehicle and the challenges facing the system should be aggressively pursued with a view to formalizing, promoting, strengthening and integrating it with the national entrepreneurship and innovation system. In this regard, legislations building on the Nigerian Labour Law and the NDE scheme; particularly by the governments of the Eastern States of Nigeria should be the natural starting point. In particular, entrepreneurship and skills development centres should be established across the country to complement the work done by the universities and technical colleges to ensure that education and training is built into the entrepreneurship system not only to promote literacy among the apprentices and the entrepreneurs but also to help in the development of 'technological literacy' in general and the development of the skill-sets embodied in the entrepreneurship triangle - technical, management and entrepreneurship skills- in particular.



Thirdly, We Work and Co-creation Hubs should be formalized and supported as major drivers for enterprise promotion. They should be incorporated with the bigger entrepreneurship development centres and new venture initiatives that have passed through them could be adjudged to have satisfied the viability test; a minimum requirement to attract support (financial, technical etc) by government agencies and financial institutions. Also, multinational corporations as carriers of technology, management skills and capital should be encouraged to promote the apprenticeship system by providing internship opportunities to the apprentices and to champion the establishment of entrepreneurship development and skills acquisition centres with grants and technical personnel as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. Further, local businesses should be encouraged to learn from the operations and practices of MNCs and from better run and successful indigenous organizations. For example, policies such as tax rebates could be used to incentivize indigenous organizations to invest more intensively in research and development activities to solve problems facing local businesses, to promote innovation in the economy and to build indigenous technological capability. Finally, the present study is obviously exploratory and more research is therefore needed to deepen understanding of the Nwaboi Apprenticeship system, new venture creation process in Nigeria and the Nigerian entrepreneurship ecosystem and to further develop and refine some of the recommendations made in this study.

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