

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL VICICES: THE NIGERIAN  
PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper is title youth empowerment, unemployment and social vices. The concept of youth empowerment as the process of building enabling environment for the young to realized their potential and ability to create wealth was in focus. This paper also discuss the negative impact of unemployment on the youths which influences them into social vices, whereas youth empowerment programmes is the only solution to reduce this impact of unemployment. This paper opined that lack of youths empowerment in Yobe and Borno state Nigeria are strong and likely causes of promoting insurgency in the North, Eastern Nigeria (Nwafor, 2019). The paper further asserted that the lack of empowerment and or ineffective empowerment programmes that is supposed to cushion the effect of poverty among unemployed youths can lead to youth restiveness. This paper identify several challenges that can lead to failure of empowerment programmes: these include corruption; over politicization of empowerment programmes to reflect party interest, lack of political will on the part of government to execute meaningful programmes that will benefit the youth, poor implementation of empowerment programmes due to lack of supervision from government or agencies, the implementation of wrong project that does not satisfy the directneeds of the unemployed/poor youths. The paper recommend that for proper and good empowerment programme that will achieve a desire objective to be successful, the stakeholders and professionals like social welfare and community development officer must be consulted. The paper further recommend immediate action of designing and implementing programmes that will integrate youths, ensure close monitoring, evaluation and accountability, eliminate corruption and ensure programmes meet the needs of the poor and unemployed youths. The paper in conclusion asserted that only effective and purposeful youth empowerment programmes can close the gap of unemployment and reduce youth anti-social behaviour and social vices.*

**Keywords:** Youth Empowerment, Unemployment, Social Vices

## INTRODUCTION

Globally unemployment constitutes a very serious threat to many nations even those nations with developed economy and those that are developing as well. Unemployment in many developed and developing countries affect a significance number of the country's population which the youths are in majority because in every country's working or active population, the youths form the bulk of the population. According to ILO (2019) unemployment is a long standing labour market indicator which is employed around the globe to explain the performance of the labour market and the ability of the economy to create jobs for job seekers.

ILO (2019) defined unemployment rate as "the valuable mismatches between the labour supply and demand, casting light on the unutilized labour supply". This unutilized labour force which constitute most often the youths, who form the greater percentage of the labour force in every nation's economy, suffers a lot of economic challenges which make them to be poor and economically disadvantage.

Youth empowerment, therefore is the aggregated effort and policies of various government to cushion the effect of unemployment in a country or nation". Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encourage to take responsibility of their lives. They do this by addressing the situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitude" (UN, 2002). The process of empowering the youths to increase quality of life through diverse of economic and social programmes aim at adding more value to the active population (youth) is youth empowerment.

For instance in Nigeria, due to the wide margin of unemployment rate, several government policies are made to cushion the negative effect of unemployment through empowerment programmes. The programmes are given different names by various successive administration; the Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration (2007-2010) introduced the amnesty programme to ease youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region. The Jonathan administration in (2011-2015) introduced the SURE-P Programme, while the Buhari administration of 2015 till date introduced the N-Power programme. These programmes are targeted on the unemployed population of the country which basically the youth form the higher proportion. The aim of these empowerment programmes is to reduce the negative effect of unemployment which will conversely reduce anti-social behaviour among unemployed youths.

Several factors are considered to be responsible for increasing social vices in our society. According to International Crisis Group (2010), one of the basic factors which influence social vices in Nigeria is unemployment and lack of good youth empowerment programme. The group reported that due to unemployment of Nigerian youths, several social vices such as human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, militancy and other forms of criminality has flourish in our dear country Nigeria. Johnson (2011) asserted that, due to the discovery of oil in Niger Delta in the early 70s and the oil wells seems to flows only to the elite and the powerful people in Nigeria, there was total neglect in the provision of social services, public safety programmes and education was also in low quality or non-existence. This adversely affected Nigerian citizen by making them to become very poor. Today, Nigeria rank among the world's poorest countries of the world, with more than 75% of the population especially the youths living below \$1.25 dollars per day (Thomson, 2012). According to Johnson (2011), the poverty in the north (muslim) dominated areas constitute about 72% while in some southern region (Christian) dominated areas poverty level stood at about 27% where as the Niger Delta region constitute 35% poverty level. These poverty indices among Nigerian citizen (youths), create different social and economic problems such as lack of access to education, lack of safe drinking water, lack of shelter, no good access to food, and social security. These conditions trigger social tension and increases social vices among the youths.

The link between unemployment and social vices always has an adverse effect when there is ineffective empowerment programmes. The idle youths who are poor, hungry and uneducated will certainly resolve to several method of anti-social behaviour. Ploch (2011), asserted that any country with high population density and with a proportionate high percentage of the population that constitute the youths, and combined with high level of unemployment rate will certainly be at risk with high incident of youth restiveness and social vices.

Thus, it is against this background that this paper seeks to explained the effect of youth empowerment, unemployment and social vices in Nigeria, if empowerment programmes are not effectively

executed, how it will have an impact on the unemployed youths and the rate of youth engagement in social vices.

### **The Concept of Youth Empowerment**

The process of building the enabling environment for young people to realize their potentials and ability to create wealth is empowerment. Commonwealth Secretariate (2007), define the concept of youth empowerment as “the act of creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others”.

According to Tope (2011), the concept of youth empowerment is centre on the cultural, attitudinal and structural change of an individual where the individual will have the authority and ability of taking an inform decision that will better his/her life. The concept of youth empowerment is a means where the young ones are made to realize success in life for both their future as individual and that of the nation (Mike, 2014). This self realization will enhance both their individual development and motivation to perform effectively (Akintayo & Adiat, 2013).

### **EFFECT OF EMPOWERMENT, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL VICES**

Empowerment of unemployed youths is like a lubricant that keep the machine effectively working without any break down. The absent of oil in a steaming machine can cause a serious danger to the engine, likewise the absent of youth empowerment can spell a great danger to the society. The protest and unrest that engulf Nigeria during the ENDSARS protest has been adjudged to be an outcome of a teaming population of unemployed youths and lack of empowerment (Temisan, 2020).

According to Marie-Therese (2020), stake holders in Nigeria have been urged to intensify efforts to redeem the country from anarchy and safeguard the nation unity for the good of all. Jeremiah Useni call the federal government (President MuhammaduBuhari) to take urgent action to reduce the teaming population of unemployment among youths by creating massive employment of the youth into the public civil service (Tamisan, 2020). This implies that the major cause of an increasing unrest and criminality that engulf the Nigeria state arising from the ENDSARS protest is anchored on unemployment. This goes further to prove the popular saying that an idle mind is the devil workshop.

Nwafor (2019), quoted Elizabeth Robertson a known expert in counter insurgency and conflict resolution base in Geneva who in her assertion opine that “Lack of youths empowerment in Yobe and Borno States, Nigeria are strong likely causes promoting insurgency in North East Nigeria”. According to Robertson, the failure of the two states government to empower their youths, like other Northern state counterpart have done in areas of meaningful work tools, education, and improve grains seedlings is responsible for increasing cases of hoodlums among youths. The proper education of the youths, the provision of an enabling environment for active participation in meaningful socio-economic ventures can help reduce youth’s restiveness in a particular society (Nigeria).

The impact of inadequate empowerment and high level of unemployment is the major influencing variable to youth restiveness, social vices and other forms of anti-social behaviour in many part of the world. In Nigeria, youths engagement into terrorism activities are traceable to these factors. Nwafor (2019), asserted that “certain key factors make it possible for Boko Haram to maintain it threat against the states of North Eastern Nigeria. These factors include their ability to have access to limitless pool of uneducated, unemployed, impoverish and easy to radicalized youths”. This implies that the inability of government at various level to empower the youths through social services such as skill acquisition, good economic opportunities, education, training, and equipping them with modern skills, will eventually lure them out of several choices of social vices such as kidnapping, militancy, terrorism, cyber crimes, yahoo-yahoo, and yahoo plus. Ofem&Ajayi (2008) opined that proper youth empowerment programme can help to reduce or ameliorate the problem of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta States. They further presupposes that the cause of youth restiveness and scial vices include drugs abuse, lack of empowerment and lack of humanitarian or social welfare programmes, which should be design and administer by professional social welfare officers.

Therefore, effective youth empowerment will reduce negative effects of unemployment on the youth which will conversely reduce conflict that is associated with youth (Ofem&Ajayi, 2008). Thus, sound

government policies, toward youth empowerment and youth development will reduce social vices among youth and enhance a safe society.

### **CHALLENGES OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**

Several challenges have been mitigating against good empowerment programmes for the Nigerian youths. Most of such challenges include lack of political will by government, corruption, over politicization of empowerment programmes to reflect political party interest instead of the general welfare of the unemployed poor citizens (youths).

#### **Corruption**

Sheldu&Abdullahi (2012) observe that corruption is major challenge to the success of empowerment programme such as recreational facilities, vocational and skill acquisition centres etc. according to their assertion, corruption have caused laudable programmes to be stunted in both high and low places, which means there is no proper management and accountability of these programmes. A good example of empowerment programmes that could not achieve it aims and objective are the SURE-P Programme 2011-2015, the N-Power Programmes 2015 to date. Corruption destroys the objective of the programmes and resources are only allocated to their relative and party men and women.

#### **Over-politicization of empowerment programmes to reflect party interest**

In most cases government from various political administrations have good motive of launching empowerment programmes that would have ease the social problem of unemployment. What in most cases becomes a monster to the success of such vision and mission of empowerment is the politicization of such programmes. Alibi & Burger (2008), observe that the National Poverty Eradication programme which incorporate Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Social Welfare Scheme (SWS) and some other programmes were set up in 2001 by the then president Obasanjo to address the issue of poverty and unemployment among Nigerian Youths. These programmes were domiciled within specific ministries and parastatal such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) that has similar function to their establish objective.

However, due to political influence and over politicization, the beneficiary of the programmes were selected based on party politics and majorly politician and people related to the political class became the trainees and those that succeeded to access the micro finance loan scheme. The aim of the empowerment was defeated as only the rich instead of the poor unemployed youths benefited from the scheme. The president Goodluck Jonathan administration also introduce SURE-P programme which major target was youth empowerment, but it didn't succeed because of corruption and sustainability by successive administration. Emsamro (2012), observed that just like other empowerment programme the SURE-P was not also free from the problem of over politicization and favouritism which places opportunity to the rich instead of the poor and unemployed Nigerian (Youth). Politicization and party sentiments is the bane of youths empowerment programmes in Nigeria

#### **Lack of political will by Government**

Political will is one of the challenges facing empowerment programmes. Most empowerment programmes that are suppose to reduce the consequences of unemployment, reduce youth restiveness and social vices do not gain popular support from government, such programmes are usually not attended to or in most cases given a small budgetary allocation that cannot achieve the aim and objective of such project. For instance, the federal government loan scheme that was establish by this administration, that is the Micro Small Medium Enterprises Scheme (MSME), which was suppose to salvage the teaming number of unemployed youths end up salvaging the political class and their relative.

#### **Poor implementation of empowerment programme**

Most times in Nigeria even when government approval have been secured for the implementation of a project meant for empowerment, the contractor may not deliver the desire quality project that can stand the test of time. In most case, outdated and substandard material are use to execute the project. This will

eventually render the scheme ineffective and the purpose, aim and objective defeated. Egoboosterbook (2011) observed that poor monitoring, poor supervision, lack of funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of qualified youths personnel/leadership, poor management of youth recreational facilities, lack of good maintenance of vocational centres is responsible for poor implementation of youth empowerment programmes. Poor implementation contributed to the failure of most empowerment programmes in Nigeria, thereby creating a huge impact of unemployment and social vices in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Youth empowerment, unemployment and social vices are interrelated variables. The central and most influential variable is the unemployment which causes a socio-economic and political vacuum among the youths of every given society. Therefore, the need for intervention to ameliorate this negative effect on the youths ushers in the youth empowerment programme. However, lack of political will occasioned by government poor implementation of empowerment programmes. Corruption, over politicization and the problem of favouritism has been identified as the major problem hindering a successful youth empowerment programme in Nigeria, and the rising antisocial behaviour among youths and the concomitant increase of social vices in the Nigerian society. This is so realistic because of the public saying that an idle mind is the devil's workshop, and 'an hungry man is an angry man'. Although the concept of unemployment and youth empowerment has a global occurrence, the effective management and implementation of empowerment programmes is highly encouraged to disassociate the unemployed youths from social vices, it is the major indices that can determine youth disengagement on anti-social behaviour and social vices. Therefore, government at various levels has to tread with caution in the implementation of youth empowerment programmes to reduce the negative effect of unemployment and reduce social tension.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- All levels of government and other agencies, should as a matter of urgency design programmes that will integrate youth from various political divides, devoid of party politics to enhance their participation in socio-economic and political space.
- The government and other agencies saddled with the responsibility of designing and implementing youth empowerment programmes must as a matter of fact ensure close monitoring, evaluation and accountability of all projects and programmes meant for youth empowerment, to achieve a desired result.
- The problem of corruption among programme execution can be checked through close supervision, periodic evaluation and accountability. Government and other agencies should prosecute any individual in spite of their political affiliation who is found guilty of embezzling funds meant for empowerment and projects, or who by virtue of their status are found using the empowerment programmes or projects for their personal gains.
- Most of the empowerment programmes if properly evaluated fail to meet the taste and dire needs of the people in the place of citation. Government and other agencies should always engage experts in the social welfare and community development before citing or introducing an empowerment programme. Since youth empowerment programme is people-centred, the social welfare professional will guide government or agencies on the type of social welfare needed by the people and how it can cover the vacuum so far created by unemployment to achieve the desired objective of reducing youth restiveness and other social vices.

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