

## ENHANCING AWARENESS OF PRODUCTION POTENTIALS AND BUILDING ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE IN NIGERIA THROUGH COUNSELLING

By

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### Abstract

The development of Nigeria's economy is heavily reliant on optimizing its production potentials, yet many citizens remain unaware of the resources and opportunities available to them. This paper explores the role of counseling in enhancing awareness of these production potentials and fostering economic independence in Nigeria. Through targeted counseling interventions, individuals can be educated about local resources, entrepreneurial opportunities and sustainable business practices that align with the country's economic goals. The study examines the impact of counseling on individuals' ability to identify and utilize production potentials, thereby contributing to economic self-sufficiency and national development. It further suggests that by integrating counseling into economic development strategies, Nigeria can empower its citizens to harness their potentials, reduce dependency and achieve a more resilient economy.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Production potentials, Build, Economic independence, Counselling.

### Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is endowed with vast natural resources and youthful population, yet the country faces significant challenges in achieving economic independence. Despite the potential for growth across various sectors, including agriculture, mining, manufacturing and technology, many Nigerians remain unaware of how to fully harness these resources. Economic independence, which is critical for sustainable development, hinges on the

ability of individuals and communities to recognize and capitalize on these potentials. However, this requires not just awareness but also strategic guidance and support, which counseling can effectively provide.

Counseling, traditionally associated with personal and psychological support, has evolved to include vocational, financial and entrepreneurial guidance. This expanded role of counseling is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where many citizens struggle with unemployment, underemployment and lack of access to economic opportunities. Studies have shown that counseling can play a crucial role in educating individuals about available resources, enhancing their skills and empowering them to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. For instance, counseling has been identified as a key factor in improving financial literacy and promoting small business development, which are essential components of economic independence (Casey, 2021; Mutiat & Adam, 2021).

The Nigerian government's policies such as the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) have highlighted the importance of delivering the economy and improving human capital. However, these policies often overlook the role of counseling in achieving these goals. Integrating counseling into national economic development strategies could significantly boost the country's efforts to reduce poverty, unemployment and economic dependency. As noted by recent research, counseling services can bridge the gap between potential and actual economic productivity by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in various industries (Balogun, 2022).

This article explores how counseling can enhance awareness of Nigeria's production potentials and contribute to building economic independence. It examines the current state of Nigeria's key economic sectors, the challenges hindering their growth and the potential impact of counseling interventions. By analyzing successful case studies and offering strategic recommendations, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how counseling can serve as a catalyst for economic empowerment in Nigeria.

### **Understanding Nigeria's production potentials: Overview of key sectors with high production potentials.**

Nigeria, endowed with abundant natural and human resources, has several key sectors with immense production potentials that could drive the country's economic growth and development. These sectors, if fully harnessed, can significantly contribute to job creation, poverty alleviation and overall economic independence. The following are the primary sectors with high production potentials in Nigeria:

- i. **Agriculture:** Agriculture remains the backbone of Nigeria's economy, employing about 70 percent of the country's workforce and contributing approximately 24 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as of 2023 (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2024). With Nigeria's diverse agro-ecological zones, the country has the potential to produce a wide range of crops, including cassava, yam, rice, maize and cocoa. The sector also includes significant potential in livestock, fisheries and poultry. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and low levels of mechanization have hindered the full realization of this potential. Recent advancements, including the adoption of improved farming techniques and government initiatives like the Agriculture Promotion Policy (APP), have started to address these issues, offering a pathway to enhanced productivity (Adenekan et al, 2020; Ndibe, 2022).
- ii. **Mining and natural resources:** Nigeria is rich in mineral resources including crude oil, natural gas, and limestone, coal, gold and tin. The mining sector has been identified as a key area for diversification away from oil dependency. While oil and gas have traditionally dominated Nigeria's economy, contributing around 90 percent of export earnings, the non-oil mining sector remains largely underdeveloped. Efforts to revitalize this sector, such as the Solid Minerals Development Fund (SMDF) and the Roadmap for the Mining Industry, have aimed to attract investment and enhance exploration activities. If these efforts are sustained, the mining sector could emerge as a significant driver of economic growth (Osayande, 2024; Olufemi-White, 2023; Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), 2020).
- iii. **Manufacturing and industry:** Nigeria's manufacturing sector has shown considerable potential, particularly in the areas of agro-processing, textiles, cement production and consumer goods manufacturing. The sector has benefited from initiatives such as the Economic Sustainable Plan (ESP), which encourages local production and import substitution. However, the sector faces challenges like inadequate power supply, infrastructure deficits and a challenging business environment. Addressing these bottlenecks could unlock significant production capacity, leading to increased industrial output and job creation. The potential for the manufacturing sector to contribute to economic diversification and reduce reliance on imports remains substantial (Adesina, 2021).
- iv. **Technology and innovation:** The technology sector, particularly in fintech, e-commerce and digital services, has rapidly become one of Nigeria's most promising areas for economic growth. The sector has attracted significant investment, particularly in global recognition. The rise of digital innovation hubs, tech incubators and increased internet

penetration has created new opportunities for economic participation. This sector's potential is further underscored by the increasing adoption of digital financial services, which has improved financial inclusion and created new business models. The technology sector represents a critical frontier for future growth, with the potential to drive innovation across other sectors of the economy (Adaramola & Adeyeye, 2023; sende et al, 2024).

### **Current challenges in maximizing production potentials**

Nigeria faces several challenges in maximizing its production potential, particularly in agriculture, mining and other sectors. These challenges can be categorized into three primary areas which are (Gavrilova, 2021; Nwogwugwu et al, 2023):

- a. Lack of awareness and education: A significant portion of the Nigerian workforce lacks the necessary skills and education to maximize productivity, particularly in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing. Many farmers, for instance, are not equipped with modern farming techniques or the knowledge needed to use advanced technologies. This limits their ability to increase crop yields or improve product quality, which in turn reduces overall productivity (FAO, 2024; Noba Africa, 2024).
- b. Inadequate infrastructure and resources: Nigeria's infrastructure is insufficient to support high levels of production, particularly in rural areas. Poor road networks, unreliable electricity and inadequate access to water and modern farming equipment are major obstacles. For example, frequent power outages increase the cost of production for businesses, making it difficult for them to compete globally. The lack of sufficient storage facilities also leads to significant post-harvest losses in the agricultural sector (Osugwu, 2020; Adeniyi et al, 2021; Eke et al, 2023).
- c. Policy and regulatory barriers: While the Nigerian government has introduced various policies aimed at improving the business environment, inconsistencies and inefficiencies in policy implementation continue to pose challenges. Regulatory bottlenecks such as delays in obtaining necessary permits and navigating complex bureaucratic processes hinder business operations. Additionally, the enforcement of new policies like those in the finance and energy sectors, often lacks the necessary public sensitization, which can destabilize businesses (Adegboyo et al, 2021; Karkare et al, 2022).

### **The role of counseling in enhancing awareness**

In the economic context, counseling refers to the process of providing individuals or groups with expert advice, guidance and support to help them make informed decisions that can enhance their economic well-being. Counselling in this context goes beyond traditional psychological support

and includes practical, actionable advice on career choices, financial management and entrepreneurial endeavours. It aims to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve their economic status, thus contributing to overall economic development (Baji & Muhammad, 2021; Perveen & Akhtar, 2023; Jeleel-Ojuade, 2024). Some types of counseling that are relevant to economic empowerment are:

1. Career and vocational counseling: This form of counseling is crucial in helping individuals to align their skills, interests and abilities with potential career paths. It is especially important in developing economies like Nigeria, where unemployment and underemployment are significant issues. By guiding individuals in making informed career choices and providing training and skill development opportunities, vocational counseling can enhance employability and productivity. This type of counseling also helps in addressing skill gaps, thereby boosting overall economic productivity (Thomas, 2020).
2. Financial counseling: Financial counseling involves providing individuals with guidance on managing their finances effectively. This includes advice on budgeting, savings as well as investing and debt management. Financial literacy is often low in developing economies, which can lead to poor financial decisions and economic instability at the individual level. Financial counseling therefore helps individuals to manage their resources better, avoid debt traps and build wealth over time. By empowering people with financial knowledge, this type of counseling can contribute to greater economic stability and growth (Chadha, 2023; Venz & Leggatt, 2023; Kennedy & Smith, 2024).
3. Entrepreneurial counseling: Entrepreneurial counseling is aimed at individuals who are either running their own businesses or looking to start one. It is a type of counseling that provides guidance on business planning, market analysis, financial management and risk assessment. In Nigeria, where small and medium-sized enterprises play a crucial role in the economy, entrepreneurial counseling is essential for fostering business growth and innovation. It helps entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of starting and running a business, ultimately contributing to job creation and economic development (Mutiat & Adam, 2021).

### **How counseling can raise awareness of production potentials**

The following strategies show how counseling can effectively raise awareness and improve production potentials, such as in a developing economy like Nigeria:

- i. Educating on local resources and opportunities: Counselling can play a pivotal role in raising awareness about the local resources and opportunities available for maximizing production. By educating individuals and communities about the natural resources,

- agricultural potentials and market opportunities in their regions, counseling can unlock economic potentials. For instance, in Nigeria, agricultural counseling can inform farmers about the best crops to cultivate based on local soil and climate conditions, as well as how to access government subsidies and agricultural extension services. This kind of targeted education can lead to more efficient use of local resources, thereby increasing productivity (Thomas, 2020; Chadha, 2023).
- ii. Guiding in skills development and capacity building: Counselling also contributes significantly to skills development and capacity building, which are essential for enhancing production potentials. Through vocational training programmes and workshops, counseling can equip individuals with the necessary skills to improve their productivity. For example, entrepreneurial counseling can teach business owners how to scale their operations, while vocational counseling can provide workers with the technical skills needed in growing industries such as ICT and manufacturing. In Nigeria, the development of such skills is crucial for boosting economic growth and reducing unemployment (HundrED, 2024).
  - iii. Facilitating access to information and networks: This is another critical way that counseling can raise awareness of production potentials. Counsellors can connect individuals with relevant information on market trends, government programmes and investment opportunities. They can also introduce them to networks of other professionals, mentors and potential investors. In Nigeria, access to such networks can be particularly valuable for small business owners and entrepreneurs who might otherwise struggle to navigate the complexities of the market. This networking not only enhances individual business success but also contributes to broader economic development by fostering collaboration and innovation (Sutton, 2021; Counselling Connection, 2023).

### **Building economic independence through counseling**

In order to build economic independence through counseling, the following need to be considered. Counselling should be seen as a tool for empowering individuals by providing them with a safe space to explore their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Through this process, individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their circumstances, which enables them to make informed decisions and take control of their lives. Counselling also empowers individuals through the provision of self-awareness, problem-solving skills, emotional support, building confidence, development of coping mechanisms and fostering independence (Stubbing & Gibson, 2022). Here are a few case studies of successful counseling interventions in Nigeria that have empowered individuals in various contexts:

1. Empowerment through mental health counseling: The Yaba Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Lagos.

Background: In Nigeria, mental health issues often carry a stigma, and many individuals do not seek help due to cultural and social barriers. The Yaba Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Lagos has been at the forefront of changing the narrative.

Intervention: The hospital introduced a community-based counseling programme that focused on de-stigmatizing mental health issues through education, outreach and accessible counseling services. The programme included group therapy, individual counseling and community seminars to raise awareness.

Outcome: The intervention resulted in an increased number of individuals seeking help. Reduced stigma and improved mental health outcomes. Participants reported feeling more empowered to manage their mental health, resulting in better integration into society and improved quality of life (Olaoye et al, 2024).

2. Empowerment of women through counseling and micro-finance: The Women for Women International, Nigeria.

Background: many women in rural Nigeria face economic hardship and limited opportunities for empowerment. The Women for Women International has been working to change this through a holistic approach that combines counseling with economic support.

Intervention: The organization provided group counseling sessions for the women focusing on self-esteem, leadership and financial literacy. Additionally, the women were given access to microfinance loans to start small businesses along with ongoing mentoring.

Outcome: The counseling combined with financial support led to significant changes in the lives of participants. Women reported increased self-confidence, improved family dynamics and greater financial independence. Many started successful small businesses, which uplifted their families and communities (Okesina, 2021).

3. Youth empowerment through career counseling: Lagos State Ministry of Youth and Social Development.

Background: Youth unemployment is a significant issue in Nigeria, contributing to poverty and social unrest. The Lagos State Ministry of Youth and Social development initiated a career counseling programme targeting young people in secondary schools and universities.

Intervention: The programme offered career counseling sessions, skills development workshops and mentoring opportunities. It aimed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills

needed to navigate the job market, including resume writing, interview techniques and entrepreneurship training.

Outcome: The intervention empowered many young people to pursue careers that aligned with their skills and interests. Participants reported better job readiness, increased confidence in their career choices and a higher rate of successful job placements (Ako et al, 2020).

4. HIV/AIDS counseling and empowerment: The Society for Family Health (SFH), Nigeria.

Background: HIV/AIDS continues to be a major public health challenge in Nigeria. The Society for Family Health (SFH) has implemented a comprehensive counseling programme to support individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

Intervention: The SFH provided one-on-one and group counseling that focused on coping strategies, positive living and adherence to treatment. The programme also included vocational training to empower individuals economically.

Outcome: Participants showed improved adherence to treatment, reduced stigma and greater emotional resilience. Many were able to start small businesses through vocational training which improved their financial stability and quality of life (United Nations, Nigeria, 2024).

5. School-based counseling to reduce dropout rates: The LEAP Africa Initiative.

Background: High dropout rate in schools, particularly among girls, is a significant issue in Nigeria. LEAP Africa initiated a school-based counseling programme to address this problem.

Intervention: The programme provided counseling services to students at risk of dropping out, focusing on personal development, academic support and family counseling. The initiative also engaged parents and teachers to create a supportive environment for students.

Outcome: The intervention led to a significant reduction in dropout rates in the targeted schools. Students reported improved academic performance, better relationship with their peers and teachers, and a renewed commitment to their education (Oparaduru, 2023).

## Strategies for integrating counseling into national economic development plans

Integrating counseling into national economic development plans can be a powerful strategy to enhance human capital, improve workforce productivity and address social issues that hinder economic growth (Barakat et al, 2021). Some strategies that can be employed include (Elujekwute et al, 2022):

- a. Incorporating counseling into workforce development programmes (Derenzis et al, 2023): This may be done by way of:
    - Skills and career counseling: Integrate counseling services into vocational and technical training programmes to help individuals identify their strengths, interests and career paths. This can ensure that the workforce is not only skilled but also aligned with sectors where they are most productive and satisfied.
    - Job placement and transition support: Provide counseling services to assist individuals in transitioning between jobs or industries, especially in sectors undergoing rapid change due to technological advancements or economic shifts.
  - b. Mental health as an economic policy (Knapp & Wong, 2020): Issues of mental health should also be prioritized thus:
    - Workplace counseling programmes: Encourage or mandate the inclusion of mental health counseling services in workplaces. This can reduce absenteeism, increase productivity and create a healthier work environment, contributing to overall economic efficiency.
    - National mental health strategy: Develop a national mental health strategy that includes widespread access to counseling services. This strategy should be linked to economic goals, recognizing that a mentally population is more productive and innovative.
  - c. Counselling for entrepreneurs and small business owners (Brenner, 2021): This can be offered in the form of:
    - Business development services: Offer counseling as part of business development services for entrepreneurs. This can include financial counseling, stress management and leadership counseling to help small business owners to navigate challenges and contribute to economic growth.
    - Start-up support: Integrate counseling into start-up incubators and accelerators to provide emotional and strategic support to entrepreneurs, increasing their chances of success and sustainability.
4. Education system integration (Mutiat & Adam, 2021): This can be done through:
- School-based counseling services: Embed counseling services within the education system to support students' career development, personal growth and

mental health. This can ensure that students are better prepared to contribute to the economy upon graduation.

- Curriculum development: Integrate life skills and emotional intelligence training into school curricula, emphasizing the role of counseling in personal and professional development.

5. Community-based counseling programmes (Marquette University, 2021; Methodist Healthcare Ministries, 2024): This can provide:

- Rural and urban integration: Expand access to counseling in both rural and urban areas as part of community development plans. This can include support for mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and other issues that affect community stability and economic productivity.
- Public-private partnerships: Encourage partnership between the government, NGOs and private sector to fund and implement community-based counseling initiatives that address specific economic challenges.

6. Social welfare and counseling services can equally be offered as (Brodowicz, 2024):

- Support for vulnerable populations: Integrate counseling into social welfare programmes aimed at vulnerable populations such as unemployed youths, women in poverty and disabled individuals. Counselling can help these groups to overcome barriers to economic participation.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes: Counselling should be a key component of programmes aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating individuals who have been marginalized or affected by conflict, thereby enabling them to contribute to the economy.

7. Policy and institutional framework (Perron et al, 2023): This can be actualized through:

- National counseling policy: It could be by developing a national policy that recognizes counseling as an essential service for economic development. This policy should outline standards, funding mechanisms and strategic goals for integrating counseling into various sectors.
- Counselling professional development: Invest in the training of and development of professional counselors who can contribute to economic goals. This includes expanding academic programmes, certifications and continuing education opportunities in counseling.

8. Monitoring and evaluation (Lenz, 2022): This can be done through:

- Impact assessment: Regularly assess the impact of counseling services on economic outcomes such as employment rates, business success and productivity. This data can be used to refine and expand counseling initiatives.
- Data-driven planning: Integrate counseling-related data into national economic planning processes, ensuring that decisions are informed by the real needs of the population.

9. Public awareness and advocacy: This can be achieved through campaigns and advocacy. Launch national campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of counseling in achieving economic and personal well-being. Advocate for the inclusion of counseling in development plans at all levels of government.

### **Recommendations for enhancing the impact of counseling**

To enhance the impact of counseling in improving awareness of production potentials and building economic independence in Nigeria, a multifaceted approach is needed. Here are some key recommendations:

- a. Integrating counseling into educational systems: This can be made possible through school counseling and vocational training programmes. Integrate career and economic counseling into school curriculums, with a focus on entrepreneurship, agriculture and other production potentials in Nigeria. Students should be educated on various production opportunities that align local needs and resources. Same way, they should partner with technical and vocational education centres to provide hands-on experience in industries like agriculture, manufacturing and technology. Counselling should guide students to discover fields with high demands and growth potentials.
- b. Economic and career counseling for adults: This can be done through entrepreneurial counseling, financial literacy and collaboration with local organizations. Provide specialized counseling for young adults and unemployed individuals, focusing on starting small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Counsellors should offer guidance on business planning, accessing capital, market analysis and navigating regulatory environments. Equally offer counseling programmes that teach personal finance management, savings, investment and budgeting. Building economic independence starts with understanding how to manage money effectively. They should also partner with NGOs, local governments and

financial institutions to provide resources like grants, training and mentorship for people starting businesses or agricultural ventures.

- c. Using technology for wider reach: This can be achieved through online counseling platforms, mobile applications and e-learning modules. Counsellors should develop digital platforms offering counseling on career options, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment. This will help to reach more people, especially in the rural areas, through webinars and online workshops. They should also create mobile apps with resources for self-help counseling and guidance on local production potentials, government schemes and loan opportunities. Similarly, counselors should offer free or low-cost e-learning courses on topics like business development, agriculture and production skills. These can be targeted to address specific sectors with high growth potential.
- d. Counselling on local production opportunities: This can be done by way of agricultural counseling, manufacturing and artisanal skills training and encouraging innovation. Since agriculture is a key sector in Nigeria, counselors should focus on educating individuals on modern farming techniques, agro-processing and accessing agricultural loans or grants. Highlighting the potential of value chains in agriculture (e.g., cassava, rice, palm oil, etc) is crucial. Counselling should also include advice on production-related fields such as tailoring, leatherwork and other artisanal trades. These fields offer substantial potential for self-employment. It equally necessary to introduce innovative ways to harness local resources such as sustainable energy production (solar, biogas), recycling or small-scale manufacturing through counseling programmes.
- e. Collaboration with government and private sector: This can be accomplished through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), community-based counseling as well as micro-financing and cooperative models. Counsellors should collaborate with the government and private sector to create initiatives that support economic counseling. For instance, government programmes like the Youth Empowerment Scheme or Anchor Borrowers Programme could be integrated into counseling services to create awareness and access to these resources. They should as well counseling centres where trained counselors would provide free or low-cost services on business development, local production and economic empowerment programmes. They also introduce counseling on how to access micro-finance options, form cooperatives or join existing savings and loan groups. Economic counseling could include guidance on forming cooperative societies to pool resources for collective production ventures.

## Conclusion

This article emphasizes the critical role of counseling in promoting economic independence and maximizing production potentials in Nigeria. It highlights the following key points:

1. Economic awareness: Counseling can enhance awareness of Nigeria's vast production potentials, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing and mining sectors.
2. Skills development: Counselling provides essential guidance on skill acquisition, entrepreneurship and the effective use of available resources, enabling individuals to contribute to the economy.
3. Mindset shift: Counselling fosters a mindset shift from dependence on government or foreign aid to self-reliance and innovation.
4. Employment generation: Through counseling, individuals are encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, which can lead to job creation and reduce unemployment.
5. Holistic development: Counselling plays a vital role in the holistic development of individuals, addressing not just economic but also psychological and social factors.

As Nigeria continues to navigate its economic challenges, the role of counseling will become increasingly important. The future of counseling in this context will likely involve integration into educational systems deeply in order to ensure that students are aware of their potentials and are equipped with the necessary skills to thrive economically; expansion of professional counseling services focusing on economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and development; government and private sector collaborations that will benefit from providing resources and platforms for effective counseling and with technology-driven counseling that are accessible through online platforms that will reach broader audience across the country. By working together, stakeholders can harness the power of counseling to build a more economically independent and prosperous Nigeria.

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