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Unemployment and Livelihood Support

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Definitions

Unemployment or joblessness as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1982) occurs when people are without jobs and they have sought work within the past 5 weeks. In Nigerian context, unemployment is defined as the proportion of labor force that was available for work but did not work in the week preceding the survey period for at least 39 h (Oduwole 2015). The official gazette from the Bureau of Statistics puts the figure of unemployed at 19.70%, about 30 million, but this figure still did not include about 40 million other Nigerian youth captured in the World Bank Statistics in 2010. By implication, it means that if Nigeria's population is 160 million plus, then 50% or more of Nigerians are unemployed; this was opined by Njoku and Okezie (2011). Then, the majority of the unemployed are youth. Youthhood can be defined as that phase or period of life in which one passes from childhood to maturity. Maturity on the other hand refers to a situation whereby one becomes fully developed. Age and location are the two key defining characteristics of youth. The United Nations defines youth as all individuals aged between 15 and 24 (UNO 2001), while in Nigerian context, the youth usually fall into the 18–35 years age bracket, that is, both male and female. Hence, Abdullahi (2008) affirmed the National Youth Policy conceptualization of youth.

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living (Bennell 2000). A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from the stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future without undermining the natural resource base (Bingen 2000). Meanwhile, household livelihood is secured through adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs (Frankenberger et al. 2000).

Introduction

The empowerment of rural areas of the world is seriously important from the perspective of inclusive development, sustained peace, and shared commonwealth in the global world. The empowerment of three billion people that reside in rural areas across the globe is a germane issue that needs urgent attention today as the world talks about inclusive development. However, the untapped potential of rural populace and the talent that is sure to emerge when they are empowered will prove to be a treasure trove. Several governments, NGOs, and other developmental actors had tried in the recent time to bridge the rural-urban divide which is very closely connected with the objectives of overcoming poverty and inequality, but the mission has not yet accomplished (Abdulkalam and Singh 2004).

The great quest for qualitative education, better healthcare services, and reasonable income is the root cause for which the rural dwellers are migrating to urban areas with the hope of acquiring livelihood opportunities that often results in despair. As a result of rural-urban drift, most of the big cities in the world have started managing slums coupled with huge economic challenges; this has further contributed to urban poverty and led to stress and societal insecurity.

However, it is not a gainsaying that rural areas of the world possess unharnessed resources and potentials, hardworking youth, and indigenous knowledge and skills. All these have to be nurtured into the design of value-adding enterprises that will create enabling environment of empowerment (Abdulkalam 2014).

For better grasp of the concepts of unemployment and livelihood as it affects nations particularly Nigeria, this write-up, therefore, depicts the rate of unemployment cut across Europe, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. It also touches strategic areas needed to improve the livelihood support among rural youth.

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Unemployment is one of the developmental problems that bedeviled every developing economy in the twenty-first century. International statistics portray that industrial and service workers living in developing regions account for about two-thirds of the unemployed. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's population is said to have reached about 167 million people in 2012. The National Population Commission (NPC 2013) states that about half of the population is made up of youth, which is defined as individuals between 18 and 35 years of age. Akande (2014) stressed further that, unfortunately, as the youth population grows, the unemployment rises. In fact, unemployed youth numbered about 11.1 million in 2012. Generally, the youth are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have and, therefore, need to be developed and empowered. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country

can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The youth have been described as the greatest investment for a country's development (National Youth Policy of Nigeria 2001). The 2007 World Development Report, which focuses on "the next generation," expands the definition of youth to include all young people aged between 12 and 24. The youth constitute about 60% of the more than 160 million people of Nigeria. Nigeria's unemployment rate is projected at over 11% compared to the average rate of 9.5% in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2004), young people aged between 15 and 24 years account for 52.9% of unemployed people, while those aged between 25 and 44 years accounted for 41.1%. Therefore, those in the age bracket of 15 and 44 years account for 94% of the total unemployed persons in Nigeria (Osibanjo 2006). There are number of trends in youth unemployment in Nigeria, and these are indicated in the table below.

Available statistics, from Table 1, show that the majority of unemployed youth were female. Women accounted for more than 50% of unemployed youth between 2008 and 2012. Many reasons have been adduced for female gender unemployment. Empirical evidences have revealed that the female gender generally experienced poverty more than their male counterpart as a result of unemployment. Payne (1991) and Abdullahi (2004) observe that specific risk of poverty stems from the structuring of female economic dependency, within families, marriage, and the sexual division of labor that come together to create a gendered vulnerability to poverty and deprivation.

Table 1

National youth unemployment figures by gender

Year Percentage of unemployed youth that are female and male

	Female	Male
2008	58.53	41.50
2009	57.82	42.18
2010	54.52	45.48
2011	50.85	49.15
2012	55.42	44.58

Source: NISER 2013

Table 2 indicates that the problem of graduate youth unemployment is critical in both rural and urban areas of Nigeria. The major significant inference from the table shown above is that, for a period of 9 years compared in totality,

graduate youth unemployment was high for 6 years in urban as compared to the rural areas. This could be ascribed to migration indices – pull and push factors. In addition, considering 42.7% as the total population of graduate youth unemployed as at 2011 compared with the current population of about 50% unemployed youth of the total population of Nigeria (167 million) gives credence to the statistics revealed as at 2011 as credible. It is because of this that total population of Nigeria in 2015 has increased compared to 2011.

Table 2

Graduate unemployment rate (2003–2011) by residence (rural/urban)

Year Rural Urban Total

2003	8.3	17.3	25.6
2004	12.8	25.2	38.0
2005	13.3	19.0	32.3
2006	13.4	18.8	32.2
2007	13.4	18.7	32.1
2008	21.7	15.8	27.5
2009	19.8	19.2	39.0
2010	20.7	22.8	43.5
2011	25.6	17.1	42.7

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS [2012](#))

Table 3 reveals that incidence of youth unemployment varies considerably from one region to another. It is highest in the Near East and North Africa regions, where over one-quarter of all youth were classified as being unemployed. Youth unemployment was lowest in East Asia and South Asia with rates of 7.8% and 10%, respectively. Youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa was 18% in 2005. Notwithstanding, breakdowns of rural and urban youth unemployment rates are not available, but high rates of youth unemployment are closely linked with high rates of landlessness, for example, 20% in MENA. There is no uniform trend which exists with regard to regional youth unemployment. However, unemployment rates have declined appreciably in MENA; they have almost doubled in the Southeast Asia and Pacific regions during the last decade.

Table 3

Youth unemployment rates by region (1995 and 2005)

Region	1995	2005
Developed economies and EU	15.2	13.1
Central and Eastern Europe and CIS	19.6	19.9
East Asia	7.5	7.8
Southeast Asia and Pacific	9.2	15.8
South Asia	9.9	10.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	14.4	16.6
Middle East and North Africa	28.7	25.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.5	18.1

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends 2005

National Youth Policy on Unemployment

The youth are highly recognized globally and are regarded as the greatest assets that any nation could have. They are seen as the pillar of peace, security, and development of any nation. The World Development Report (2007) portrays 1.3 billion people in the age category of 12–24 years as the largest group recorded ever. Thus, close to 85% of these over 1.3 billion young men and women live in developing countries; this figure is projected to increase to 89% by 2025. It is also noteworthy that Nigeria's population is predominantly young. According to NPC (2006), Nigeria has a population of 140 million people, while NBS (2012) projected the Nigeria population to be over 160 million. Of this projected population, one-third of is conceived to be between ages 10 and 24 years. The recognition of this fact led to the development of the National Youth Policy and the subsequent review of the policy. Furthermore, the overall policy goal of NYP is to provide an appropriate framework that will promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic, and political well-being of all young men and women so as to enhance their participation in the overall development process and improve their quality of life.

Consequently, in pursuant of the policy goal, the National Youth Policy seeks to address youth problems from holistic approach so as to ensure the coverage of the most critical elements. One of such critical elements is what this entry considered to be unemployment and livelihood which invariably has direct effect on the living standard of the youth.

Previous academic literatures reveal that successive Nigerian governments have played pivotal roles in providing lasting solutions to the problem of unemployment. Despite several policies and programs initiated by the Nigerian government such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Schemes, and N-Power as lofty and laudable as they appear, their inability to affect the real target (i.e., Nigerian youth) reflects the lacuna between country's policy formulation and implementation.

Poverty and Unemployment in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of about 173.6 million, GDP of 521.8 billion US dollars, and GDP growth rate of 5.4%. Owing to such huge population, Nigeria remains the largest nation in Africa which accounts for around 47% of the West Africa population. Nigeria has the largest deposit of oil for export in Africa along with the biggest gas reserves in the continent coupled with huge talents in human resources. Nigeria is a country that is expected to build a robust economy among peers, reduce its poverty level significantly, and be able to provide humongous infrastructural services to cater for her population needs (World Bank [2014](#)). The World Bank further predicts that poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is set to rise if proper measures are not put in place. Poverty affects over four billion people in the world. It is a global problem that calls for an urgent attention and solution among the key actors in the world economy. The need to alleviate poverty arises in order to enhance the quality of life through the creation of favorable standard of living by effective production and distribution of consumer goods and services including generation of employment particularly for teeming unemployed youth all over the world.

Nigeria is a country with close to 200 million people but still basking in the tide of poverty. This has shown a rising tendency in the past couple of decades accounting for the nation's low development indicators and may be has improved drastically in the recent years.

Poverty level in Nigeria is widespread, counter to the wealth of the country that include human, oil, natural gas, and solid minerals. Indicators place it among the 20 poorest countries in the world. According to the World Bank ([2000](#)) about 66 percent of the Nigerian population now fall below the poverty line of about a dollar a day compared to 43% in 1985, this in a country which is estimated to have earned about 280 billion US dollars from oil during the past 30 years. It is obvious that the wealth from oil sector has not been having meaningful impact through many sectors of the economy because poverty is still a growing

problem in Nigeria. However, if poverty is characterized by hunger, ill health, poor housing, illiteracy, malnutrition, and unemployment, then there is no doubt that the majority of Nigerians are living below the poverty line as set out by the World Bank in the year 2000.

Unemployment is considered to be a barrier to social and economic progress of any country; an attempt to prevent its undesirable implications on poverty may put a clog in the battle against the challenges toward achieving developmental objectives of the emerging economies (Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa [2012](#)). The Nigerian government is already aware that unemployment is the root of poverty but fails to recognize ineffective educational quality and inadequate job skills including trainings which are shortfalls hampering the productive sector of the Nigerian economy. The cumulative effect of this scenario is that the private sectors feel reluctant to employ Nigerian graduates because of insufficient knowledge, skills, and experience. The lack of political will or lackadaisical attitude has hindered the Nigerian government to finance and initiate huge investment in the education sector by encouraging research-oriented projects via universities and research institutes. This has eventually resulted in weak and unfavorable political environment for adequate human resource development (Nwagwu [2014](#)) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

The figure shows unemployment rates in Nigeria (1980–2010).
(Source: Egunjobi [2014](#))

The figure above reveals the trends of unemployment rates in Nigeria as it rose from 3.1% in 1977 to 6.4% in 1980; it fluctuates between 6.4% and 6.1% in the years 1980 to 1985 of the military regime. This development arises as a result of the stalemate in the Nigerian economy during that period. National unemployment rate figures staggered in downward direction from 1986 to 1990, declining from 5.3 to 3.5%. The advent of structural adjustment program (SAP) which was adopted in 1986 by the military junta had serious implications for the subsequent unemployment problem. The program which was geared toward encouraging greater employment opportunities in the private sectors (especially among the small and medium enterprises) later contributed immensely to the unemployment rate that rose from 5.3% to 7.0% in the year 1987. This was further compounded by the continuation of industrial furlough and declaration of embargo on employment in the public sector. Aside from

unwanted expectations the program has brought forward, its policy orientation resulted in some structural changes within the Nigerian labor market. Moreover, from 1991 to 1995, there was a high reduction in unemployment rate to 3.4% which eventually increased to double digits of 17.5 percent in 1999, and by the year 2000, it has declined to 13.1 percent. This provides evidence that there was no optimal utilization of human resources in spite of the excess amount of labor which demonstrated macroeconomic mismanagement and lack of focus by those governments in power. Meanwhile, from that period onward, unemployment rate has continued to fluctuate from 13.6 in 2001 to 13.4 in 2004, 14.9 in 2008, and 21.2 in 2010. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2014) shows that unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 21.1% in 2010 to 23.9% in 2011. It is therefore suffice to say that poverty and unemployment remained major developmental challenges in Nigeria.

Concept of Rural Youth Livelihoods

It is widely alleged that rural youth are increasingly losing interest in smallholder farming, which is perceived as “dirty work.” Thus, rural youth tend to be relatively mobile, both nationally and increasingly across international borders. Recent researches show that migration from rural to urban areas will continue on a large scale and this is an integral part of the livelihood coping strategies of the rural poor. Temporary migration and “commuting” are also a routine part of the combined rural-urban livelihood strategies of the poor across a wide range of developing countries (Deshingkar 2004). In many parts of Asia and Africa, remittances from rural to urban migration are overtaking the income from agriculture, and it is essential therefore that young people in rural areas are prepared for productive lives in both rural and urban environments. Policymakers should, in turn, revise negative perceptions of migration and view migration as socially and economically desirable.

Rural youth tend to be poorly educated, especially when compared with the urban youth. The extent of “urban bias” in the provision of publicly funded education and training services is huge in most low-income developing countries (Bennell 1999). The deployment of teachers and other key workers to rural areas amounts to nothing less than absenteeism and truancy in many countries. Poor quality education, high schooling costs, and the paucity of good jobs continue to dampen the demand for education among poor parents. Rural youth have been heavily involved in civil wars, and other forms of social vices in a growing number of countries, which poses a major threat to the long-term development and prospects of these countries. The local safety nets are tearing apart, and rural youth expectations for a better life are increasing, most especially with access to global information technologies.

Rural youth face major health challenges, including malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. It is important, however, to keep the direct health threat posed by HIV/AIDS in proper perspective. Except for a handful of very high prevalence countries, the scourge of HIV among rural teenagers still remains very low. The large number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and all of Asia and Central and South America experienced the incidence of HIV infection among rural

teenagers which has been controlled to fall under 1%. The main impact of the AIDS epidemic on rural youth livelihoods is the rapidly growing number of children and youth whose parents have died from AIDS-related sicknesses.

The rural population as a whole including rural youth is engaged in a diverse range of productive activities, both agricultural and nonagricultural. However, there is a dearth of statistics, but the proportions of rural youth engaged in waged and self-employment in both these main areas of activities vary considerably across the globe.

Improving Youth Livelihoods in Rural Areas

1. (i)

Human capital development – education. More than 160 million youth in developing countries are classified as “illiterate.” Generally, the preparation of rural youth for productive work is poor (Atchoarena and Gasperini 2003). According to 2007 World Development Report, “changing circumstances” mean that much greater attention needs to be given to the human capital needs of the youth; these include “new health risks, changing nature of politics and the growth of civil society, globalization and new technologies, expansion in access to basic education, and the rising demand for workers with higher education.” The greatest contribution to improving the future employment/livelihood prospects of disadvantaged children in both areas (rural and urban) is to make sure they stay in school until they are least functionally literate and numerate. Free tuition for girl’s education is the most obvious lever to change the situation of young women in the society. Moreover, in the majority of low-income developing countries, rural youth still do not acquire these basic competencies in education. In Ethiopia, for example, nearly three-quarters of 15–24-year-olds have no access to quality education. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, more than one-third of youth are still classified as “illiterate” in 2002. The government provision for primary education in rural areas is improving rapidly in many countries, but the quality of education remains generally very low and is even declining in some countries.

2. (ii)

Human capital – skills training. The provision of good-quality post-school skills training (both pre-employment and job-related) remains very limited in most of the rural areas. Many governments would like to establish extensive networks of rural training institutions, but do not have the necessary resources and political will to do it. The recent evaluation results have found that the cost-effectiveness of most youth-related rural training is low (Middleton et al. 1993 and Bennell 1999). Typically, training services are fragmented, and no coherent policy framework exists to provide the basis for a pro-poor rural training

system. There are some notable exceptions, mainly in South America, for instance, the countrywide rural training and business support organization, SENAR, in Brazil. The key challenges in providing high-quality training and extension services for rural youth are low educational levels/poor learning outcomes, scattered populations, low effective demand from both the self-employed and employers, and limited scope for cost recovery. Religious organizations and other nongovernmental organizations have supported many of the vocational trainings for rural school leavers in different developing countries across the globe, but funding constraints have resulted in significantly reduced enrollments in other countries during the last decade.

3. (iii)

Financial capital – microfinance and enterprise development. The World Bank (2006) points out that “entrepreneurship is not for everyone and so cannot be viewed as a large-scale solution to the youth employment crisis” (p.59). Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in the targeted provision of microfinance for youth, because it is obvious that education and training only do not usually lead to sustainable self-employment. Until now, services in this area remain limited, and numerous problems have been encountered in pilot projects. Inadequate provision of soft loans for youth borrowers is a major issue, screening mechanisms are weak, and intensive training is needed on how to make best use of the fund. The youth, especially the very poor among them, always feel reluctant to borrow money, maybe because of the fear of collateral. Utilization of condensed packages of inputs such as credit, training, advisory supports, and other facilities are often necessary, since this imposes major demands on organizations and significantly reduces the number of beneficiaries. Agribusiness and enterprise development extension staff should be trained to work with young people, most importantly the rural youth.

Future Labor Demand in Rural Areas

Rural reality is changing fast in many countries, and it is widely recognized that rural diversification will be the focal point of successful agricultural transformation in the future. Where rural diversification is not economically feasible, the alternative will be the transition of economic activity from rural to urban areas. Whatever may be the outcome, rural youth will be at the forefront of this process of change as rural non-farm activities account for a large and growing share of employment and income, especially among the poor and women who lack key assets like land. The rural non-farm sector is seen as the springboard from underemployment in low-productivity smallholder production to regular wage employment in the local economy and from there to jobs in the formal sector. The key policy goals for the rural non-farm sector are to identify the key engines of growth, focus on subsector-specific supply chains, and build flexible institutional coalitions of public and private agencies

(Haggblade et al. [2002](#)). Traditionally, manpower planners assumed that increased demand for labor in a particular sector such as smallholder agriculture depends on the projected rate of growth of output and the elasticity of employment with respect to output for that specific sector. However, in countries without unemployment benefit systems, total employment is largely supply determined, and employment elasticity tends to vary inversely with output growth. Consequently, an increase in the demand for labor is reflected in an increase in the quality rather than the quantity of employment: workers move from unpaid to wage jobs, from worse jobs to better jobs, etc. Subsistence agriculture and informal sectors are “sponges” for surplus labor. Also, the traditional “manpower planning” analysis sets up a false conflict between increasing productivity and increasing employment. It leads employment planners to talk about the threat posed to jobs of too fast growth in productivity, whereas the process is entirely opposite. Increasing productivity is at the center stage for any strategy to increase the quality of employment (Godfrey [2005](#), [2006](#)).

Conclusion

The main objective of Sustainable Development Goal 1 is to eradicate poverty by the year 2030, and in order to achieve this, Nigeria must target those living in vulnerable situations, increasing access to basic resources and services, and support communities affected by conflict and climate-related disasters. Globally, more than 800 million people are still living below the poverty level of \$1.25 per day; many lack access to nutritious food, potable water, and sanitation. However, number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped significantly by more than half, that is, from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015 (SDGF [2018](#)). But eradicating poverty in all its forms has remained a daunting task since too many people are still struggling to meet the most basic human needs particularly the rural poor. However, suggestions to the Nigerian government focus on strategic areas to address various challenges facing the youth which include youth empowerment program that would reduce the unemployment rate among Nigerians through job and wealth creation and introduction of microfinance schemes that would support young entrepreneurs with seed fund. The government was also advised to improve literacy and numeracy among Nigerian youth with special attention on the female education in the northern part of the country. The government was urged to initiate programs that would target key health challenges among Nigerian youth such as reproductive, emotional, and mental health including drug addiction. Such programs should include educating and sensitizing the youth on communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, etc. Concerning youth and their immediate environment, government ought to increase awareness on sanitation and pollution and educate and sensitize the youth on the global climate change and how to harness alternative sources of energy (Chukwuma [2013](#)). The government should equally endeavor to establish functional leadership and development centers in all local government areas where future generations would be groomed for the position of leadership (Winifred [2010](#)).

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