

## Youth Unemployment and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Youth unemployment remains one of the defining challenges of our time, not just in Nigeria, but somehow across West Africa and beyond. Addressing youth unemployment means finding solutions with and for young people who are seeking a decent and productive job, are working but living in poverty or are discouraged by current labour market prospects. Such solutions should address both labour supply (through education, skills development and training) and labour demand (through job creation and an enabling environment for entrepreneurship), as well as the quality of work available for young people (including with regard to labour standards, working conditions and wages). The study relied on the secondary data while content analysis was employed in analyzing the gathered data. Marxist Theory of Unemployment was used as a framework of analysis in this study. The study discovered that unemployment among youths has significantly affected youth population with severe consequences on Nigeria survival as a nation. It is recommended that government should focus its attention to the quality of education so as to produce employable graduates, anti-corruption agencies be given full independence to fight corruption, there should be steady supply of electricity in order to enable industries operate which in turn can generate employment to the teeming youths.

**Key words:** Youth, Unemployment, Employment creation, Policies and Sustainable Development

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## **Introduction**

One of the vulnerable groups in today's societies is the youth. Among the factors that determine this vulnerability is the youth unemployment. The effects of youth unemployment affect not only the unemployed person but also the economic growth and the society. Given that access to the labour market constitutes a mechanism for social inclusion, youth unemployment entails the risk of exclusion of this social group. Due to the specific characteristics of this type of unemployment, Cyclical Unemployment, Frictional Unemployment, Structural Unemployment, Natural Unemployment, Long-Term Unemployment, Seasonal Unemployment, and Classical Unemployment.

The economic and social environment becomes a determining factor in achieving decent employment and full inclusion in society. In the context of sustainable development, a set of social and economic policies are needed to provide ways of solving this social and economic problem. Globalization has increased prosperity, but at the same time, it has introduced some weakness in the labour market, which has increased inequality (ILO 1999). Similarly, the quality of employment of young people is worrisome. Young people face severe difficulties in securing and keeping decent employment. Their unemployment rate is three times as high as that of adults. More than one in five – 23.5 per cent – of young people are not in education, employment or training (ILO 2023). No doubt that joblessness has become the order of the day in Nigeria as every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society is with Youth who live without job and this has become one of the fundamental challenges facing Nigeria at the moment. (Kayoed, A., Samuel A., and Silas, F. A., 2014), observed that there was no time in Nigeria's chequered history where Youth unemployment is as serious as now. This assertion is particularly more relevant today when majority of Youth Population are jobless and are ever ready to indulge into acts capable of destruction and retarding Nigeria's Development and have significantly contributed to the dramatic rise in criminal activities such as armed robbery (Salami, 2013).

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Hope by the Nigerian youth has withered by the day and there is now feeling of frustration about their inability to be employed when he is capable, willing and qualified to work, and as a result, majority of them are no longer able to meet their primary psychological needs (Olakitan, 2015).

Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), asserts a decade past that the statistics from the Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics showed that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60% of the total population of the country. Also, 64 million of them are unemployed, while 1.6 million are under-employed. Also, 40% of the unemployment rate is among urban youth aged 20-24 and 31% of the rate is among those aged 15-19. Also, two-thirds of urban unemployed are ranged from 15-24 years old.

This trend continued unabated despite many efforts by the successive governments. Recently, it rose from 27.1 percent to 33.3 percent from December to March 2021, according to the National Bureau of Statistics(2021). The increasing rate of unemployment is alarming to the extent that one can rightly argue that the Nigerian state is resting on a time bomb that may sooner or later consume her if this problem is not properly managed.

Youth unemployment is of course one major important issue that needs to be arrested if Nigeria wants to survive and development attained. Alanana (2003) contributing to the discussion on Youth Unemployment, studied it's implication in Nigeria while Okafor (2011) focused on the implication of youth Unemployment on Democracy in Nigeria. Furthering the discussion, Uddin and Uddin (2013) dwells on Causes, Effects and Solutions to Youth Unemployment in Nigeria. In their studies, (Omoniyi, S.O., Aliyu, D.Adeleke,I.T. and Anyebe, E.E.,2016) concentrated on the impact of youth Unemployment on the mental health of Youth and explored the place of agricultural revolution as panacea while (Lawretta,2021) paid attention to the effect of youth Unemployment on Nigerian society. This study however, seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge by studying the linkage between Youth Unemployment and Emerging Government Policies to sustainable Development. The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which youth unemployment hinders effective development in Nigeria as well as to see policies made by the government in an effort to cushion the youth unemployment to sustain development.

## **Conceptual framework**

### **Youths**

The concept of youth has no global acceptable definition. The range of a youth differs from country to country depending on the country's concern or based on the country concern. Idris (2016) argued that youth is defined in the literature as both an age group and social construct.

Youths are also regarded as those individuals that fall between the ages of 15-24 (United Nations, 1992). Those in this category are in the process of passing through childhood to adulthood. In Nigeria like in other countries such as Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo, Youths are those persons aged 18-35 (UNECA, 2017).

### **Youth Unemployment**

The term youth is vague. Hence, there is no generally agreed definition for it. The definition of youth varies from country to country and culture to culture. The United Nations considers ages between 15 and 24 as youths. Youth is best understood as a period of transition from dependence childhood to adulthood (Akande, 2014). Youth in Nigeria is regarded between the ages of 18 and 35 years. The National Youth Policy document of Federal Republic of Nigeria (2019 edition) stipulates the following characteristics of youths: He must be a Nigerian citizen between the ages of 18 and 35 years old, must have completed secondary school education, tertiary education, or learning a trade, he is looking for employment or already employed, he is leaving parental home because of marriage or being independent (Osakwe, 2013).

Youth unemployment is a situation of young people living without an engaged work to earn a living. The International Labour Organization society considers it as the entire population of able people living as active people but are living without employment and are also willing and available for work (Olawoyin, 2017).

### **Youth Unemployment and Government Policies**

The labour market situation of young people in Nigeria is also affected by developments that go beyond national borders, such as population growth, climate change, migration, innovation and automation.

(Akiri et al. 2016) argued that Unemployment occurs as a result of the insufficiency of jobs to commensurate with the rapid population growth, even those who are already employed are afraid of being rendered unemployed due to the insecurity of the job, economic recession and retrenchment of workers. The early Roman Christians and Islamic writers were largely in favour of population growth without showing concern for the need to balance the number of people with available resources.

National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Though for several decades, the Nigerian government and other stakeholders have been working hard to create more jobs, skill acquisition program and youth empowerment schemes to curb or reduce youth unemployment (Onuba, 2020). But a lot still needs to be done. In most countries globally (including Nigeria), most job creation activities are not eco-friendly thus contributing to climate change challenges.

The case of Nigeria is even surprising given its migration experience, the composition of emigration and the situation of its labor market. Nigeria emigrants have been increasing over time, posting 487,882 to be the eleventh emigrating countries in 2000 and increased to 920,118 in 2010 to be the fourth emigrating countries in SSA. The country moved to the third position in 2015 posting 1,199,115, while South Africa that was in second position with 1,943,099 in 2010 moved to the first position recording 3,142,511 (World Bank, 2018). This shows that the number of Nigerians moving out of the country for better economic condition is increasing. With this discussion so far it called for bold and urgent action by all relevant stakeholders.

Nigeria remains committed to ensuring decent and productive work for young people (NIYEAP 2012). The National Employment Policy, the National Youth Policy and the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy emphasize the centrality and potential of job creation for young people.

At the global level, Nigeria supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and became the first government partner from Africa to make a commitment towards the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth.

In August 2019, Nigeria hosted the Global Youth Employment Forum, organized by the International Labour Organization. The Forum resulted in the Abuja Youth Statement, a strong call by young people for increased and transformative action on youth employment.

Yet finding a decent and productive job when entering the labour market in Nigeria remains a challenging task. Through the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan for the period 2021 to 2024, the Government of Nigeria aims to address this situation by focusing our joint efforts on a number of priority areas for action, areas with high potential for the creation of decent jobs for youth.

The Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) (2009-2011) supported efforts of the Government of Nigeria aimed at creating an enabling environment for youth employment. This Action Plan, which had modest achievements, has outlived its relevance in view of current realities. Moreover, the issues of human capital development and employment generation have been prioritized by the Government in the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Youth Policy (2019) and the National Employment Policy (2017). The revised NIYEAP (2021-2024) aims to address the youth employment challenge in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. The review of the previous Action Plan was an attempt to benefit from lessons learned, build on existing frameworks and strategies, align interventions, create synergies and involve all relevant stakeholders in the identification of key priority areas and interventions on youth employment which includes the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Employment Policy (NEP), the National Youth Policy (NYP), the National Policy on Education, the National Policy on Labour Migration and the National Social Protection Policy

The NIYEAP (2021-2024) also aims to contribute to the achievement of the Job Creation target of the National Youth Policy (2019) to create 3.7 million jobs annually from 2019 to 2023.

The NIYEAP for the period 2021 to 2024 is a confirmation of Nigeria's commitment to tackle youth employment and contribute to national, regional and global development goals. It complements and operates in the context of existing policies, frameworks and strategies, such as the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Youth Policy (NYP), the National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy, the National Employment Policy (NEP), the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF) and the Call for Action. It also aims to guide the work of relevant institutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, civil society, youth organizations and development partners in the promotion of decent jobs for youth, and intends to inform the development of related programmes,

initiatives and budgets in a complementary and sustained manner. The priority sectors of the ERGP also informed the identification of viable economic sectors for job creation for youth including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, digital economy and services. . Therefore in the words of Scarpetta, S., Sonnet, A., Livanos, I., Núñez, I., Riddell, WC, Song X, Maselli, I., (2015) Investing in young people to give them a fair chance in the world of work is more than ever a key political priority in all countries.

### **Policy and Institutional framework**

Employment creation, including for young people, remains a key goal and priority of the Nigerian Government, as reflected in the macroeconomic and sectoral policies and frameworks that have been put in place. Key policies include the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Employment Policy (NEP), the National Youth Policy (NYP)(2019), the National Policy on Education (2019), the National Policy on Labour Migration(2020) and the National Social Protection Policy (2020).

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable Development (SD) is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process.

The key principle of sustainable development underlying all others is the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns into all aspects of decision making. All other principles in the SD framework have integrated decision making at their core (Dernbach J. C., 2003; Stoddart, 2011). It is this deeply fixed concept of integration that distinguishes sustainability from other forms of policy.

Institutionally, government organizations are typically organized into sectoral Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). This works fairly well until the system encounters something very comprehensive and highly integrated in nature, such as sustainable development. In practice, sustainable development requires the integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives across sectors, territories, and generations. Therefore, sustainable development requires the elimination of fragmentation; that is, environmental, social, and economic concerns must be integrated throughout decision making processes in order to move towards development that is truly sustainable.

### **Causes of Youth Unemployment**

The followings are identified as the causes of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria by scholars such as Echebiri (2005), Ayinde (2008), Awobgenle and Iwuamadi (2010), Okafor (2011) and Uddin and Uddin (2013).

### **Lack of Steady Electricity**

Electricity is a fundamental requirement for the operation of industries in any state. It provides the basic need in any factory. However, in Nigeria electricity supply has remained a mirage because in some quarters there is no electricity throughout the day. Where there is the supply, it is either low voltage or not always. This affects the activities of industries that can employ the teeming youth in Nigeria. Industrial concerns that ordinarily should provide employment opportunities for the youths, most times, close down due to non-availability of public power supply. In the word of Uddin and Uddin (2013) lack of electricity discouraged investors from coming into the country let alone investing in Nigeria.

### **The expansion of the Educational System**

Apart from the low quality graduates, the number of higher institutions in Nigeria is increasing day by day and kept producing largenumber of graduates yearly while there is no corresponding demand on ground. There are graduates in professional fields who might be found deficient in skills. In recent past, Nigeria's Minister of Education echoed that, some graduates in Nigeria cannot read and write application (Silas, 2020). This compounds the issue and led to the youth unemployment in Nigeria. Manning and Junankar (1998) argued some years back that, the total number of graduates turned out by higher institutions in Nigeria which were 73,339 in 1986/1987 rose to 131,016 in 1996/1997. With over 150 universities (Both public and private) presently, one could imagine the number of graduates been produced yearly.

### **Corruption**

The high rate of unemployment in the country has being attributed to corruption value chain in high places of authority which is a worrisome situation that urgently require deliberate effort by both government and the private sector to solve (Business Day Dec 2019) .This practice has led to negligence of all other sectors that suppose to provide employment opportunities to the teeming youth in the country. Those who are rich are very few and they control the resources for their benefit.

### **The Effect of Youth Unemployment on Sustainable Development**



As observed from the beginning, Unemployment among youth in Nigeria is very serious and it is increasing day by day. This poses a threat to Nigeria as a country and can hinder any meaningful development. Unemployment poses a threat to Nigeria's existence and development in the following ways. The lack of enough money to meet basic needs such as providing food and shelter is demoralizing for the individual (Lawretta, 2021). The lack of enough money to meet basic needs such as providing food and shelter is demoralizing for the individual (Lawretta, 2021). In addition, an already stressed and worried individual without a job usually finds it difficult to socialize and as a result, individual experiences boredom and tend to devalue life (Dewitte, Rothmann & Jackson, 2012). Doreo (2013) studied the psychological effect of unemployment on individual and he concluded that, it has a damaging impact on the psychology of the individual concern.

According to Okafor (2011), when large number of youth are unemployed their quest to survive may make them to become willing tool in the hands of maverick and disgruntled politicians who may want to use them for anti-social and clandestine political activities. It is worthy of note that these youth are normally provided with all sorts of weapons by politicians which they use against the opponents of their masters. After election, these weapons remain in their hand and as such they resorted to using them in destabilizing the country. This act is alarming and can lead to the destruction of lives and properties which adverse effect on Nigeria's survival and development.

Ejikeme (2014) concluded that Youth Unemployment and poverty in Nigeria has direct link to the security challenges bedeviling the country. Similarly, Muhammad, Inuwa and Oye (2011) observed that Youth Unemployment has an enormous effect (over 65%) on the making of the Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and there exist an inverse relationship between unemployment and gross domestic product. As argued by these scholars, when unemployment increases, gross domestic product falls. This implies that the majority of the population who are jobless cannot contribute to the GDP due to the fact that they have nothing doing.

### **Theoretical framework**

The study adopts the Marxist Theory of Unemployment. The thrust of this theory is that Unemployment is as a result of capitalist setting which was based on capitalist exploitation of wage labour. Karl Marx, in this theory, accepts as true that unemployment is inherent within

the unstable capitalist system and periodic crises of mass unemployment are to be expected. However, capitalism, he asserts, unfairly manipulates the labour market by perpetuating unemployment which lowers labourers' demand for fair wages. In other words, workers are marched against one another at the service of increasing profits for owners. In Marx's conception, the only way out is for the less privilege to wage war against the system thereby overthrowing the system and establish a new setting.

Applying this theory to this study one can understand that in Nigeria the political elites manipulate the masses through subjecting them to abject poverty so that youth can always be a ready tool to be used during elections.

### **Methodology and data Analysis**

This study is qualitative one that utilized secondary data as such published materials, journal articles, government publications were used. The sourced data were analyzed by the use of content analysis.

### **Discussion of Findings**

From the study, it has been understood that Youth are the backbone of any society that supposed to play a vital role in the development of their society. In Nigeria, Youth being the energetic and strong section of the society remain without job and this has serious consequences on her existence and development.

It has been discovered by this study that the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria include low quality of education, increasing number of higher institutions without corresponding job opportunities, corruption, and lack of steady electricity supply among others. The study found out that Youth unemployment can result in disintegrating and destroying the Nigerian state and also retarded her development. The study also discovered that government has made some level of effort to pursue policies that would ameliorate the unemployment of the teeming youths.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that Nigeria's one of the major challenges is Youth Unemployment. For decades, the country has been bedevilled with this issue despite many attempts by governments at all levels. The study concurs with that of Obele (2019) that unemployment had negatively impacted on economic growth in Nigeria. In view of the consequence of youth's unemployment, the destructive activities by youth such as involving in insurgency,

kidnapping, political thuggery among others as discovered by this study agreed with the findings of (Lawretta 2022).

### **Recommendations**

Government must ensure that the educational system becomes standardized through providing essential facilities needed by our higher institutions to enable them produce skilled graduates. School curriculum should be structured in such a way that graduates should have entrepreneurship skills that they can rely upon after graduation without necessarily relying on government after graduation.

Corresponding job opportunities should be provided by government. This can be done through providing enabling environment for private individuals to establish industries and by government directly establishing factories. There should be government policies to ensure steady electricity supply as without it, industries cannot flourish let alone employing the youths.

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