

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Nigeria, a country with a very large youth population has one of the highest unemployment figures in the world, despite her enormous economic potentials. Successive political leaderships have tried unsatisfactorily to address Nigeria's unemployment conundrum. This has led many scholars and public analysts to aver that the unemployment situation in Nigeria is an albatross to national security. Taking cognizance of the above, this paper examines the dynamics of youth unemployment in Nigeria and its implications for national security and development. The paper argues that bad leadership, corruption, policy inconsistency, lack of sustainable youth empowerment strategies, failed educational system accounts for the high preponderance of youth unemployment in contemporary Nigeria. The paper further argues that youth unemployment in Nigeria has significant, albeit, negative implications for National security and development which include: increased wave of armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism/insurgency, human trafficking, cybercrimes and militancy among others. Through historical analysis of related literatures that is anchored upon frustration aggression theory, this paper, using primary and secondary data arranged in a thematic order, shows how previous youth policies in Nigeria have been ineffectual and recommends an overhaul of Nigeria youth ministry through reforms, youth empowerment strategies and anti-corruption crusade.

Keywords: youth, unemployment, development, national security, Nigeria

Introduction

The reality of our present time has clearly shown that some developed countries in the Global North like Spain, Germany and Japan are currently in dire need of a youthful population to boast and sustain their industrialization, while many countries in the Global South, particularly Nigeria have abundant youth but lamentable, and unable to develop and harness the potential of her youthful population for national development. This unfortunate phenomenon constitutes an albatross to Nigeria's National security and development.

Available statistics in Nigeria show that Nigeria has arguably, one of the highest unemployment figures in the World in spite of her abundant Natural resources. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2011 stated that over 40 million Nigerians are unemployed and that 45% of the population between the ages of 15 and 40 years are youth. In 2012, youth unemployment increased to about 11.1 million. In 2016, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) reports that about 46 per cent of Nigeria's 68 million youth population is without jobs while in the second quarter of 2020, unemployment rate increased to 27 per cent¹. Annually, about 4.5 million young people enter into the Nigerian Labour Market and only 10 per cent are absorbed.

Every four years since the return to democratic rule in 1999 after close to three decades of military interregnum, particularly during electioneering, politicians of different political parties in Nigeria had also promised to create employment opportunities for the youth. Unfortunately, very little has been done. In fact, even when opportunities for employment are available in government ministries and agencies, only few people with political connections are employed. The unemployed youth in Nigeria are used as political thugs to foment trouble during elections; they also constitute the bulk of cultists, readymade recruits into terrorist and militant groups like the Boko Haram and oil militants in the North East and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. The reasons for the current insecurity and development woes in Nigeria are linked to the inability of government to create sustainable youth employment programmes that will absorb the latent idle minds that abound in Nigeria. Thus, youth unemployment is a threat to Nigeria's national security and development.

Therefore, in this paper, attempt is made to investigate the following research questions; what is the proportion and causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria? What are the implications of youth unemployment for national security and development? How should the current political leadership in Nigeria in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) respond to the challenges of youth unemployment? This paper, in addition to the introduction is divided into four sections. Section two examines some conceptual and theoretical issues, section three focuses on the proportion and causes of youth unemployment while section four examines the implications of youth unemployment for National security and development and recommendations on how to address the unemployment crisis in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications and theoretical Framework

In order to clearly situate the context in which some key terms are used in this paper, it is germane and imperative to define some terms like youth, unemployment, national security, development.

Youth: The term youth has no universally accepted definition. Its usage and meaning varies across cultures and countries. The United Nations Organization has come up with a specification of age bracket 15-24years as youth, while the Commonwealth uses the age category of 15-29years². In Nigeria, the second National Youth Policy

Document states that “Youth shall comprise all males and females of the ages 18-35 years, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. In this regard, Ato and Agbu see the youth as the most active, vibrant, energetic and daring members of any nation who are potential future leaders and greatest assets for development³. Abah and Jenkeri defined the youth as “young women and men who fall within the age bracket of 15 and 35 years⁴. Furthermore, anyone who is acknowledged by deed as identifying with and committed to youth development may be recognized as youth. While the age brackets may differ from society to society, it is important to note that, the youth age is the time in life when most young people are going through dramatic changes in their life circumstances as they move from childhood to adulthood. They are energetic, ambitious, creative and promising. They represent the most active and most impulsive, they constitute the most important human resource potential that can contribute significantly to the overall development of a nation. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 33.10% in the 3rd quarter of 2017 from 29.50% in the 2nd quarter of 2017(www.tradingeconomics.com, 2018). Consequently, they require social, cultural, economic and political support to realize their full potentials if not, the opposite will be the case. It is within this context that this study is based.

National Security: John Tor Tsuwa and Abah Danladi argued that national security literature and definitions of national security is copious and is still growing. They further stated that the proliferation of definitions of national security is essentially because the process of discursively securitizing vulnerable referent objects (i.e. individual, nation-state or the global system) and defining particular risks, is therefore a political one, which usually depends on who is grappling with the subject. It is therefore common to see reference being made to human security, national security, international security, state security, regime security, corporate security, among others⁵. Therefore, in this paper national security means the ability of the state to protect its citizenry from hunger, poverty, ignorance, disease, and all forms of defenselessness. This entails protecting the citizens from all forms of social, political, ecological, territorial, as well as cosmic vulnerabilities. This perspective shows a clear departure from the orthodox perspective which describes national security as merely as military-centre. As relevant and fundamental as the concept of security is to human societies, it has not only defied any consensus but has created a “battleground of ideological contention”. No matter the conception of security, an important point is that it underpins human existence. Thus, states define security within the context of their core values, interests, culture, prestige and socio-economic order. Transformations in the global arena have produced certain mutations in the conceptualization of national security: the focus has moved from an emphasis on protecting and maintaining the state to a focus on the well-being of the people⁶. Within this context, therefore, national security is equated with, and denotes, physical safety of individuals and groups and freedom from threats, anxiety or danger. This people-centric focus of contemporary national security presupposes that the state must facilitate unfettered access to, and enjoyment of, fundamental human rights by citizens. In other words, actions that tend to abbreviate or abridge fundamental human rights constitute insecurity.

The task of maintaining national security is as much the responsibility of the government as it is of the citizens. For the state to play its role as an impartial restraining force and thus maintain the delicate balance that could trigger insecurity, it ought to be aloof and non-aligned in the resolution of recurrent conflicts of interest within the polity. John and Abah argued that in Nigeria, the state immersed itself in the class struggle instead of rising above it, and thus became a Nigeria, the responsibility to protect and guarantee security is clearly spelt out in Sec 14(2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution which states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government⁷. This is the basis for the social contract in which we as citizens of Nigeria surrender some of our freedoms in addition to submitting ourselves to the authority relating to governance in order for us to enjoy the full protection of our remaining rights. These rights which include those of life; dignity of human persons; personal liberty; fair hearing; private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of expression; peaceful assembly and association; freedom of movement; and freedom from discrimination⁸. These rights are fundamental to the social contract between government and the citizens, and failure to guarantee them by the former not only means a violation of the “agreement,” but also a threat to the security of a nation. Human Trafficking pose a different kind of security challenge in Nigeria. It is often carried out domestically or within a given sub region and most offenders are convicted in their countries of citizenship. Victims, on the other hand, are often foreigners in the country where there exploitation are detected. Trafficking flows are usually confined to a geographically limited area, either within a country or between neighbouring countries

Development: The term development is contentious. Development means different things to different people. Thus, it has no generally universally acceptable definition. However, a working definition is established in this paper. Walter Rodney viewed development at the individual level as something that implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being⁹. Rogers as cited in Walter Rodney describes development as a type of social change in which new ideas introduced within a social system produce higher – per capita income and levels of living through more productive methods and improved social organization. It also means the process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions. Thus, for a society to develop there has to be order, stability or a peaceful co-existence within and among the various ethnic groups.

Furthermore, development connotes improvement in the social, political, economic and cultural strata of a society or individual which promotes longevity, happiness, joy, capabilities among others. It is the capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship. Development can also be seen as a means of freely exercising one’s economic, social, political, and religious rights. Development is not only about economic growth or industrialization, but extends to include the creation and sustenance of conditions that guarantees adequate individual freedoms and security and elimination of all forms of inequality. Development is the advancement of human

welfare manifest in the fights against poverty, ignorance, hunger, insecurity, deprivation, diseases, and all that threatens a good life. Development in the context of this paper connotes human development. That is, development that is human-oriented or one that has a “human face” as its priority. In other words, development is seen as the departure from conditions that inhibit human and societal transformation to provision and advancement of values and creation of institutions that mentally empowers people, transform societies, promote political equality, social justice, economic empowerment, education, care for the poor and vulnerable, and all other variables that sustain a good life.

From the Political genre, development is the advancement of good governance. Good governance is the building of institutions that consolidate democracy such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, service delivery, probity, equity and respect for human dignity in the management of state resources and power. Besides, political development is the departure from dictatorial norms to democratic consolidation through regular free, fair and credible elections.

Frustration-Aggression Theory: The Frustration-Aggression theory was propounded by Sigmund Freud and Dollard Dupe. Their view postulates that aggression arises as a result of frustration. When families, individuals and communities are troubled with poverty, injustice, lack of good livelihood opportunities, discrimination, marginalization, lack of education and other basic necessities of life, they tend to get frustrated and this spirit of frustration often creates militant consciousness among the people especially able – bodied youth.

Lending credence to the views of Sigmund Freud and Dollard Dupe, Ademola notes that:

The main explanation of the Frustration-Aggression theory provides that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume but that it is the outcome of frustration and in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those he holds responsible, or people who are directly or indirectly related to them¹⁰

It is a truism that 70.82% of the total population of Nigeria live under extreme poverty (less than \$1 a day) and Nigeria is one of the world’s poor nations; the death rate is 13.48 deaths/1000 population; 51% of girls are out of school; the average life expectancy is less than 1000 live birth; under-five mortality rate of 138/1000 live births; maternal mortality rate of 840 deaths/100,000 live births; insignificant drugs; human development index is one of the lowest in the world. This is in spite of the fact that Nigeria is a wealthy nation, earning over \$400 billion of oil revenue alone over the years of our existence. In fact according to a New York Times report “Nigeria is the World’s 6th Most Populous and expected to hit 300 million in 25 years at the rate of 2.553% growth¹¹.”

What plans do we have for education, healthcare, food, employment, drinking water, housing, electricity, etc? Meanwhile a reporter from the NY Times made an observation of the living condition she saw somewhere in Lagos in which:

...typical apartment blocks known as “face me, face you”...whole families squeeze into a 7-by-11-foot rooms along a narrow corridor. Up to 50 people share a kitchen, toilet and sink-though the pipes in the neighbourhood often no longer carry water...At...primary school, more than 100 students cram in most classrooms, two to a desk...As graduates pour out of high schools and universities, Nigeria’s unemployment rate is nearly 50 percent for people in urban areas ages 15 to 24 driving crime and discontent...¹².

Governments all over the world, particularly those of developing countries, are increasingly recognizing that threats to national interests/security are more likely to stem from internal than external sources. Such threats can assume different forms in different countries at different times. Against this background the question is how does one evaluate the implications of human trafficking for national security in Nigeria? One must begin by acknowledging the fact that it is the sole responsibility of a government to guarantee the security of its citizens, and also as a matter of fact it is this responsibility that gives any government its legitimacy. This, to a large extent, despite some acknowledge criticisms against the frustration-aggression theory, provided the promise for this discourse.

Unemployment in Nigeria: Understanding the Proportions and Causes

Since independence in 1960 the issue of unemployment has been of major concern of which, successive Nigerian leaders have contemplated one economic programme or the other, without any much positive impacts on the population, particularly the youth. In the wake of the persistent rise in youth unemployment, different interventionist programmes have been initiated by the successive government in Nigeria, though it is widely perceived that conscious policy effort by government towards poverty alleviation began in Nigeria during the era of structural Adjustment Programme that was informed by the severe economic crisis in Nigeria in the early 1980s. This notwithstanding, there have been attempts at poverty alleviation, most notably with the following programmes;

- 1972 National Accelerated food production programme and the Nigeria Agricultural and co-operative Bank.
- 1976 Operation feed the Nation: to teach rural farmers how to use modern farming tools
- 1979 Green Revolution Programme: to reduce food importation and increase local food production
- 1986 Directorate of food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)
- 1993 Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme
- 2001 National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP): to replace the previously failed poverty Alleviation Program. Despite all these efforts,

according to a 2018 report by the World Bank, almost half of the Nigerian population is living below the international poverty line (\$2 per day)¹³.

In early 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme(SAP) became a clear testament of the failure of the previous programmes. The economic consequences of Structural Adjustment Programme, imposed on Nigeria by IMF and the World Bank in 1980s and recently is one of the causes of unemployment in the country. The common feature of the programme was reduction in public spending, the opening of industrial and agricultural production to international competition by removing trade barriers and the introduction of the policy of privatization¹⁴. As regards unemployment, the impact of structural adjustment programme on Nigeria's economy was highly destructive. For example, the privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria, its socio-economic costs on Nigerians have been calamitous. By the late 1990s, Nigeria had over 25,000 public enterprises which generated over sixty-five percent employment¹⁵. As a policy strategy SAP adoption meant the rationalization of these public enterprises through privatization. Between 1988 and 1999, over 66 public enterprises were privatized. This scenario led to massive sack of workers. Without doubt, the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria worsened unemployment challenges in the country. Through the staff rationalization of government ministries, Parastatals, Agencies and Developments, many civil servants lost their jobs. This was also witnessed in the private sectors; the accompanying retrenchment causes social dislocations as many families lost their jobs and had no alternative means of livelihood. In 2016 over 30,000 civil servants lost their jobs in Federal and State civil services while 60,000 workers with private sectors lost their jobs¹⁶.

Agriculture which serves as the major source of employment to many Nigerians was fundamentally affected. This was due to the removal of subsidies which was necessitated by the introduction of structural adjustment programme, a fact that has been well established and need not overemphasizing. The policy led to price increase on farm produce due to devaluation of Naira. Output also decreased especially in rice, maize, cassava, poultry and fishery production because their production became less profitable following high cost of imported inputs such as agro-chemicals. This led to loss of jobs in the agricultural sector as many farmers abandoned their farms out of frustration owing to high cost of agro-chemicals. Indeed, the devaluation of Naira affected the agricultural sector negatively.

Another factor that promotes unemployment in Nigeria is the democratization process of Nigeria. First, it creates opportunity for corruption, inflation of contract, fraud and embezzlement in government institutions. Secondly, in order to totally control the political terrain of the country, the ruling political party would create a way of diverting funds meant for developmental projects to funding party affairs in order to suppress opposition political parties. There is no doubt, corruption breeds plethora of social problems in Nigeria which unemployment is one of such. Job creation in Nigeria today has been undermined and retarded by the menace of corrupt practices. Recently, it has been said that corruption drains Nigeria of 300 million US

dollars, the consequence of this has manifested in the absence of basic infrastructures and increase in unemployment. Indeed, the impact of corruption on developmental and governmental processes in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The effects of corruption on the Nigerian state are enormous. Against this backdrop, Nwabueze avers that the worst impact of corruption in Nigeria is its effects on the economy¹⁷. It has created wide spread of unemployment in the nation which brings feeling of frustration of disgust and cynicism, that has distorted the love for and faith in the state. As a matter of fact, corruption and mismanagement on the part of the leadership has been the bane of development and job creation in Nigeria¹⁸. Corruption is so real in Nigeria and has permeated the vital structures that make for progressive functioning of the country.

Implications of Youth Unemployment for National Security and Development:

The consequences of unemployment in Nigeria are manifold. First, unemployment widens the gap between aspiration and possibilities, thereby promoting violence¹⁹. There is no doubt, as the gap between aspiration and possibilities becomes parallel, the possibility to engage in violence activities increases. For instance, if young people feel that education and training will no longer provide them with a job and decent life, then, they can be more willing to take part in insurgencies. This is because unemployment leads to grievances especially when expectations are raised through expansions in education²⁰. A worthy illustration is the case of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, and the Founder of the group had a Master degree in Public Administration from the University of Maiduguri. Many members of the group have degrees and higher degrees in different disciplines however, most of them were unemployed, a cause that led to their recruitment into the terrorist group.

To this end, it is obvious that over 90% of the total crimes committed in Nigeria are caused by the youth. Although not all youths involve themselves in crime, however the unemployed and poverty stricken have the tendency to indulging themselves in crime. Between 1999 and 2020 for example, there has been rise in violence in the country, with majority of the actors the youths. This has been the case because of poverty and high rate of unemployment among youths. Many graduates today are on the streets without jobs, and easily used as agents of destruction by those elements that can pay them meager to cause pain in the lives of others. Most of the political crises, religious riots and economic upheavals witnessed in Nigeria were planned and execute by educated unemployed Nigerians.

In another development, unemployment is responsible for involvement of Nigerians in illegal trades and activities such as drug trafficking, proliferation of small arms, prostitutions, armed robbery and corruption breeds plethora of social vices like unemployment. The rise in unemployment provoked by retrenchment of civil servants in the Federal and State government services resulted in an explosion of drug trafficking. Therefore, drug peddlers were easily recruited on the streets of Nigeria, as the cheapest means of earning sustainable living. Drugs trafficking are indeed, a threat to Nigeria security and integrity. This is because the scope of the narcotic problem has tremendously increased as traffickers undermined drug law

enforcement agents through corruption, intimidation, assassination, by massive flow of drug money into the economy which also has destabilizing effects on the supply of money in the exchange marketing²¹.

Apart from drug trafficking, commercial sex work is another negative impact of unemployment in Nigeria. Today, most of unemployed female graduates take up sex work as means of earning sustainable living. Most of them are in brothel, hotel and motel. Others are in the streets of Nigerian cities and towns. The painful consequence of prostitution in Nigeria is its effects of indecent mode of dressing which spread easily in the country. Above all, its most tragic consequence is the spread of sexual transmitted diseases such as HIV, gonorrhoea, syphilis amongst others that have destroyed many lives in Nigeria.

Addressing Unemployment in Nigeria: Some Recommendations

Flowing from the above discussion, this paper finds it cogent to put forward the following recommendations as a token of our commitment in addressing unemployment in Nigeria and thereby reducing to a manageable level, challenges to national security and development.

Youth unemployment is a menace in Nigeria, and constitutes a great threat to security and national development. This is because these youths as a result of their exuberance could be exploited to undermine the stability and development of the nation at any point in time. Against this background, there is the need for both the government and private organizations to embark on massive job creation to take these youths off the street. Governments must play their constitutional role by creating enabling environment, including the provision of infrastructure to make industrial climate investment friendly. This would encourage investors to invest and thereby create jobs in order to absorb the unemployed youths. Government is also required to provide adequate security and incentive to facilitate Job creation.

Another possible way out is the provision of sustainable youth empowerment schemes and provision of right skills. The SURE-P (Subsidy Reinvestment Empowerment Programme) by Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan led federal government has contributed a lot in providing job for the teeming unemployed youths in Nigeria. Despite this success, the APC led federal government has been the unable to sustain such a laudable scheme. This problem has been associated with the tradition of successive administration in Nigeria not to continue with a programme that had been initiated by a previous government. Lack of continuity is largely responsible for the abandoned projects and programmes that would have created several jobs for the youth in Nigeria.

Corruption, which has been identified as a major cause of youth unemployment in Nigeria most, be effectively checked. To ameliorate the scourge of corruption, a culture of holding people accountable, both in public and private sectors has to be well instituted in Nigeria. People with ill gotten wealth should not be recognized and celebrated, and those found guilty of corruption be made to face stringent and

effective sanction. For example, scholars like F. C. Onuoha, J. U. Umo and Okolia have identified Nigeria as one of the corrupt countries in the world thereby giving Nigeria a bad name in front of foreign investors. To this end, leaders should avoid the use of government agencies as means of political vendetta while they on the other hand, commit worst the crimes which they accused their opponents who had been in government before, instead, they should live up to expectation so that all funds made for developments and employment projects are utilized appropriately. This would lead to job creation that would absorb most unemployed youths in Nigeria and promote national development.

Another important aspect that the government must be serious with is the re-awakening of the collapsed industries scattered all over the country. For example, the various textile industries in Kaduna, Kano, Ibadan and the automobiles, so as to get the majority of the youths employed. There should also be adequate provision of power supply by the government to keep the industries working. This would help in solving the problem of unemployment among the youths in the country.

It is clearly observable that bad leadership in Nigeria has not only resulted in corruption, bad and inadequate policy inconsistency, lack of sustainable youth empowerment strategy, failed educational system but the fundamental cause of Youth unemployment. And Youth unemployment in Nigeria has been one of the greatest challenges to security and national development. To this end, conscious efforts should be put in place for governance to be responsive and committed to addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Conclusion

With an estimated population of over 180 million, Nigeria has one of the highest youth unemployment figures in the world despite her economic potentials. According to NBS (2007) the number of Nigerians that became unemployed rose from 11.92 million in the first quarter of 2017 to 13.58 million and 15.99 million in the second and third quarters of 2017 respectively. This implies that, total unemployment in Nigeria increased from 37.2 percent in the second quarter of 2017 to 40 percent in the third quarter of 2017. Thus, Nigeria ranked 28th among other nations on the international records in unemployment in the third quarter of 2017 and about 31.10 percent of the unemployed are youth. This is a reality of our country that has seen us where we are today. The central thesis of this paper, which is premise on the frustration-aggression theory advance that, It is only rational and commonsensical that issue of youth unemployment be considered an urgent matter to be addressed by all concerns through various approaches indicated in this paper.

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