

Tackling Youth Unemployment and Under-Employment in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Recommendations to Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies



Background

It is now generally known that youth unemployment has reached an epidemic proportion in Nigeria, and is currently one of the most serious issues challenging social development in the country. The World Bank defines youth unemployment as “the share of the labour force ages 15-24 without work but available for seeking employment”. Nigeria is a predominantly youthful population, with approximately 60% of its people being less than 30 years old. Recent data from the National Office of Statistics indicate that up to 12 million of Nigeria’s employable youth are unemployed. In January 2015, McKinsey and Company estimated that up to 50% of Nigerian youth are unemployed. In the same year, the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) reported that up to 80% of Nigerian youth are unemployed. Among those employed a significant proportion are not earning wages that will enable them attain decent livelihood. Despite the rising economic prosperity of the country as reported by the FOS, and increases in the enrolment of youth in secondary and tertiary education, it is worrisome that youth unemployment remains a nagging issue. If not strategically tackled, youth unemployment remains one of the most crucial social time-bombs that can undermine the systematic development of the country.



Social Consequences of Youth Unemployment

The consequences of youth unemployment have been poorly researched in Nigeria. Everyone

acknowledges the importance of youths as major players in the labour force, but only a few have considered the consequences of not engaging them in the country’s means of production. Some of the consequences of youth un-employment include the following:

- Un-employment leads to youth restlessness. An idle mind they say is the devil’s workshop. The rising wave of armed robbery, kidnapping and violence throughout the country can be attributed to high rates of unemployment among youth. Indeed, among “returnees” from kidnappers’ dens across the country, the major reason deciphered from kidnappers themselves for their involvement in kidnapping is the high rate of unemployment in the country.
- Youth un-employment has become a gendered issue in Nigeria, with women more likely to be affected than men. The consequences of unemployment in women are also more severe than in men, with women more likely to suffer untold hardship, social marginalisation, sexual exploitation and sexual violence as a result of poverty that emanates from un-employment.
- Youth are the most active and virile part of any population. Their exclusion from the labour force is a major contributor to under-development as the most active part that should be leading developmental agenda are left idling away in social isolation.

Causes of youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Some of the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria include the following:

- Increasing youth population with only the fittest able to cope with the declining job opportunities.
- High degree of geographical mobility among youth – the promise of high-paying jobs in urban areas have not always materialised for the majority of Nigerian youth.
- Lack of employable skills among youth – with falling standards of tertiary education and deficiency in technical education
- Non-involvement of youth in decision-making processes. The doctrine is that Nigerian youth can vote (and be used as political thugs) but they cannot be voted for.
- Wrong perception among policy makers and the youth themselves that unemployment in the formal sector is the main cause of youth unemployment
- The pervading high rate of corruption and impunity in Nigeria which reduces youth access to the nation’s resources from the extractive industries and other sources of wealth.

Table: National Youth Unemployment figures by Gender and Geography, 2008-2012

Year	% of Unemployed Youth that are female	% of unemployed Youth that are in rural areas
2008	58.5	54.7
2009	57.8	50.8
2010	54.5	47.6
2011	50.9	60.0
2012	55.4	53.3

Source: Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), 2013

Lack of Political Will – As Main Driver of Youth Unemployment

Governments have often shown limited political will and understanding of the importance in focussing on reducing the high level of youth unemployment in the country. While many recognise that there is a problem, not many have developed strategic approaches for tackling unemployment in youth. Yet, the blame game continues. Youth are blamed for rising sectorial tension, for social malfeasance and political savagery, yet many governments often fail to secure a fundamental understanding of the true nature of the problem.

When governments are challenged on youth unemployment some have pushed back saying for example that it is not the responsibility of government to create jobs. Surely, it may not be the responsibility of government alone, but governments must lead the way and mobilise all stakeholders within their domains to prioritize skill building and employment for young people. Prioritising youth development and employment is one of the most important dividends this country can gain in its current effort to consolidate democratic practice.



Recommendations for Tackling Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

- Governments at all levels – Federal, States and Local Governments – must be encouraged to prioritize youth development, and develop strategic plans of action for dealing with youth development. Such a strategic plan should begin with a formative research to identify the specific issues associated with youth unemployment in the specific locality. All stakeholders able to deal with the problem should be involved in the development of the strategic plan and if possible a form of community conversation should be organised as part of the process. Stakeholders to be involved include government MDAs, private sector organizations, non-governmental/community-based organizations, religious organizations and community leaders.
- We are aware that State Governments such as Nassarawa, Ekiti, Ondo, Imo, Abia and Kano States have developed and are implementing various forms of youth strategic plans. Other states should be encouraged to do the same.
- Going forward, all governments – Federal, States and Local Governments – should develop relevant policies for engaging youth in all sectors of development. Indeed, youth development should be positioned as a credible assessment tool for measuring the performance of governance at all levels.
- Governments should endeavour to keep relevant data on the level of youth unemployment in their domains. This would allow for planning and effective policy formulation. Indeed, States can open a register for unemployed youth (as was done 2 years ago in Edo State), and encourage youths in the register to indicate their preferred job opportunities in the register. This would help in identifying skills development options that would meet the needs and current expectations of youth.
- Educational opportunities should include the training of youth to possess skills that are congruent with the real labour market demands. Curricular need to be improved at the tertiary, secondary and technical education levels to ensure that this happens.
- Youth need to be involved in political decision-making. An affirmative action, whereby a proportion of key positions are

reserved for youth (especially young women) in Nigeria's political firmament will do the trick.

- Special credit and loan schemes should be made available to enable young Nigerians secure loans to set up small to medium scale enterprises. This should include the integration of entrepreneurship into teaching curricular at all levels of the educational system in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Promoting youth gainful employment is the most important strategy for promoting social harmony and reducing the present high level of social tension and violence in Nigeria. Governments at all levels should endeavour to prioritize youth employment as an important ingredient and signpost of development, without which Nigeria's quest for true greatness may not materialise.

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Grounded in a deep love of humanity and a belief in equality and dignity for all people, WHARC works to improve the reproductive health and social wellbeing of women and adolescents in Africa so they can lead productive, fulfilling lives and provide a healthy future for their children. Through its cutting edge research, WHARC educates women, youth, community gatekeepers and policymakers about sexual and reproductive health, and advocates for policy change at the local, state and federal level. WHARC also provides current and effective reproductive health services to women and adolescent girls in Africa.

Conflict of Interest: None

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