

Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Implications for Transforming the Economic Sector

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Abstract

The paper examined the issue of unemployment and youth restiveness in Nigeria and the need for government and all stakeholders to rise up to their responsibilities in reshaping the economy and make the country a better and safer place. The increasing spate of unrest, insecurity, mass protest, demonstration, killings, looting, kidnapping, wanton destruction of properties and other social vices going on in Nigeria since the onset of democratic government in the country are not unconnected with unemployment. The paper relied more on review of relevant literature using internet, text-books, conference papers and policy documents. The paper painstakingly highlighted the nature and magnitude of unemployment in the country between 2011-2020 and the associated consequences/ such as mass uprising and protests. It further discussed the precipitating factors underlying the unemployment rate in Nigeria and then the implications to transforming the real sector of the economy. The author recommended among others, that the government should recognize the school curriculum towards vocational/skills acquisition that will enable youths become self-employed after completion of their educational programmes.

Key Words: Unemployment, Youth, Restiveness, Transforming, Economy.

Introduction

The increasing rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria for many years now appears to be one of the underlying factors to incessant protests and insecurities which has posed a threat to the sustainable development goal of the nation. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (Egbemode, 2019) shows that the total number of unemployed in Nigeria

increased from 17.6 million in the first quarter of 2017 to 20.9 million in the third quarter of 2018 and vice versa. The author noted that since then unemployment rate in the country has been in upward trend which could be attributed to mismanagement of resources and ineptitude of the successive governments to sustain various social intervention programs initiated since independence that were meant to reduce unemployment and poverty among the citizens. The Nigerian youths since then have resorted to asking themselves such puzzling questions like, 'does attending schools or universities still matters? Ekine (2021) noted that responses to this question has continued to hang as the educational curricula in Nigerian schools may not have been prepared to integrate vocational and skill acquisition programmes at the onset. In other words, this deficient school curricula may have contributed to the failure of educational institutions in Nigeria to provide them with the appropriate skills to make them employable. Similarly, Akande (2014) opines that the growth in youth unemployment in Nigeria was caused by serious infrastructural deficits and debilitating structural adjustment program (SAP) introduced by the government in the early 1980s which led to the winding-up of many industries that would have provided employment to the teeming youth.

Obviously, lack of adequate and reliable data may have been another impediment to the inability of the government to have made remarkable progress in tackling the unemployment situation in Nigeria. There is no statutory institutions charged with registration of the unemployed (Asaju, Arome & Anyio, 2014). The authors maintained that the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), is only responsible for training in line with the programmes released by the government in power and mostly accessible only by those in the urban centers.

Naturally, the youths are expected to contribute substantially to the development of the society in which they belong with work and tax obligation. This could assist the government in providing the needed incentives to other vulnerable groups as they are germane in the life of every member of the society. Akaeze (2011) argues that once the act of sustaining oneself on daily basis is threatened, there is the probability of the individuals resorting to illegitimate means to obtain what they cannot obtain legitimately. In such instances of joblessness, there is the likelihood of the youths being overtaken by anxiety and frustration and then resort to protest and other forms of deviant inclinations. The End

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (#EndSARS) protest that recently occurred in Nigeria in October, 2020 appears to be one of the results of youths dissatisfaction with the Nigerian political class on their failure to care for them especially in the areas of security and employment (Uwazuruike, 2020).

One of the implications is that Nigerian government claims to be occupied with other trivial issues and less concerned with the quality of human lives or how the citizens live especially the youths that make up 35.6% of the total population (Hoffman, 2020). The author noted that young people in Nigeria below 30 years overwhelmingly suffer from high unemployment rates with its statistics being higher than the entire population of certain African countries like Tunisia and Rwanda. Ojewale (2020), observed that successive governments in Nigeria since independence have not made frantic efforts towards the revival of the educational system and job creation making the outlook to be bleak, hostile and unfulfilling for the younger generation.

In addition, the increasing cases of corruption in Nigeria has not allowed the government to give serious thought on how to reduce unemployment and ensure equitable economic prosperity for her citizens (Ojewale, 2020). The viciousness with which corruption has invaded the country's socio-economic and political space without sanction has become obvious irrespective of which political party is in power. In other words, the craze for money has turned the country into one in which rules and decency no longer counts. According to Akaeze (2011), when a particular segment of the society are confronted with structural impediments or marginalized in the areas of economic and employment opportunities, they may resort to vent their bottled-up grievances against the government and clamp down the economic activities of the nation. This is the major thrust of the paper. In other words, the paper examined youth unemployment and restiveness in the contemporary Nigeria democratic space and its implications towards transforming the real sector of the economy. Efforts were made to have an overview of the magnitude of unemployment in Nigeria from 2011-2020. More so, the conceptual issues of youth restiveness and precipitating factors to youth unemployment in Nigeria were highlighted and then their implication in transforming the real sector of the economy.

Overview of the magnitude of youth unemployment in Nigeria (2011-2020)

In Nigeria, right from the era of the military to the enthronement of democratic government in 1979, youth unemployment statistics have never been impressive in any way. The situation however became worse with the coming into power of Dr Goodluck Jonathan and Gen. Mohammadu Buhari as the nation's presidents respectively from 2011 to date. Olurounbi (2021) argued that since 2011 unemployment has become a hydra headed monster that has made the dreams of many Nigerian youths unfulfilled. Akazeze (2011) also noted that even within the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo, the unemployment figures in 2008 and 2009 had already assumed double digits, 14.9% and 19.7% respectively. In 2010 and 2011, the figure increased to 21.1% and 23.9% (Osolor, 2012) while 2012 and 2013 recorded an incremental rate of 3.7% each from the preceding years. There was however a little improvement in 2015 and 2016 with 10.4% and 14.2% but later rose up to 18.8% in 2017 and 21.8% in 2018 respectively (Verrelle, 2021). Similarly, in 2019, the unemployment rate was put at 23.1% and 33.3% in the last quarter of 2020 which was rated as second to the highest in the global list (Olurounbi, 2021). This implies that the scale of youth unemployment in Nigeria especially since the enthronement of democratic government in 1999 seems to have been on increase without any hope of decline. World Bank (2020) attributed the current increase to Covid-19 pandemic which posed a threat to the global economy making it absolutely difficult for employers to create more job opportunities. This group was dominated by youths between the ages of 15-30 years. The alarming situation seems to have buttressed the incessant youth restiveness such as the "EndSARS" movement, IPOB secession agitation, Niger Delta Avengers, Yoruba Nation movement and while others are on the other side working for green Visas to enable them travel outside the country for better job overseas.

Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness simply refers to sustained protest embarked upon by the younger segment of the population so as to enforce a desired outcome from a constituted authority (Ezedikachi & Eze, 2020). In other words, it constitutes a kind of unwholesome activities undertaken by the youths that could lead to breakdown of law and order, disruption of economic activities, harassment/unleashing of terror to public office holders and ordinary citizens, destruction of public properties/infrastructural facilities and other criminal

tendencies (Osalar, 2012). It portrays an endemic dissatisfaction of the youths with the performance and achievements of the government at a particular point in time. In many instances, the demand of the youths are geared towards the delivery of equitable economic prosperity by the government and stronger efforts toward job creation (Ojewale, 2020).

This therefore implies that for many years now, there have been a steady increase in youth unemployment in Nigeria which have also become a major challenge to our quest for sustainable economic development (Egbemode, 2019). A former Minister of Science and Technology in Nigeria; Tam David-West argued that true leadership in a plural society like Nigeria should not be quantified in terms of pomps and pageantry, but rather on the ability to provide a maximum standard of life for all and sundry. In the same vein, the former Central Bank Governor; Lamido Sanusi noted that high rate of youth unemployment is the major cause of social problems being witnessed in Nigeria (Akaeze, 2011). Sanusi stated that Nigeria's economic revival may be meaningless if the youths are not adequately empowered to be part of the transformation.

According to Akaeze (2011), the messages of youth protests in Nigeria displays its direct link with unemployment as people who do not have any other avenue to channel their energies are usually ready to indulge in such crimes and as such, employment creation is expected to be continuous and permanent in nature. Protest is an avenue to demand for an accountability on the part of the government and civil society that are expected to be responsive to the needs of the citizens. Ojewale (2020) observed that 27.7 million of young people within the ages of 15-34 years were unemployed at the last quarter of 2020 and another 22.9 million underemployed. This situation seems to have moved the country to become more dangerous to the younger people who constitute a greater percentage of Nigeria's total population (Fayehun & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2020)

Precipitating Factors to Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment appears to be one of the biggest threats to social stability in most developing nations especially Nigeria in the present dispensation. According to Onwuka and Abonyi (2019), when compared with other countries, Nigeria's unemployment crisis seems to be more serious. Many factors could therefore be pinpointed

as being responsible for the increasing rate of youth unemployment in the country. Some of these factors include;

(i) **Increase in the nation's population:** According to Akande (2014), the growth in the population of the country has equally increased the number of youths seeking for employment in the nation's ailing economy. This implies that with the population of Nigeria recording more than 200 million there may not be enough spaces for all the people who are actively looking for work.

(ii) **Inconsistencies in Government policies and programmes:** Since the 1970s, different policies and programmes have been fashioned out by different administration to address youth unemployment in Nigeria but none of these programmes have yielded the desired results (Akande, 2014). The author noted that as a nation operating the Federal system of government, some of these policies have to be addressed at the three levels (Federal, state & local), but each new administration in most cases tend to change focus on their arrangements to promote sustainable employment for the youths. Egbemode (2019), noted that between 1972 and 2019, not less than fourteen different programmes have been implemented by the governments to boost youth unemployment in Nigeria without noticing any tangible results which on the other hands indicate high resilience posed to the intervention efforts.

(iii) **Infrastructural deficit:** The failure of the government at different levels in Nigeria to prioritize investment on the nations critical infrastructures especially the power sector seems to have contributed in promoting the high level of unemployment statistics in the country. The state of electricity supply which has been in epileptic mood tend to have worsened the already existing bad economic situation such that people who would have gone into some forms of small-scale businesses could not do so owing to high cost of providing an alternative source of power (Akaeze, 2014). Many people have also lost their jobs because a great number of manufacturing companies appear to have winded up as a result of their inability to meet up with the rising cost of production caused partly by high cost of diesel required to keep the machines running.

(iv) **Faulty Curriculum of the nation's Education system:** Makinde and Adegbelemi (2019) posit that the curriculum of the Nigerian educational system is tailored towards the acquisition of white-collar jobs which seems to have erroneously raised the confidence and

expectations of the youths. Many of the young people believe that as soon as they leave school, they can comfortably get government or corporate jobs. A considerable number of job seekers in Nigeria live under such illusion and as a result lacks the zeal for self-independence and entrepreneurship.

(v) **Corruption:** There seems to be lack of transparency in the management of public funds in Nigeria which may have impacted heavily on the nation's infrastructures and corresponding decline on the economy. Corruption has been identified as one of the major road-blocks to Nigeria's economic transformation and which have also contributed to high level of youth restiveness and insecurities in the country (Okenna, 2020). Ola, Mohammed and Audi (2014) also stressed that corruption saps a country's economy by hampering tax collection and undermining the enforcement of important regulations. These social vices which occur in different dimensions such as bribery, embezzlement, money laundry and others appear to have stolen the wealth of many resource-rich nations like Nigeria and then heightening the level of unemployment and poverty (Adewale, 2011, Nwankwo, 2014, & Okenna, 2020). It is one of the unresolved social problems in Nigeria that have skewed economic and socio-political development of the nation leaving few better off at the expense of majority (Madichie, 2005 & Nwankwo, 2014). In the same vein, the study undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) in 2020 revealed that corruption in Nigeria if strictly unchecked may likely cost the nation up to 37% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030. The Researchers also pointed out that corruption is a pressing issue in Nigeria which affects public finances, business investments, human capital development as well as the general standards of living. In other words, the slow pace of development and youth unemployment in Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan Africa could be partly attributed to corruption which has actually affected every aspects of public lives and businesses.

(vi) **Covid-19 Economic Recession:** According to the national Bureau of Economic Research; NBER (2015), economic recession refers to a significant decline in the economic activities of a nation which may last more than five months and normally identified in a nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale/retail sales. Noko (2016) argues that economic recession in Nigeria could result from poor economic policies, over dependent on oil, infrastructural decays, youth

restiveness and militant activities in the Nigeria oil regions and collapse of the oil prices at the global markets. The implication is that the general cycle of economic recession experienced in Nigeria in the ongoing era of COVID-19 pandemic seems to have brought imbalance in the socio-economic management of the nation and equally aggravated the unemployment situation of the Nigerian youths. In a report recently released by the World Bank (Ndubuisi & Addeh, 2021) shows that unemployment index in Nigeria rose approximately five-folds, that is; from 6.4% in 2010 to 33.3% in 2020. In other words, the rate became very acute in 2015 and 2016 and then worsened with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It appears that with the emergence of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the unemployment rate increased substantially for all Nigeria youths across all educational levels making the majority of active labour force in the country to seek for greener pastures in the foreign lands. The National Bureau of Statistics in (Olurounbi, 2021) noted that out of the 69.7 million people that constitute the active labour force in Nigeria in 2020, only 30 million were gainfully employed with 53.4% (for people aged 15-24) and the jobless rate for women (35.2%) higher than that of men (31.8%). The reports further shows that the rate of unemployment in Nigeria had quadrupled over the past five years as the economy went through two recessions within the shortest period. This development does not speak well for Nigeria when compared with other African countries. Onwuka and Abonyi (2019) also upheld similar view and noted that Nigerian youths have been terrorized immensely by subsequent economic recessions in the country which have worsened the employment opportunities.

(vii) **Lack of diversification of the economy:** Akaeze (2011) observed that since the early 1970s, successive governments in Nigeria had failed to diversify the nation's economy even as they indulge in profligate spending coupled with poor maintenance culture of the critical infrastructures. There was the overdependence on petrol resources at the neglect of such sectors like Agriculture where unemployed youths should be mobilized and given modern Agricultural equipments with new farming techniques (Makinde & Adegami, 2019). In addition, many industries that would have assisted in stemming down the situation were closed down as they could not cope with the rise in the exchange rate and economic recession.

(viii) **Technological advancement:** The emergence of digital system and other sophisticated machines in our formal organizations have increased the woes of our youths looking for employment opportunities. Most of our industrial organizations are no longer using the manual system that may require more hands in their production processes. This also applies to government establishments.

Implications for transforming the Nigeria economy

Youth unemployment and restiveness have become serious issues that seem to have affected the overall economic development of the nation in the negative perspectives. In other words, the situation has led to a drastic reduction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and that of individual per capita income with no formidable step being taken by the government to affect the economic prosperity of the youths. Anasi (2010) emphasized that not less than 34% of the Nigerian youths within the ages of 15-34 years are trapped by unemployment which makes them to live below the poverty line. According to the author, the state of joblessness makes the youth to become hostile and thus creating an atmosphere of fear, chaos and vandalization of critical infrastructural facilities/production units.

During the era of colonialism and independent struggle, the Nigerian youths were regarded as heroes and builders of society and through their creative talents and labour power, they made a giant stride in the Nigeria's economic and socio-political development (Anasi, 2010). The activities of the Nigeria Youth Movement, Zikist movement spearheaded by late Nnamdi Azikiwe, PA Obafemi Awolowo and Anthony Enahoro's boldness to confront the British Authority for Nigeria's independence expressed the commitment of youths to national development and the need to prioritize their wellbeing.

It however appears that many years after Nigeria independence, the welfare of the youths especially in the areas of employment has not been given the desired attention (Akaeze, 2011) and which have made many of them restive and eager to resort to crime. The author stated that some of the resources that would have been allocated to youths are diverted through corruption to the private accounts of government officials and other individuals entrusted with responsibilities. The Youths seen the viciousness of corruption and other forms of economic exploitation in the country, they take to outright breakdown of law and order and disruption of economic activities. According to Ezedikachi (2020),

the syndrome of unemployment and youth restiveness have affected the general socio-economic development of the nation and other areas such as her cultural heritage and the likelihood of survival in the preservation of national values.

The increasing unemployment rate in the country also tended to have pushed many of the youths to negotiate for their future through asylum in foreign lands with favourable economic conditions. According to World Bank (2021), not less than 50% of the Nigerian youths leave the country every year to other countries. The reports further show that Nigeria ranked the third position in 2019 among countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for citizens itching to relocate to other countries scoring 50% after Liberia with 70%. Equally, in 2016 and 2017, Nigerian youths formed the largest group of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa that entered Europe with about 40,000 recorded in Italy alone (World Bank, 2021). This migratory pressure seems to have been created by frustration for lack of jobs.

Youth unemployment also appears to have contributed generally in increasing the poverty level of the nation. According to Ezedikachi (2020), if the energies of the youths are properly channeled, there should be vast progress and improvements in national development. As Zacharia (2006) observed, a greater percentage of the Nigerian population live below the poverty line which is less than one dollar of the United States per day.

Conclusion

For many years, Nigeria has been facing the crisis of youth unemployment which contributed to incessant protests and insecurities which have posed a threat to the smooth transformation of the Nigerian economic sector. The structural impediments experienced by the youths in their efforts to acquire productive jobs compel them to become restive and unleash grievances or other forms of criminal activities against government's officials and innocent individuals amidst youth protests. Some of the factors contributing to youth unemployment include; rapid increase in population, inconsistent government policies and programmes, infrastructural deficit, use of faulty curriculum for the educational system, the problem of corruption, economic recession created by Covid-19 pandemic, government's failure to diversify the economy, the problem of technological advancement and poor data management.

Recommendations

The paper having discussed exhaustively the problems of youth unemployment and restiveness and the implications for transforming the real sector of the economy makes the following recommendations;

1. The federal Ministry of Education should reorganize the school curriculum towards vocational skills acquisition that will enable youths to become self-employed after completion of their educational programmes.
2. The government should diversify economic activity through the provision of loans and other agricultural materials that will make farming attractive for young people after their educational programmes.
3. Government should also employ competent people that will provide a permanent solution to the epileptic power supply that causes serious problems for industrial activities in Nigeria.
4. The Nigerian federal government should formulate laws that will expose and sanction government officials that engage in corrupt activities to serve as a deterrent to others.
5. Both the federal and state governments should improve the welfare conditions of the citizens as stated in the constitution to discourage youths from participating in mass protests and unlawful demonstrations.
6. Finally, the federal and state governments should create job opportunities for the youths that completed their educational programmes through the establishments of industries to change the minds of youths from engaging in unlawful restiveness.

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