

Youth Empowerment: A Means To Reduce Unemployment In Nigeria.

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Abstract

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is becoming a source of worry for the government and society at large. Youth empowerment is an enterprise that helps to re-engineer the potentials and energies for peace and stability in order to decrease the rate of poverty, unemployment, and criminality. The aim of empowerment programmes is to provide education, employment assistance, health, housing referrals, and support services for citizens who are in disadvantaged positions due to incarceration, poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS infection, and/or involvement in the criminal justice system. This review paper was undertaken to keep us informed of the overview of youth empowerment from inception of democratic rule, approaches geared towards reduction of unemployment, problems encountered in youth empowerment programs from successive government and suggest possible strategies of empowering the youth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Empowerment; Nigeria; Reduction; Unemployment; Youth.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

A youth is referred to as a period of life coming between childhood and maturity. These groups of people are the able-bodied male and female who are intelligent and independently minded and can make an impact on every society by their will and independence of mind (Unini, 2020). In Nigeria, a youth is one under the age of 18 to 30 years (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2019). According to Olusola *et al.* (2016), youthful age is

between ages 1 – 45 years, the most viable stage in the life of humans. If individuals at this stage of development are not occupied by positive activities, the tendencies to take to negative vices will be extremely high.

Youth empowerment is allowing the voice of the youth to be heard and putting it into consideration during decision making. It involves giving children and young people the opportunity to take charge of their lives. This is achieved by addressing their state of affairs and taking action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their perception through their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Nigeria is seen as the most populated nation in the African continent, she is blessed with abundant human and natural resources spread throughout the country. Despite the fact that the nations are endowed with these resources, Nigeria is still struggling to be developed and be a power to be reckoned with in the community of nations. The inability to empower majority of Nigerian youth to contribute to national development has led to incessant increase in poverty, armed robbery, militancy in the Niger Delta region and Boko Haram turbulences in the Northern region (Olusola *et al.*, 2016).

Unemployment is a situation where a person who is energetically looking for an occupation is not capable to bargain for one. Unemployment is one of the main problem destroying Nigeria's population today and it is mostly suffered by the youth. The National Bureau of Statistics stated that Nigeria's youth unemployment reached an all-time high of 29.7% in 2018 with about 13.2 million youth becoming unemployed. As a result, most youth lack the means to cater for their necessities (Ifatimehin *et al.*, 2020). The rate of youth unemployment is disturbing and many of the adolescents have taken to various social indecencies to outlive. A typical resultant effect in recent times is the allurements of youth by insurgent groups and criminal minded association via financial aids with the ulterior motive of using them to perpetuate their dastardly acts.

The objective of this review paper entails; the overview of youth empowerment from democratic rule, approaches towards reduction of unemployment, problems encountered in youth empowerment programs and possible ways of empowering the youth in Nigeria.

2. Overview Of Youth Empowerment Programme Since The Inception Of Democratic Rule In 1999

Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999 after several years of military interregnum. General election was conducted on the 27th of February 1999 to welcome in a democratic dispensation, and the former military leader, Rtd General Olusegun Obasanjo was chosen and finally sworn in as the president on 29th May 1999. When he assumed duty, he restated his earlier campaign promises to modify the armed forces, decrease official corruption, erect strong democratic foundations and lessen poverty. President Obasanjo's government took a further step in reducing poverty and unemployment among the youth as well as empowering them with the necessary skills leading him to speedily introduce a scheme that paid N3, 500 per month to 200,000 Nigerians. The beneficiaries were evenly chosen from the thirty six states of the country, with Abuja inclusive. Their major task was to sweep and mend roads in Nigeria (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2021). The participants' activities opposed the objective of the scheme and was met with stiff disapproval and criticism by well-meaning Nigerians. They were exactly blamed of careless road maintenance which led to the government replacing the scheme with another programme called the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The National Poverty Eradication

Programme (NAPEP) was designed to focus on youth employment, rural infrastructures, social welfare services, and conservation (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2021). The National Poverty Eradication Programme was created in 2001 with the goals to train youths in vocational trades, create empowerment in the automobile industry, support internships, and provide micro-credit facilities. However, Obikeze *et al.* (2015) argued that the programme failed to achieve its major goals even after ten years of implementation in 2010.

Late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua, on the assumption of office on 29th May 2007 was faced with high incidences of vandalism of oil pipelines, militancy, and kidnapping in the Niger Delta area of Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, and Ondo states, (Ajibola, 2015). Niger Delta region is blessed with a large deposit of "Black Gold" (oil and gas) while the proceeds from these natural resources still rank number one source of revenue in Nigeria till 2021. The root cause of the crisis in the region is blamed on negligence and nonchalant attitude of the government, her agencies, and that of multinational oil companies operating in the region (Ajibola, 2015). The deeds of these oil companies disrupted the agreement they contracted on environmental protection and social responsibility which subsequently resulted to the dilapidation of the environment while their youths were left to wallow in poverty. The laxity by these companies and government led to the pollution of fishing and farming business which is their means of livelihood over the years ("Amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A critical appraisal," 2017). The resulting outcome was widespread corresponding attacks on oil facilities in the region by youths; the employees in the oil companies were sometimes kidnapped while some died in the process (Ajibola, 2015).

The late former President Umar Musa Yar'Adua in an attempt to limit the intense clash in the region, adopted the recommendation of the technical committee on Niger Delta to grant amnesty to militants in the region. The programme had two phases: The disarmament and Demobilization phases. The program was targeted at de-escalation of the conflict in the region as well as rehabilitate, train, and reintegrates the combatants, who are mostly youth. Regrettably, ("Amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A critical appraisal," 2017) observes that the programme has not impacted youth empowerment in the Niger Delta region. Ajibola (2015) further argued that though the programme had reduced the rate of attacks on oil facilities by angry youths, it has not reduced the poverty and unemployment rate, especially among the young ones. Also, the government of former President Goodluck Jonathan, who replaced his boss Umar Musa Yar'Adua after his death on 5th May 2010, came up with a good number of youth empowerment programmes among which were Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Youth Enterprise with Innovation

in Nigeria (YouWin), Graduate Internship Scheme, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programmes (SURE-P) and other schemes aimed at empowering young Nigerians. The scholars picked Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment programme for analysis under Jonathan's era due to the level of publicity and attention the scheme enjoyed throughout the time his administration lasted.

Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programmes (SURE-P) is a youth empowerment programme introduced by the Nigerian government under Goodluck Jonathan's administration. The scheme was funded from savings following the removal of fuel subsidies. SURE-P was formally started in October 2012 following the declaration of the subsidy removal on Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS). SURE-P was given the work of creating a database of unemployed youth and providing work for the unemployed graduates using internship programme. It was effected by the Ministry of Finance in the federal level to provide short employment opportunities for young unemployed Nigerians in all the states of the federation. The beneficiaries are offered job opportunities to sharpen their skill as well as enable them to gain some work experience (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2021). During the first phase of the programme, 50,000 young Nigerians were slated to undergo the training while an additional 100,000 were to join in the second phase (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2021). Literatures on SURE-P showed that the programme has the capability of reducing poverty and unemployment in Nigerians if the effort had been channeled towards creating an enabling environment through the provision of basic amenities in both rural and urban areas (Okeke and Ngoradi, 2017). The World Bank however (as cited in Macrotrends.net, 2021), stated that unemployment among Nigerian youth between the ages of 15 to 24 in 2016 stood at 12.48 %. In another report by Okonkwo *et al.* (2021), while quoting Fitch International, asserted that Nigeria recorded her worst poverty rate in 2016; jumping from 60 % in 2015 to 72 % in the second quarter of 2016. This is a strong indication that the SURE-P scheme has not equitably mitigated the rate of poverty and unemployment of Nigerian youth.

The current President, Muhammad Buhari, a retired general in the Nigerian army and a one - time Military Head of State from 1983 to 1985, took over office as a civilian president on 29th May 2015. He defeated the then incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, in a fiercely and tensely contested presidential election. His government won the election based on the conviction that his predecessor failed to satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerians. He was seen as a saviour who was sent to save Nigerians from the scourge of poverty, unemployment, corruption, disease, poor state of infrastructures and other facilities that make life easy. His government, during the electioneering campaigns, before the 2015 general election, promised to create three million jobs every year; to create social welfare programmes where a minimum of five thousand naira (N5,

000.00) would be paid to twenty-five million poorest Nigerians; establish youth empowerment programme that would employ 740, 000 graduates in the whole country including the federal capital territory; to pay a monthly allowance to discharge and unemployed Youth Corps members for twelve months and numerous promises according to Okonkwo *et al.* (2019).

3. Problems Encountered In Youth Empowerment Programs In Nigeria

Youth empowerment scheme has its own specific problems like every other programs in Nigeria are experiencing which may include the following according to Musa and Idris, 2019.

a. Absence of government assurance: The rates of unemployment have incited poverty in the country thereby leading to increase the crime rate and fierceness among youth in the nation. Statistics shows that the rate of unemployment from 2007 to 2014 is frightening within the country; the record also indicates a speedy rise from 13.1 % in 2000, rose to 19.7 % in 2009 and 23.9 % in 2011 to 28.5 % in 2013 up to 30 % in 2014 respectively. Many graduates are left in the street of Nigeria wandering about without any job to earn a living. The government has what takes to provide job but is reluctant leaving many competent persons in poverty with no one to care for them. Most of the government strategy agendas on youth empowerment and poverty alleviation are not accurate and unproductive.

b. Exploitation: Corruption is usually recognized as having adversely affected previous poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria and as a result of this, it has eaten so intensely into the administration; the leaders, who put their personal interest at heart while disregarding the large interest of multitudes in the country vandalize the public funds that were reserved for developing projects are being misappropriated daily. They mishandle and steal public funds that are intended for lack related programs. There are numerous issues involved with bad governance in Nigeria, use of wrong policies applied from the western countries and implementing wrong policies which has a straight effect on the general welfare of the citizens. In any disparity as well has contributed to the high level of crime in the nation.

c. Sluggishness: this is seen to be public illness which almost many Nigerians youth suffer today, especially those from rich households. They are not prepared to work towards their self-empowerment and development but they just want to be relaxed. Most youth are reliant on on their parents or relatives which indirectly discourage self-confidence among the majority of the youth thereby hindering youth empowerment Scheme in the nation.

d. Reduced Educational Growth Structure: World Bank stated that “education is vital to improvement”. Education plays an important role in decreasing poverty across the globe. It works towards promoting economic growth, national efficiency and modernization, and principles of democracy and social interrelation. The high

level of illiteracy among the population is so alarming that need a serious government and nongovernmental attention within the country. The education system in Nigeria can be considered as a disappointment when compared to other nations in the universe. This right to education has been denied to many Nigerians, of which many of them can be considered imperceptible to the public now. This denial of education applies more to females than males because they are considered substandard sex. This has greatly contributed to the problems of youth empowerment in Nigeria as most of the youth do not attain any educational requirement.

e. Regular Alteration of Governmental Strategies: Lack of continuity among community the established order has significantly affected the success of youth empowerment in Nigeria. The common alteration of governmental strategies has created more problems than results to youth empowerment programs in the country, particular changes on poverty alleviation policies which in no small measure affect the production outcomes of most of the government curriculums on youth advance.

4. Possible Ways Of Empowering The Youth In Nigeria

a. Providing Advanced Education

Education, as thought, is the bedrock of any society hence, any society that wants to achieve prominence must clinch to education. So, access to advanced education has led to the increase of economic growth, and sociopolitical development of any country. Allowing Nigerians' youth access to advanced education by creating higher institutions across the nation and also giving the youth scholarship will help them to face directly the difficulty task of leadership in the future. Many Nigerian youths are seeking admission in foreign schools for their educational needs as a result of poor quality of education.

b. Providing of Practical and Occupational Education

Youth empowerment with respect to the educational aspect involves capacity development. Practical and occupational education is the new trend to socioeconomic development of any visionary country, and such country will exhaust virtually all its capital resources towards ensuring that its populations, particularly the youths are trained in practical and occupational education with a view to equip them in manufacturing and money-making activities, since such activities are what sustain industrialized nation. Thus, going by this point, the Nigerian youths are endowed in practical and occupational education through Innovation Enterprise Institutions, which of course, are substitute to advanced formal education.

c. Provision of Special Scholarship Programmes

Special grants are should be presented to the Nigerian youth for novelty and developmental growth. This type of youth empowerment, in most cases, are overseas training, where Nigerian youth will obtain knowledge and expertise for invention and developmental growth from highly rated world class universities, sometimes, the programmees demand for transference of knowledge after study.

d. Increase Budgetary Allocation for Education

Youth empowerment will not be possible if education is out of place. Doubling funds allocated to education or youth empowerment by the government is another way of engaging Nigerian youths. Inclusive of those in higher tertiary education, alternative formal higher education, technical and vocational education, whether skills acquisition and capacity development, whichever form of education or empowerment.

e. Making Grants Available for Business Development

The government can give out funds, such as business development incentives or grants for young Nigerian business entrepreneurs, mostly in the creative industry to encourage the youths who are engaged in small and medium scale businesses for their means of support. Believing that increasing these businesses with great anticipation of gaining huge return on investment will increase the socio-economic activities in the society thereby leading to the nation's industrialization.

f. Creation of Hundreds of Thousands of Jobs

Giving capital grants of millions of naira to young entrepreneurs by the government to help them grow their business could help in creating hundreds of thousands of jobs where the youth can be gainfully employed as a way of empowering them and taking them away from the street.

g. Engaging Youth in Construction and Rehabilitation of Infrastructure

Employing Nigerian youths to partake in the construction of social infrastructure and economic infrastructure, as well as the rehabilitation of these infrastructures can be used to empower the youth. Nigeria relying on the ability of the local content, could also help to empower its youth by engaging them in the community services.

h. Graduate Internship Program

The graduate internship program is one of the key ways, the youths could be engaged. It makes provision for placement with companies that are capable to improve the skills of the Nigerian youths, as well as advances their changes of being retained by these companies. Therefore, graduate internship program has indeed being useful in empowering the youths of the country.

i. Housing Sector Revolution

A selected mortgage financial institutes can be used by Nigerian government through federal government house sector revolution to empower the youth by permitting them to avail themselves a chance of possessing their own houses at a suitable and favorable environment.

j. Engaging Youth in Governance

The Nigerian youths can also be enabled to participate in the country's system of governance, where their voices are heard, and at the same time integrated in the making of policies as well as, in the corridors of power (Athanasius, 2018).

5. Approaches Towards Reducing Unemployment

Different approaches can be employed to reduce unemployment and empower the youth. They include:

a. Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education focuses on developing real-world skills that will help students to lead exceptional lives in a rapidly changing world. Entrepreneurship education teaches students crucial life skills. Entrepreneurship education is a significant way of helping entrepreneurs obtain resources, improve innovative ability and innovative personality, and construct multi-level learning channels for entrepreneur by incorporating different knowledge and value systems. Wealth is being created by enterpreneurs through initiation new business undertakings, provision of goods and services in addition to lightening poverty within the local groups and the country at large (OECD, 2019). Nigeria is seen as one of the largest economies in Africa and with youth

unemployment population at 14.2% (World Bank, 2020). The use of entrepreneurial arrangement, via coaching, teaching and information, has been accepted as a desired way to incorporate the youth population into the labour market for economic development (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Baluku *et al.*, 2019 and Jabeen *et al.*, 2017).

b. Skill Development in the Informal Sector

Skill Development is the process of learning to do something to earn a living or survive. There are different types of skills one can acquire; examples include fine artists, mechanics, potters and vulcanizers etc. The International Labor Organization (ILO) projected that 61 % of the worldwide working populace (about two billion people) in 2018, earns their living in the informal economy (ILO 2018a). Informality exists in countries at all levels of socio-economic development and encompasses a wide range of jobs and economic activities with no work-based social protection: from street vending, home-based work in global and domestic value chains, picking of waste and home-based work to temporary contract job. 2017 saw Nigeria record its first full year of growth after experiencing its first recession in 25 years. Although this regaining fetched a rise in commercial self-confidence, it still brought about concerns as the GDP growth attained was less than national populace development. This concern persists even as the IMF projected 2.1% growth for 2018, which falls below the population growth forecast of 2.6%. The growing population, together with high underemployment and joblessness which rated (combined 40%), resulted to an increase in the number of employment seekers in 2018. Furthermore, it led to a rise in the total number of people who look to the informal sector for economic existence. The Nigerian Informal Sector (IS) has really contributed immensely to the Nigerian economy, bringing into account an important help in employment and national GDP. IMF noted that the Nigerian informal sector contributed for ~65% of Nigeria's 2017 GDP (Arndt, 2018).

These associations provided support to informal entrepreneurs by identifying the skills need of their workers, offered meaningful insights for elaborating the training curricula, selected participants to the training and contributed to its delivery, monitored the quality of apprenticeships and undertook in some cases the testing and certification of the developed skills. Finally, Community Learning Centers were also very popular in some countries (especially in Asian and Pacific countries) where they were very successful in providing education, training, and skills development; community information and resource services; community development activities; and coordination and networking at local level (Bardak and Rosso 2019).

c. Information Acquisition on Job Opportunities and Development

Information is a valuable good that fosters efficient allocation of limited resources. However, gathering information is not costless. Rather, it requires expending resources taken away from other uses. If the party that gathers information cannot fully appropriate the returns to information, then information can be undersupplied. At the same time, information is often used as a strategic instrument to influence and persuade decision makers,

which creates additional stimuli to produce information. It is therefore natural to inquire whether in the presence of persuasion motives, information will be produced efficiently, overproduced or remain undersupplied (Migrow and Severinov, 2021).

Developed abilities are gifts and capability usually acquired through schooling or practice. These abilities could be soft (communication) or hard/ technical (computer programming). Acquiring skills enables one to accomplish the roles of his job at an expert level and be able to take on other roles in his industry. This is achieved through rehearsal and commitment and by searching for training or placement, following on-the-job training, reading of related books, and taking lessons. With this in view, the present role can be progressed and possibly find new career chances. This pathway of advancement can also help to keep someone current when changing work locations and practices. A number of benefits can be attributed to skills acquisition, it includes:

- a) It builds self-confidence and gives a sense of accomplishment
- b) It creates a robust resume
- c) It emerges a progress and tractability attitude
- d) It expands your work tasks
- e) It increases your knowledge speediness
- f) Creates an option for elevation

In addition to learning an explicit program connected to your work, there are other IT skills one can develop himself on, it includes Analytics, Coding languages, Collaboration, Critical thinking, Multi-tasking, Project management, Wireless modems and routers and written and oral communication.

d. Career Advancement

Career advancement is the sequence of happenings or the on-going/lifelong process of increasing one's career which includes describing new goals frequently and obtaining assistances to achieve them. Career advancement regularly denotes handling one's career in an intra-organizational or inter-organizational scenario. It includes teaching novel skills, moving to sophisticated job tasks, changing career change in the same organization, moving to a diverse group, or opening one's own trade. Career advancement is directly connected to the areas and purposes set by a person. It starts with self-actualization and self-assessment of one's welfares and competences. The interests are then coordinated with the obtainable choices. It is important that the individual train himself to attain the skills required for the option or career path he chose. Lastly, after acquiring the anticipated capability, he must execute to attain the areas and objectives established by him. Career

advancement is rightly connected to an individual's development and fulfilment and therefore should be managed by the individual not the employer. Career advancement enables an individual grow personally and professionally. Knowledge of new abilities like leadership, time management, good governance, communication management, team management etc. also helps in developing and shaping the career of an employee (MBA Skool Team, 2021).

e. Career Internship

An internship is defined as 'any official or formal program to deliver useful knowledge for learners in a career or profession, using Dictionary.com. More specifically, The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) describe an internship as "a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting" (NACE, 2018). These internships predominately offer an opportunity for undergraduate, graduate students and those changing careers to receive practical experience to their selected field of study or a novel profession, whether they are paid or unpaid. Mount Holyoke College in unification with the NACE Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition (Townsley *et al.*, 2017) discovered that when students' grade point average are combined with number of internships, it holds a positive primary career outcomes either in safeguarding a first job post-graduation or entering a graduate program within 6 months than when compared with those who did not secure an internship. Students who are privileged to participate in two or more internships are likely to find work within 6 months of completion. Building strong networks was one of the other practical aspects of doing an internship. These networks have helped students secure jobs as well as switch jobs that offered better prospects and career progression. A significant number of respondents also indicated that the internship experience helped them realize that their choice of major and subsequent career choice was indeed the right option for them. By doing the internship, they had a much better idea about the skill requirements of the job, which helped them make the career choice (Galbraith and Mondal, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This review paper highlights the problems encountered in youth empowerment programs from successive government and suggest possible strategies of empowering the youth and reducing unemployment in Nigeria. Youth empowerment is really needed in our contemporaries to help reduce the problem of unemployment, reduction in poverty and criminality and also contribute to the national development of our country.

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