

Youth Unemployment Challenge as A Potential Source Of Insecurity In Nigeria

Mohammed Dauda

Department of Business Administration Yobe State University P.M.B. 1144 Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author: Mohammed Dauda; Email: mdauda47@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper on youth unemployment challenge as a potential source of insecurity in Nigeria is intended to highlight the problem at hand and also give possible policy alternatives that can alleviate it. The paper will also inform key policy makers and implementers about the interests of the young generation and highlight the rationale for including them in the country's national development priorities. The paper concluded that youth unemployment and underemployment continue to impose heavy social and economic costs and result in the loss of opportunities for economic growth in Nigeria and Africa at large. The study recommended that government should formulate a policy that ensures that every financial institution operating in the country establishes a facility that can enable youth entrepreneurs to access business loans at low interest rates. There should be standard recruitment procedures embedded in a given Government policy.

Keywords: Unemployment, Youth, Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities are widely considered, both popularly and among academic and policy discussants, to be significant factors aggravating conflict and increasing the chances of young people drawn into violence as both perpetrators and victims. Unemployment increases individuals' vulnerability to be mobilized both by rebel movements and urban gangs, evidence consistently points to the lack of alternative sources of livelihood as a motive for youth joining such groups [1]. Consistent with global trends, there is in Nigeria evidence of a close correlation between youth's unemployment and rising armed violence [2]. The World Bank identifies the increasing magnitude of youth unemployment as one of two key indicators of the decline welfare status of Nigerians in recent times [3]. High unemployment in Nigeria is associated with a growing gap between rich and poor, and there is evidence that such polarization in itself reflects and fuels structural grievances. The deepening crisis of security apparent across several regions, as well as the riots and violence which followed both the 2011 elections and the government's announcement in January 2012 of dramatic reductions in fuel subsidies, have drawn the attention of the public, as well as policy makers, to the risks associated with high levels of youth un- and under-employment. Nigerian community leaders and government officials have frequently made such links when speaking of their own society and local communities. Two of the prominent traditional rulers in northern Nigeria, the shehu of Borno and the sultan of Sokoto, have linked youth unemployment to post election violence and the activities of Jama'atu Ahli Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-

Jihad (JAS) (commonly known as Boko Haram) respectively.

OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON UNEMPLOYMENT

Given Nigeria's large population, which is growing at just under 3% per year, 4.5 million new jobs are needed every year to absorb new entrants to the labour market [4]. This demand represents an enormous challenge to government, yet without concerted progress towards it as a target, youth unemployment will present an ever-growing obstacle to development as well as enlarging the pool of potential recruits for violent actors. Successive governments have invested substantially in employment generation and economic empowerment programmes. Often these programmes are explicitly framed as interventions that will reduce levels of violence, through providing young people with larger stake in society. Example of these programmes include, Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme, the Agriculture Transformation Action Plan, the University Entrepreneurship Development Programme, as well as the integrated Youth Development Initiative. Notwithstanding the number of such schemes and the resources that have been poured into them, the fact that both youth unemployment and levels of insecurity continue to grow in Nigeria raise questions as to the overall quality and impact of programming in this area, given their often expressed intention to reduce violence. While the potential for employment and income generation programmes in conflict settings to reduce violent conflict is globally established, the approach adopted in delivering these is

also known to be critical to success given the link between perceived inequality in access to economic opportunities and conflict[5].

YOUTH AS “CHANGE AGENTS”

Although the potential of youth as “agents of change” and “future leaders” was stressed by policy-makers and practitioners, and many of the youth programmes were undertaken with the recognition of this potential, the interventions themselves did not reflect this thinking. Even though all interviewees strongly criticised prevailing economic and political systems and conditions, none of the youth programmes reviewed dealt with imparting the skills to challenge these conditions to address their own problems. Rather, there appeared to be implicit encouragement to find the means of coping within the system and to accept the impossibility of change or transformation. This further limits the possibility of young people to experience and use democratic means as a way of transforming their social and economic milieu through such programmes.

CAUSES OF THE HIGH YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AT A GLANCE

The major causes of a high youth unemployment rate are lack of employable skills, lack of access to resources like land and capital, lack of focus by the existing programs on the informal sector and agriculture, overemphasis on experience, lack of apprenticeship schemes, negative attitudes by the youth towards work especially in agriculture, lack of an comprehensive employment policy and negative cultural attitudes such as gender discrimination et cetera.

Generally, the high youth unemployment rate in Nigeria and Africa at large can be attributed to the slow economic growth and small formal labour markets, high population growth rate, lack of sufficient experience and skills, lack of decent work, the rigid education system, rural-urban migration, limited social networks, youth’s limited access to capital support systems et cetera.

A number of analysts believe that the poor Government policies are partly to blame for these youth problems. In recent times the Government has come up with a number of solutions to youth problems and these are embedded in policies such as the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowering Programme (SURE-P), The Youth Enterprises with innovation in Nigeria Programme (YouWIN) et cetera. The poor attitude towards certain jobs that both young people in employment and unemployed ones exhibit is also partly responsible for the youth problems.

The incidence and causes of violence differ significantly among Nigeria’s 36 states. Some states have proven remarkably resilient, while others have

seen violence erupting much more frequently. A fundamental problem relates to the ethnic and religious make up of a state, and distinction often drawn between so-called ‘indigene’ and ‘settler’ populations – groups originally from other parts of Nigeria who may however have lived in the area for generations. There is wide spread systematic discrimination against non-indigenes, preventing them from access to government jobs, education scholarships and other services. As indigenous status maps on to ethnic and religious differences, states with sharp inter-group divisions become particularly vulnerable to violence.

CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment has social as well as economic consequences for young people. Unemployed young people are forced to find alternatives to generate income, including activities in the survival-type informal sector and, in extreme cases, criminal activity. Urban unemployment is further exacerbated by rural-urban migration. Rural migrants believe that more jobs and social opportunities are available in urban areas, but once in the cities they find themselves without a job and with limited social networks. Trapped and discouraged by bleak job prospects, some turn to the sex, criminality and drug industries to survive. Youth joblessness also implies missed opportunities in the human resources to produce goods and services. In addition, smaller tax revenues result from a smaller tax base for income tax and indirect taxes such as the value added tax. A further implication is related to security. An increase of one percentage point in the ratio of people ages 15-29 to people ages 30-54 increases the likelihood of conflict such as civil unrest or war by 7 per cent. Higher crime rates also have a direct economic cost in terms of loss of foreign direct investment. The youth now lack the capacity to access health services, lack leadership and management skills are prone to poverty, because they are unable to engage in meaningful and gainful employment. Many of them have also resorted to corrupt tendencies in order to quickly go up the ladder of success. To them, the meager sums that they earn are a justification for this form of behavior which is a vice that Nigeria needs to get rid of. The youth have also lost faith in the capacity of their country to offer them the necessary protection against exploitative employers. Long standing sources of instability are being aggravated by the threat from the militant Islamic group commonly known as ‘Boko Haram’. Efforts of state security forces deployed in response to

INTERVENTIONS

Kemper distinguishes between three main types of interventions addressing youth issues in situations of violent conflict: rights-based, economic, and socio-political approaches[6]. To some extent, these are “prototypes” that may in reality overlap to some degree; however, the categorisation remains useful in

understanding different components of youth and conflict work.

Rights-based approaches:

For example as promoted by UNICEF, focus on the protection of children from the negative impacts of conflict, for example, forced recruitment into armed groups. This approach views young people principally as victims and not perpetrators of conflict, or even potential agents of change. Older youths effectively fall between the cracks in the rights-based approaches, as these international legal frameworks only apply to children under the age of 18, so do not cover the wider age cohort. Rights-based approaches have also been criticized for not taking into account young people's differing experiences during conflict and changing self-perception: a young person forcibly recruited into an armed group, for example, after years of fighting may find it difficult, if not impossible, to be reunited with his or her family and be recategorised as a "child."

Economic approaches:

View youths through the lens of "rational agents on the market", and highlight the economic reasons for young people joining violent movements or armed groups. In this analysis, offering a viable and at least equivalent economic alternative to taking up arms should be sufficient for young people to resist that "temptation". According to this approach, unemployed young people are a potential threat to peace processes, and efforts are made to "keep them off the streets" through work-oriented skills training; improved access to microfinance; participation in productive projects; promotion of self-employment or apprenticeships. Supporting young people's need for economic self-sufficiency can enable them to make their own living independently of the family, and realise entrepreneurial creativity. All these are important for a young person's self-esteem, affirmation of his or her place in a society, and transition into adulthood.

Socio-political approaches:

On the other hand, stress that when it comes to democratisation and reconciliation, especially after conflict, the usually largest part of the population should not be left out of the process. In fact, there is much positive potential and creativity in young people that should be harnessed, in this view, for peace building purposes, and young people should be pulled into the mainstream of political processes. This requires support and accompaniment to young people developing and making their voices heard. In other words, youth "peace constituencies" need to be strengthened, in order 'to make an active, socially relevant contribution towards the prevention and peaceful resolution of violent conflicts' Frequently this involves strengthening youth clubs or other types of youth organisations, or involving young people in media initiatives like radio programming

CONCLUSION

As shown above, youth unemployment continues to impose heavy social and economic costs and result in the loss of opportunities for economic growth in Nigeria and Africa at large. A World Bank publication entitled, "*African Development Indicators 2008/2009: Youth and Employment in Africa-the Potential, the Problem, the Promise*", notes that success in addressing youth unemployment in Africa will not be achieved and sustained through fragmented and isolated interventions. Instead, an arching guideline for addressing the youth employment challenge is the need for an integrated strategy for rural development, growth and job creation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide young people with financial facilities

The government should formulate a policy that ensures that every financial institution operating in the country establishes a facility that can enable youth entrepreneurs to access business loans at low interest rates. Sections of youth remain unemployed because despite having the zeal to start up income generating business projects, they lack sufficient funds to facilitate these processes. This would encourage equitable access of finances by young people who seldom have large capital amounts and assets to finance loans intended to build their business enterprises. In countries such as Malaysia, it has been realized that self-employment is a necessary tool in building sustainable economies with potential to absorb the existing labour force.

Tax incentives for companies that provide internship opportunities and create jobs for young people

UNCTAD defines an incentive as "any measurable advantage accorded to specific enterprises or categories of enterprises by (or at the direction) of Government." [8]. Incentives can be fiscal or non-fiscal, direct or indirect. Fiscal incentives include direct 'cash' grants or tax breaks. Non-fiscal incentives can include fast-track approval processes or exemptions from certain regulations. Many youth have failed to become gainfully employed in the formal sector because of their lack of requisite work experience. Many young people at various universities in the country are finding it increasingly difficult to get internship placements with organizations or companies operating in the country. This is because such employers are at liberty to reject or accept their internship applications. Some of these companies argue that they do not possess sufficient funds to run such internship programs. The result is that many young people are denied the opportunity of having hands-on training in their various fields of study. The irony however is that these very employers continue to advertise positions which require applicants to have long term work experience well knowing that only a few young people possess such experience. Young people are therefore unable to apply for these

jobs and thus end up frustrated and develop a negative attitude towards work.

Establish strict recruitment policies

There should be standard recruitment procedures embedded in a given Government policy. These should be strictly followed by both public and private entities. The procedures should ensure that all positions are advertised by employers and that these are offered on merit to the best candidate. Recruitment should be done within a reasonable time. The complaint by many young people today is that academic merit and general credibility have now been shoved to the back in the recruitment process.

The private sector:

The private sector needs to address real and perceived discrimination in its hiring practices: In order to start attracting more young people to private-sector jobs, businesses need to start getting their own house in order. Better understanding is needed by the private sector about the multiple challenges faced by young people in the labour market and in the private sector itself. For this, more dialogue is needed between private-sector bodies, youth organisations and youth leadership, and youth experts. The private sector also needs to reach out to educational institutes to forge partnerships to strengthen curricula that prepare young people for entry into the job market.

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