

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A STRATEGIC INSTRUMENT TO CURB INSECURITY IN NIGERIA.

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**ABSTRACT**

The scourge of unemployment has ravaged almost all nations of the world in different dimensions. The Nigerian situation is further compounded by the recent economic crisis that has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people. In the light of the above assertion, this study examine youth empowerment as a strategic tool the curb insecurity in Nigeria. This paper relies basically on secondary sources of data consisting of textbooks, periodicals, journal publications, and other documentary sources such as internet and published empirical research reports. The findings from the study reveals that youth unemployment has resulted in incessant crime such as kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy, oil bunkering, internet scam, car snatching, prostitution, murder, cultism among others. The study recommends that insecurity could be curbed through improving on infrastructure both in the urban and rural areas, revitalization of some collapsed industries, allocating more money to education sector, providing enabling environment that will encourage development of entrepreneurship skills, establishing more vocational and technical schools, encouraging agriculture and fighting corruption.

Keywords: Youth, Empowerment, Insecurity, Nigeria.

**Introduction**

The issue of unemployment is a major problem that has bedeviled the lives of many Nigerian youths causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends who also have their own problems to contend with. The scourge of unemployment has ravaged almost all nations of the world in different dimensions. The Nigerian situation is further compounded by the recent economic crisis that has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people.

Jacob, Shedrach, and Ishaya, (2019) reported that Nigeria has a youth population of over eighty (80) million representing over 60 percent of the total population of the country. Sixty four (64) million of Nigerians are unemployed while one million six hundred thousand (1.6 million) are underemployed and 4.5 million graduates enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for life sustenance. This precarious situation has left the youths in a vicious cycle of poverty that daily erodes their self-confidence and bright future thereby creating an atmosphere of hopelessness and insecurity.

Empowering the youths according to Olabiyi (2013) is the process of encouraging the youths to imbibe positive attitudinal change to be active citizens in their community. Youth empowerment can provide young people with positive attitudinal change to become role models in the society. It is also considered as one of the most effective ways of helping the youths to reach their full potential as productive members of the society.

The youth's empowerment will also enable the youths to develop good work ethics, gain entrepreneurship experience, attain employment readiness, and develop skills and competencies that will enable them to make positive contribution to the development of their communities to foster the development of good behaviours that will instill some level of responsibility and accountability in them. It will further stimulate the youths to channel their energy, time and effort into more productive means that will equipped them for work and not to engage in socially degrading activities that could disrupt the peace and stability of the nation. This will help in reality curtailing the menace of unemployment; eradicate poverty among youths, and to curb national insecurity.

However, several studies reported that among the youth empowerment programs and poverty reduction programmes set up by the government since independence till date, there still exist a high rate of unemployment and poverty looming in the nation (Ma'aji & Hassan, 2012; Nwankwo, Obeta, & Nwaogbe, 2013; Onderi, Ajowi, & Malala, 2014; Chinedu & Olabiyi, 2015).

They attributed this pandemic to the mega corruption, inappropriateness of the programmes, too much focus on already established skill areas, inconsistency in the running of the programmes, poor administration, poor and unsuitable programme content that is not consistent with employer's needs. These are responsible for the alarming unemployment and poverty in the nation which results in youths engaging in numerous social vices that disrupts national peace and threatens national security in Nigeria.

Based on the foregoing, this paper examines youth empowerment as a veritable instrument to curb national insecurity. The paper is structured into eight segments which comprise the introduction, conceptual clarification, methodological issues, nexus between unemployment and insecurity, causes of unemployment, strategies for effective youth empowerment, and challenges of youth empowerment in Nigeria, conclusion and the ways forward.

### Conceptual Clarification

#### Youth

As a result of its varying descriptions and definitions by organizations, countries and cultural groups, the term youth cannot be easily defined. Officially, the Nigerian Population Commission defines a youth or young adult as persons between the ages of 18 and 24.

The National Population Commission has gone on to describe the characteristics of the persons identified as youth as persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either completed post secondary education or be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or already employed. These groups of people are considered as youths.

United Nations has defined youth as persons in the age range of 15 to 24 years. While the World Health Organization reporting on violence and health to categorized youth as persons between the ages of 10 and 29. According to Anyanwu (2014) youth aged 15-24 and unemployment is currently one of the greatest global development challenges facing youths in Nigeria. Relating this to the African continent, he affirmed that Africa which has more than 60 percent of its population currently under the age of 25, is the fastest growing and most youthful population in the world. With regards to Nigeria, unemployment among the youths is one of the major problems inhibiting the peace and security of the country.

Youths are regarded as the future leaders of tomorrow and utmost asset for a country's development (UN: 2007). Therefore, any society or country that plays with the welfare and development of it youths could be said to be playing with its future and survival (Alanana 2003). Unfortunately, Nigerian, youths have been left to their fate and inflicted with the menace of unemployment which breeds social alienation, frustration, criminality and violence among youths in Nigeria.

Youths make up the active population of any society. The active population of any society is its productive sector and this determines to a large extent the level of development of that society. When the youths, being the active population, are made unproductive, consciously or unconsciously, that society tends to remain stagnant in her developmental strides.

The youths are one of the greatest assets a nation could possibly possess. The youths are the foundation of a society; their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pattern of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides. The youths are also the most volatile when their energies are misdirected or channeled into wrong endeavours. The daily desperation and frustration that torments the unemployed youths create a fertile ground for crime to thrive in Nigeria. Thus, the youth's needs an urgent reorientation for positive attitudinal change, a gap which the vibrant Mokwa Youth Redemption Network Group is exploring to bridge through youth sensitization programme.

### Youth Empowerment

Youth Empowerment is the process of encouraging youths to be active citizens in their community through positive attitudinal change in order to acquire skills and vocations that will make them self reliant (Olabiyi, 2013).

Youth empowerment is an altitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of other people (Ojo, Abayomi & Odozi, 2014).

Chalasan (2013) perceived youth empowerment as a deliberate involvement of youth in socio economic development activities that result in meaningful change from economic dependence on parents to having productive and economically dispositions with the considerable ability to support oneself and other people.

Youth empowerment is only possible and achievable when concrete steps are taken to make the people acquire skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and its sustainability (Okwelle & Deebom, 2017)

Empowering the youths is considered one of the most effective ways of helping the youths to reach their full potential as productive members of the society. Youth Empowerment helps young people to strengthen positive behaviours that improve proper functioning of youths across a wide range of vocations.

However, the current deplorable situation of Nigerian youths is the failure of the past and present government policies which aimed at tackling the problem of the youths through agencies and programmes such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic and Empowerment Development Scheme (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) that are geared towards alleviating the suffering of the youths.

Despite the initiation and execution of these programmes in Nigeria, youths are still confronted with problems of poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, crime, prostitution and fraudulent activities which are all associated with unemployment and its attendant insecurity challenges in Nigeria (Surajo & Zehadul Karim, 2016). The solution therefore, does not lie in creating these policies and programmes, but in their faithful implementation.

### **Insecurity**

The concept of insecurity, on the other hand, means different things such as absence of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty and lack of protection (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). These authors argued that insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. While, Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) define insecurity from two perspectives; firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where the danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, insecurity, according to them is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune.

Insecurity is a condition in nation's development where life is threatened as a result of lapses in governance which have adverse effect on food security, youth employment, health conditions of the people and in the long run breed violence, Boko haram, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, assassinations, ethno-religious crisis, piracy, human trafficking, religious crises, and civil wars (Ezekiel, 2019).

Sixty years after independence, Nigerians are disappointed about their leaders who have failed to deliver the good governance, secure the welfare of people on the principles of freedom, equality and justice and the purpose of consolidating the unity of the people. The socio-economic structure to make the citizens feel compel to be patriotic are lacking (Enyi, 2020).

Leadership failure and the socio-economic insecurity arising from misrule of the country's polity has prompted Nigerians to begin to feel more and more of fending for themselves to the extent that some citizens procure arms and light weapons to defend themselves.

The leadership maladministration and mismanagement of the economy made unemployment to become a key factor in the labour market even as the cost of living rises beyond the reach of the low income earners. The unemployed youths becomes despaired, frustrated and susceptible to engage in degrading activities such as crime, violence, kidnapping and insecurity continue to reign in Nigeria.

#### Methodological Issues

This paper relies basically on secondary sources of data consisting of textbooks, periodicals, journal publications, and other documentary sources such as internet and published empirical research reports.

#### Nexus between Unemployment and Insecurity

The various security challenges been face in Nigeria have been attributed to unemployment. According to the popular maxim "the idle hand is the devils workshop", the situation whereby majority of the people are poor and hungry and a lot of youths are jobless and unemployed, will undoubtedly, engender high insecurity in the country. It is now the norm to see thousands of the unemployed turn up in response to advertisement for jobs where only a handful is to be employed. The country is faced with a gross under utilization of human resources with direct consequence of breeding insecurity (Adebayo, 2013).

Thus, unemployment has driven many Nigerians into various activities that constitute a threat to the country's security. There have been instances in which graduates are arrested for involving in one form of crimes or the other. Most of these criminal graduates attribute their involvement in these crimes to the unemployment situation in the country. For instance, the cover story of the news magazine 26 September, 2011 cited in Adegoke (2015) was captioned graduates bandits on the prowl. According to the report, most of the graduate's robbers that were interviewed argued that they engaged in crime for lack of employment.

In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and under-employment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability (Ajufo, 2013). The scariest undertone of Nigeria socio-economic underachievement, by far, is the steady rise in youth crime, nurtured in a climate of increasing national income and the simultaneous failure of employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes.

Unemployment has been identified as the major cause of social vices like armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more. What holds true for Nigeria and most other nations of equivalent human development indicators is the fact that crime is often a means of survival (Adebayo, 2013).

#### Causes of Unemployment

Unemployment is the number of economic active population who are without work but available and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1993).

#### Rapid rural-urban migration

The rate at which young people move from the rural areas to the urban centers in Nigeria in search of greener pastures is alarming. Many of these youths are fleeing from the poverty in the rural areas due to push-pull factors pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural areas. This is further compounded by the gross lack of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas, which makes the standard of living in the rural areas unattractive. Since the industries and social amenities are concentrated in the urban areas, youths migrate into the urban areas to seek employment in the industries and ministries, as well as enjoy the comfort which the social amenities offer (Adebayo, 2013).

#### Rapid expansion of the educational system

Following the deregulation of education Nigeria, government has been encouraging the opening of private schools and universities. However, the aggressive creation of more private and public-funded institutions has not been followed or matched with a commensurate job absorption strategy for the many graduates from these educational institutions. Whereas tertiary institutions have grown at multiple progressions, jobs and employers have grown at arithmetic progression. This has led to the increase in the supply of educated manpower which outstrips the corresponding demand for them. This has contributed greatly to the problem of youth's unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria (Ajufu, 2013).

#### Corruption

High level of corruption in Nigeria has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base in spite of her abundant natural resources. Massive corruption is perpetuated in every sector and has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria. Funds meant for development projects which could have generated employment have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks (Chukwuma, 2013).

#### Decline in the manufacturing sector

The capacity of the manufacturing sector to absorb youths into its workforce has been hampered by the continuous decline in the sector. In 2009, over 837 factories have collapsed and closed shops. About half of the remaining operating firms have been classified as "ailing", a situation that poses serious threat to the survival of the manufacturing sector in the country in the next few years (Chukwuma, 2013).

#### Rapid Population Growth

Nigeria has continued to experience high rate of population growth. The increasing population growth has produced an overwhelming increase in the youth population thereby resulting in an attendant increase in the size of the working age population. The growth in population rate has resulted in rapid growth of the labour force which is far higher than the rate of jobs supply causing unemployment and insecurity problems (Chukwuma, 2013).

#### Dearth of Vocational and Technical Education

There is decline in Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria. Vocational technical education trains the individual to develop occupational skills and become self-reliant. However, Nigeria has neglected Vocational and Technical Education to the extent that enrolment to these specialized schools has suffered a huge setback at secondary school level. More so, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics that should provide higher technical skills are neglected. By implication, our education system seems to be producing job seekers instead of job creators. (Nkechi, Lawrence, 2016).

#### Dormant Agricultural System

Many Nigerian youths are no more interested in agriculture. They prefer to move to urban areas and crave for white collar jobs many youths are no longer interested in agricultural work because it portends being in the field, tilling the land and patiently waiting for the yields. Unfortunately, the agricultural sector which used to provide employment for more than 60 percent of the Nigerian population in the sixties and in the seventies has been relegated to the background (Chukwuma, 2013).

Consequently, youth unemployment poses a great threat to the country's stability and development, and if not checkmate on time, it may lead to disastrous consequences for the nation. Desperation can drive the unemployed youths into living outside the law in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence (Adebayo, 2013).

#### Conclusion and the ways forward

It is evident from statistics that a high number of the Nigerian youths are unemployed or under-employed. This is disheartening knowing the fact that Nigeria is a rich country both in human and material resources. The youths should be the drivers of the economy if given the opportunity. Youth unemployment has resulted in incessant crime such as kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy, oil bunkering, internet scam, car snatching, prostitution, murder, cultism, abduction, rape, drug trafficking and abuse, among other social vices. The youths engage in these nefarious activities as way to make ends meet and in a way to protest their ill-treatment by the society. This has resulted in breach of peace and security of the nation.

Several reasons have been adduced to why unemployment and insecurity is high in Nigeria. These include massive rural-urban migration, dearth of vocational and technical education, neglect of agriculture, corruption etc. These notwithstanding, youth unemployment and insecurity could be curbed through improving on infrastructure both in the urban and rural areas, revitalization of some collapsed industries, allocating more money to education sector, providing enabling environment that will encourage development of entrepreneurship skills, establishing more vocational and technical schools, encouraging agriculture and fighting corruption. To this end, concerted effort must be made by all stakeholders such as the Mokwa Redemption Network Group, government at all levels, national and multinational organizations to orientate and empower the youths to channel their energy into productive socioeconomic activities. This will curb youth unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria and the global community.

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