

A Review of the Problems of Youths' Accessibility to Government- Run Employment and Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of government-run employment and empowerment strategies among the youth in Nigeria. It encapsulates the evolution of those policies and programmes from political independence to date with a view to weigh their impacts. It traced the position of youth as the bedrock of any society and any sustainable development can only be achieved if they are empowered through the provision of employment opportunities. It argued that in spite of the enormous resources sunk into policies to provide more access and equal opportunities, the dream of the Nigerian youth in respect of employment continues to be far from being realized as the rate of unemployment continues to increase at an unprecedented rate. Youth suffer discriminations with respect to gender, rural urban dichotomy, corruption and mismanagement, lack of political will, marginalization from equitable access, etc. It focused an attention on recent efforts at addressing the problems with particular reference to Kano State. It is the thesis of this paper that no sustainable development is attainable if policy recommendations such as expansion of opportunities for empowerment and employment, reductions of poverty both among rural and urban youth, bridging the gap in educational skills, increase wide array of opportunities in the private sector, are not addressed etc. It concluded that as long as more youth are further drifted into the vicious circle of poverty their standards of living will continue to deteriorate, and unless concerted efforts are made to solve such avoidable problems the prospects for youth equitable access to employment will continue to be far from being realized vis a vis sustainable development.

Keywords: *Youth, Employment, Empowerment, Sustainable Development*

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Background to the Study

This paper examines the challenges of government-run employment and empowerment strategies among the youth. It encapsulates the evolution of those policies and programmes from political independence to date with a view to weigh their impacts. It traced the position of youth as the bedrock of any society and any sustainable development can only be achieved if they are empowered through the provision of employment opportunities and education. It argued that in spite of the enormous resources sunk into such action plans to provide more access and equal opportunities the dream of the Nigerian youth in respect of employment continues to be far from being realized as the rate of unemployment continues to increase at an unprecedented rate. Youth suffer discrimination with respect to gender, rural urban dichotomy, corruption and mismanagement, lack of political will, marginalization from equitable access. It focused an attention on recent efforts at addressing the problems with particular reference to Kano State. It is the thesis of this paper that no sustainable development is attainable if policy recommendations such as expansion of opportunities for empowerment and employment, reductions of poverty both among rural and urban youth, bridging the gap in educational skills, increase wide array of opportunities in the private sector, etc are not addressed. It concluded that as long as more youth are further drifted into the vicious circle of poverty their standards of living will continue to deteriorate, and unless concerted efforts are made to solve such problems the prospects for youth equitable access to employment will continue to be far from being realized vis a vis sustainable development.

Statement of the Problem

It was estimated that from 1991 to 2006, the population of Nigerian youth increased from 22.5 million to 30 million. A study by ILO (2004) reveals that youth unemployment increased from 11.7% in 1993 to 14.4% in 2003. Also, it has been observed that youth make up 25% of the global working-age population, but they constitute 43.7% of the unemployed (Onuoha, (2008) cited in Abdullahi, Abdullahi, and Mohammed, 2013). This problem has continued to worsen among the youths over the years thereby resulting to about 70% of the young Nigerians in the statistics of the unemployed with a resultant effect on poverty scourge (Youth Position Paper, 2007). In the same measure, it has also been estimated that more than 80% of the Nigerian youths are unemployed, while about 10% are underemployed Onuoha (2008) cited in Abdullahi, et al (2013). Thus, with very weak economy and high rate of unemployment, poverty scourge has continued unabated, i.e. youth poverty is as a result of high unemployment rate which is a consequence of exclusion from viable economic activities, a scenario Soludo (2006:29) in Abdullahi, et al (2013) termed “the dynasties of poverty.

In a more recent statistical portrayal by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria, the general unemployment rate as at March, 2016 was put at 12.1% which was 10.4% in 2015. Meanwhile, youth unemployment increased to 21.5% from 19% between 2015 to 2016 (NBS, 2016). It should be recalled that interestingly, the country generates new entrants into the labour market each year to the tune of 4.5 million (NBS, 2005 ; Vision 20:2020).

Over the years, various regimes in Nigeria came up with programmes for youth empowerment, through re -orientation, re-education and skills acquisition for self-reliance and sustainable livelihood. In other words, the idea is to create a generation of youth that are sufficiently, functionally skilled, psychologically, educationally and vocationally well equipped with a career focus for sustainable livelihood, i.e. the development of a cadre of

youths that will constitute the vanguard of sustainable human development efforts in all ramifications of societal life activities (Project YES, 2003 in Abdullahi, et al, 2013).

The Nigeria Youth Policy Document cited in Adeleke (2012) defined youths as persons between ages 18 to 35 years (both males and females). These are persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or be already employed. This group of persons would need post-secondary education, employment, and reproductive health information and services (Osakwe, 2013). The youth in any society is/are the future leaders of tomorrow they are the wealth, the power-base and image maker of the nation (Abdullahi, 2008).

Method: In this study, a methodology known as qualitative content analysis was used. To conduct a content analysis on a text, for instance the text, may be coded or broken down into manageable categories on a variety of levels that may include word, word sense, phrase, sentence or theme and then examined, Krippendorf (2004) cited in Bello (2014). The method emanates from documentary research, which allows researchers the use of documents (past and present) in order to reflect on contemporary issues. Documents, in this context, are seen to mean physically embodied texts, which are written. This methodology allowed the researcher to manipulate the documents and develop themes and sub themes for the purpose of analysis and interpretation on addressing the challenges of youth employment for sustainable development, therefore, available documents that are relevant to the problem were reviewed (journals, newspapers, periodicals, records) though not exhaustive due to constraints. (Bello, 2014).

Government Run Employment Policies and Programmes

a. Prior to the Third Development Plan (1975-1980), there was no articulated policy on unemployment situation in Nigeria due to lack of adequate and reliable statistics. The policy thrust in the plan document was to ensure the reduction in unemployment through programmes to assist the unemployed to obtain gainful employment. This trend continued in the Fourth Plan (1981-1985). This time however was on how to link the job seekers and prospective employers for the purpose of matching with available jobs. Owing to the growing number of thousands of young people without employment opportunities showed that the plans were not substantial to mop up and absorb new entrants into the labour market (NIYEAP, 2008).

b. During the period of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s also came in with policies of privatization and commercialization of public enterprises. This was aimed at total removal of government in public sector enterprises to private individuals. The outcome was the increased unemployment due to retrenchments in all sectors of the economy. This had adverse effect on youth unemployment in Nigeria as the rate of unemployment rose at unprecedented rate.

c. In 1986 the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established. The core areas of which include:-i. Rural Employment Promotion Programme, ii. Small Scale Enterprises Programme, iii. Special Public Works Programme ,iv. Vocational Skills Development Programme. Each of the programme has several sub-programmes designed to

train the youth unemployed persons, through guidance, provision of financial opportunities and support services. Rural youth were targeted to enable them to go into crop production, processing, livestock farming, etc. The programmes also targeted school leavers, and graduates of tertiary institutions (NIYEAP,2008).

d. **The Women Employment Programme(WEP)** was also launched in 1991 in order to address female youth unemployment especially generating employment in both rural and sub-urban areas , women were trained on food processing , preservation and packaging. It is worth noting prior to this period Women development Centres were established in all the local government areas of Nigeria to empower women on skills acquisition and other empowerment activities.

e. **National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)** .This programme commenced in 2002.It had four major intervention schemes one of which was targeted at youth-the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES).Under the YES there were three programmes. They are i. Capacity Acquisition Programme, ii. Mandatory Attachment programme ,iii. Credit Delivery Programme. The Capacity Acquisition was most relevant that trained unemployed youth in simple vocations and trades to stimulate their interest on technical/ vocational trades. The priority areas for intervention include local manufacturing, craftsmanship, and agro-allied activities(NAPEP,2006).

f. **The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)**. This was another agency established in 2004 charged with the responsibility for promoting and facilitating development programmes to address youth unemployment in Nigeria. This was with particular reference to the small and medium scale industries. Its main goal were to facilitate the access to micro ,small, and medium entrepreneurs to all the resources required for development(SMEDAN,2007).The target beneficiaries are i. micro, small, medium enterprises, ii. Prospective entrepreneurs, iii. SMEs support institutions; and iv. NGOs and Business Membership Organizations in the sub-sector of the economy. SMEDAN provides entrepreneurship development services, capacity building for prospective entrepreneurs to create awareness on business opportunities. It also provides business development services in partnership with private firms, state governments, and faith based organizations. It has also established Business Information Centres to provide business related information to entrepreneurs in partnership with LGAs religious groups etc .It has also established business training for different occupational groups in different states (SMEDAN, 2007).In addition it has also established Corpers Entrepreneurship Development Programme targeting Youth Corpers to assist them to engage them in self-employment drive.

g. **Industrial Training Fund(ITF)** was established for training craftsmen and technicians. The objective was to train high level skilled manpower in various occupations and liaise with industries on how to upgrade the skills of their workforce. It aims at empowering the youth in skills acquisition programmes for job creation and entrepreneurial development.

h. National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

.Owing to the failure of successive programmes in addressing unemployment particularly as it affects the youth it was launched as a comprehensive policy aimed at tackling the menace in 2003. When the government at federal level established the programme it also directed states and local governments to do the same (SEEDS, and LEEDS). The goals of NEEDS were stated as i. Wealth creation, ii. Employment generation, iii. Poverty reduction, iv. Value orientation. It was a medium term strategy (2003-2007) that was expected to create 7 million jobs within the period (NIYEAP, 2008).

i. Needs-2/ Seven Point Agenda. The twin policies were launched in 2007, where employment creation received attention especially that of youth. NEEDS-2 was to continue with the vision, mission and strategies of NEEDS-1 and sets new targets to be achieved between 2008-2011. Poverty was to be reduced by 30% in 2011. Youth development was identified as a major development challenge which will be curtailed through and youth employment generation. It proposed to create 10 million jobs by 2011. On the other hand the Seven Point Agenda set to reduce poverty through wealth creation, focus was to be not on large scale enterprises but manufacturing real sector. The attention was to create more jobs in SME sector therefore its problems were identified and would be effectively tackled to provide more employment opportunities (NIYEAP, 2008).

j. National Youth Employment Action Plan 2009-2011. This plan was also located within the seven-point agenda. Various policy recommendations that focussed on elimination of youth unemployment were proposed such as diversification of the economy, vocational development, and entrepreneurial development for both students and the NYSC. Breaking all the bottlenecks of bureaucracy in NDE, NAPEP, ITF, etc, so as to be more result oriented. Further, the creation of enabling environment for enterprise take-off such as site/location, easy access to credit facilities, fostering of informal sector cooperatives, etc (NIYEAP, 2008).

There have been so many questions as to why in spite of the many programmes, the amount of money sunk into them, and the long period of their existence the rate of employment especially among the youth continues to rise unabated? It is along this line the paper highlights some of the problems that prevent the unemployed youth to gain access to available opportunities of employment and empowerment for the benefit of their livelihood thus affecting the realization of development that is sustainable. They include the following:-

The Gender Access Problem. Empirical evidences argued Abdullahi, et al (2013) have revealed that the female gender generally experience poverty more than male gender. Further to this, Payne (1991) and Abdullahi (2004) cited in Abdullahi, et al (2013) observe that (female) specific risk of poverty stems from the structuring of (female) economic dependency, within families and marriage and in the sexual division of labour that come together to create a gendered vulnerability to poverty and deprivation. Payne (1991) advanced these factors as female gender experience of poverty within the household; the biological or physiological differences between the sexes; differences in experience in paid employment and risks; the impact of longevity on health and the issue of health measurement, etc.

According to Arber (1987) cited in Abdullahi et al (2013), gender and sexually segregated labour market have created two models: the one for the male gender is more marked, as unskilled men have seven times chances of employment, while unskilled women suffer higher rates of unemployment. According to the 2009 and that of 2012 surveys on unemployment in Nigeria, gender-wise, unemployment rates were higher for females than their male counterparts. Females face particularly strong challenges in entering the labour force, due to early motherhood and lack of education (NBS, 2012).

Mismanagement of Resources and Lack of Political Will .Many believed that there is no basis or justification for poverty among the youth unemployment in Nigeria. This is precisely because of the rich endowment of the country in both human and material resources. Soludo (2006) in Abdullahi, et al (2013) argued that Nigeria generated unprecedented wealth from crude oil alone, yet the youth populations have continued to wallow in abject frustration, unemployment and poverty. More to that, Nigeria then being the “6th largest deposit of gas and the 8th largest oil-producer in the world, with over 100 tertiary institutions that churn out 200,000 graduates of various disciplines annually” ,yet all these abundant endowment have remained largely untapped and at best grossly mismanaged because of lack of political will to do so (Soludo, 2006:10).

Discrimination on the Bases of Social Class: Many youth are marginalized on accessing employment opportunities due to their family socio-economic backgrounds. It has a daily complain over the media that youth that come from family of the upper class gain access to employment opportunities than those from the lower socio-economic strata. Children of the upper class have parents that are well connected at the political or economic structure. Therefore, once there are opportunities they are the first to grab it while leaving those of the poor to remain where they are. They have reserved vacancies for their children. Children of the lower class hardly are aware of any job vacancies existing or educational opportunities for placement in appropriate schools.

Marginalization due to Schisms: One of the banes affecting youth employment is the experiences they encounter in the struggle to change and improve their lives through securing a job. Often as a result of the quota system which many do not know about they are discriminated in educational placements, and getting a job. The idea of merit does not count to place someone but religious background, sectional/ regional place of origin, as well as tribal /ethnic affiliation. These schisms and primordial sentiments block the chances for youth on employment and education. In many host communities “non-indigenes” in cities in Nigeria, complain of lack of access to their children in admission to tertiary institutions, empowerment programmes and job opportunities.

Rural/Urban Dichotomy: Rural youth are more disadvantaged in terms of job placements and education than those of the urban areas. Due to the various forms of opportunities that exist in the urban areas in terms of schools, industries and other infrastructures the rural youth is drifted further into the poverty circle due to the neglect of government and urban biased policies and programmes. All these count on limiting access to job placements and education to vast majority who are denied access to improve their lives. It is common knowledge that most programmes are urban biased and favour section of the urban residents of Nigeria.

The Syndrome of Godfatherism: This is also a serious issue that affect the fate of young people seeking for employment in Nigeria. Many complaints and allegations are strong in various circles of employment agencies which buttress that those who have Godfathers tend to have easy access to employment than those who do not. Impliedly, the vast majority chasing few employment slots wake up to find that those who do not even apply, or attend to the screening interviews have been offered employment, while those who do not have Godfathers are left without any satisfactory explanation. In all government parastatals and establishments it is a common practice to hear from the federal to the state down to the local that employment slots are reserved for political office holders from the President, Vice, and their wives, Ministers, Senators, Members of House of Representatives, State governors ,Deputies their wives etc. Such slots for admission are also reserved at the educational institutions for them thus neglecting the children of the underprivileged members of the society..

Corruption: It is one of the greatest problems affecting youth's accessibility to employment and empowerment programmes. It is still fresh in our memories the case of immigration recruitment at the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) where a number of young people looking for jobs lost their lives. There are allegations of corruption that was why it was not decentralized. Many issues on getting employed nowadays come with having the money to pay for an appointment letter. There are several cases in our immediate environment. People were asked to pay before getting employed. The basic question is what happens to majority of youth seeking for jobs as they do not have anything to pay? Impliedly they are denied to the advantage of those that offer to give.

Sectoral Distribution

In Nigeria agricultural sector continues to be the primary sector of employment. Young people in poor rural areas will have an option of either working in low –paid work in agriculture or else they migrate to the already crowded urban areas, where they will find work in the informal sector, jobs that are not formally paid (NIYEAP, 2008).

There are also problems that emanate from the youth themselves that contribute to their predicaments. For instance, it was argued by Oghene & Achoja, (2001) cited in Osakwe (2013) that the current generation of the youth in Nigeria lack self-will, determination and discipline, i.e. factors that are crucial for creativity, achievement and enduring success for national security and sustainable development .Further to this, was the unrealistic demands for public sector employment. In Nigeria, many youth still favour public sector employment since they believe it carries higher status and higher wages/salaries, benefits, including that of job security. However, public sector employment is saturated or shrinking and most jobs are being created in the private sector.

The Experience of Kano State: Kano State being one major of the states in the country the situation is similar with what obtains at the national level with respect to youth participation in employment and empowerment. This is because all the institutions mentioned to have a stake that foster the involvement and participation of the youth in employment and empowerment found their operational structures in the state. From independence to date there were a number of programmes in health, education, economic, social etc. that gave

opportunities for youth employment and empowerment. They were however with a lot of challenges for effective implementation

In the recent past, the population of the state has grown to approximately 16 million and majority are young people without employment or jobs. However, there have been efforts to address this trend by getting more into many employment and empowerment policies. For instance, in the health sector many youth were trained on the programme called *Lafiya Jari* so as to be skilful in handling the sale of drugs and its administration. This is an empowerment strategy by creating jobs due to the saturation of the civil/public white collar jobs.

Further to this, many *institutes* were also established to empower the youth and get them involved in a number of activities such as agriculture, sports, security, education, etc. A total of twenty one (21) of such they include:

1. Kano Fisheries Institute;
2. Kano Farm Mechanization Institute
3. Kano College of Nursing and Midwifery
4. Kano Corporate Security Institute
5. Kano Hospitality and Tourism Institute
6. Kano Institute of Qur'anic and Western education
7. Kano Poultry Institute;
8. Kano Reformatory Institute
9. Kano Film Academy
10. Kano Informatics Institute
11. Kano Sports Academy
12. Kano Driving Institute
13. Kano Irrigation Training Institute
14. Kano Entrepreneurship Development Institute
15. Kano Post Basic Midwifery School
16. Kano Institute of Horticulture
17. Kano Livestock Institute
18. Kano Development Journalism Institute
19. School of Basic and Remedial Studies
20. Kano School of Health technology
21. North West University(Kano State Today, 2013:42)

If all these will be made to be functional the problem of youth unemployment and empowerment will greatly be reduced in the state for the realization of sustainable development. The point is that since they were just established, it is too early to assess their impact on youth employment and empowerment as some are even yet to take off. However, there were also a number of attempts on youth involvement in government run employment activities and policies in the state. According to Kano State Today (2013:44), the following were such examples:

- i. 3,000 women were trained in each of the 44 local government areas and given a grant of N10,000 each(3,000x44)
- ii. 200 youth have been trained on chalk production and provided with a grant of N50,000 each
- iii. 440 young men have been trained in football production (entrepreneurial skills) provided with a grant of N50,000 each
- iv. 486 young people were trained on bee-keeping
- v. 4,000+ were employed in the state civil service
- vi. 960 employed in federal institutions and private sectors
- vii. 137 youth trained on tourism and hospitality studies, leather works and ICT
- viii. 374 youth participated in NEPAD training on hatchery, preservation of perishable items, animal feed production, and machine fabrication(Kano State Today,2013).

NB this excludes those youth from the educational empowerment programme (those so far enrolled in recent times).

It is noteworthy that in as much as these are encouraging responses to the problem of youth participation in employment and empowerment, it should be noted that the ratio of such opportunities to the population of especially the youth looking for jobs is very wide.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it can be seen that government run employment and empowerment opportunities for youth have been an ongoing process right from political independence in Nigeria to date as well as in Kano State. Several policies and programmes in health, education, and income generation were established at various levels of government yet the problem continues. For sustainable development with youth as the bedrock all obstacles that challenge them in securing employment have to be solved. Sustainable development is about resources, equity, justice, fairness, management of resources and the participation of all, especially the youth. It is the thesis of this paper that no sustainability in the development process without the youth who are the leaders of tomorrow they are expected to foster development into the future.

Recommendations

1. Government at all levels should expand the number of opportunities to youth employment and empowerment as they are inadequate to cater for the yearnings and aspirations of its future generation.
2. Government should address the problem of corruption in the various agencies established to address the problem of unemployment and empowerment of the youth .Corruption and mismanagement should squarely be dealt with especially as it affects placing youth on job. How long can someone wait if he does not have money to bribe to take up employment? How many young people have the money/ is it ethical?
3. There should be sustainability and synergy of all programmes and policies aimed at addressing the problem of youth employment and empowerment, so as not be disrupted for political reasons.
4. Since it has been established that there are problems with accessing the employment opportunities with females at the disadvantaged position efforts should be made by the government at all levels through removal of all obstacles by ensuring proper f

implementation of affirmative action programmes in all places of employment. This will give women equal access with their male counterparts in job placements and vacancies. In addition, traditional and health problems affecting women's participation should be addressed.

5. Discriminatory practices related to social class, and primordial sentiments must be addressed squarely so that youth can be treated on their own merit regardless of such biases. In addition, rural urban dichotomy should be tackled through addressing poverty and the provision of infrastructures and employment opportunities as rural youth have more disadvantage if paired with their urban counterparts on access to employment. This comes as a result of urban biased policies and programmes neglecting rural youth.
6. It is recommended that youth should be treated equally, Godfatherism breeds impunity, abuse of due process, and giving undue advantage over others because they do not have someone. This affects our development and must stop for the benefit of future generations and to achieve development.

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