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**Youth's Unemployment and Illiteracy: Impact on National  
Security, the Nigerian Experience**

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**Abstract**

For a long time probably since late 1980s the youths of this nation have been on bondage as a result of unemployment caused by faulty institutional structures, illiteracy, corruption and poor management of resources. Though unemployment is a global phenomenon, the situation in Nigeria has reached the crises state, yet it is reported by economists, super financial institutions such as World Ban that the yearly growth of Nigeria economy is 7.8 percent. However, this paper espouses that unemployment, illiteracy and faulty institutional, corruption are some of the factors responsible for National insecurity. That National insecurity is characterized by violence, kidnapping, assassinations, armed robbery, food insecurity, environmental insecurity and other vices in the nation. Youths form the bulk of unemployed and are burden to national security. Government should therefore build strong economic institutions and those already in place, be strengthened to create jobs for the youths. The power sector demands immediate attention for power is the heart-beat of the nation the informal and formal sector to drive the economy. Efforts should be made to encourage vocational, technical and entrepreneurial education in Nigeria — for self employment. Education should be made free and compulsory t least, secondary

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school level. Nigerians in Diaspora with capital should be encouraged to come home and invest. Corruption and mismanagement of our resources ought to be dealt with vigour.

### Introduction

One of the thorny issues usually discussed by Nigerians is the issue of youth's unemployment and illiteracy. It has become a burden to Nigerian State because the productive youths of any state are the future of that state: denoting that if the productive youths are wasted through any means, the hope of such a state is dashed. Indeed, the youths hold the security network of any state not only by being enlisted in the military or any paramilitary force for the defence of the state, but in the productive sectors such as food and its security, environmental security among others. The youths have the key to peace and stability, they make things happen and can even change the course of a nation's historical growth and development. For instance, in 2011, the youths in some countries in North Africa and indeed the Arab World changed the course of their history through agitation for their improved welfare through employment which later led to uprising that brought down governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen etc popularly referred to as Arab Spring (Gidado, 2012).

However, the contentious issue in Nigeria is that the economic/financial experts such as Professor Akpan Horgan Ekpo, Ngozi Okonja-Iwela and financial power houses such as the Central Bank of Nigeria, the World Bank have confirmed that Nigerian economy is growing and doing fine in the last five years (Ekpo, 2012; Onwuamaezee, 2011; Odutola, 2012). The progression is fine and very encouraging and there are lots of good expectations, but why are we in this ugly situation?

The question begging for answer is: in an economy that is growing and doing quite well, as being reported, why is the unemployment rate very high and the standard of living within the population very low? In economics parlance, growth in an economy spells decrease in unemployment and improvement in the standard of living of the people (Salvatore, 1995; Hussain, 2004; Todaro and Smith, 2009). Now, there is very high youth unemployment, high illiteracy rate, very poor standard of living, low life expectancy, great poverty in the land, where in the growth? This state of affairs is inimical to our development and appears to be creating a valve for human and indeed national security. It is against this background that this paper is relevant.

The paper is divided into four sections, section A deals with introduction, concepts of youths and insecurity issues; section two discusses the causes of youths unemployment; section three looks at the impact of youth unemployment in the society; section four titrates the ways of reducing unemployment offering some useful recommendations, and then gives conclusion.

### Conceptualizing Youths

Youths as a concept is often times difficult people and societies see it differently. Indeed, there are as various views as are espoused by various organizations, countries, and authorities. Thus, the United Nations defines "youth as persons between the age of 15 and 24" (Obebode, 2011). On the economic rating and production within the system, Professor Akpan Horgan Ekpo, an economist, defined youths as persons between the ages of 17 and 35 years. In this connection, they are supposed or in fact are strong as well as able to give and take the best society can offer. On the other hand, the Nigerian Constitution defines youths as people between the ages of 18 and 30 years. It explains the fact that at 18 years, one can contest or vote for or vie for an elective position or office in governance. By this is meant that the 18 years bracket by the constitution is the age of maturity, reasoning, ability to take independent decisions or by one self. In the field or areas of interaction, the World Football Body, Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) defines youths as people between the ages of 17 and 20 years (Niyi, 2011; Ekpo, 2011, FIFA, 1985; Nigeria Constitution). The Ibibio Ethnic Nationality sees youth as young people between 5 and 25 years (Mfon, 2012; Nkenta, 2012; Idiongomfonabasi, 2012).

### Concept of Security

The term security lacks a precise and definite definition, though it is a word commonly used by all manner of persons. However, security is relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur (Bellamy, 1981). Imobighe (1985) sees security as a feeling of being protected and a feeling of freedom from danger, fear, anxiety, oppression and unwarranted violence. Therefore, national security is the feeling of the people within a nation of being protected from fear, anxiety, violence, oppression, unwarranted restrictions. National security means developing relatively stable patterns of economic development and political growth at home and abroad. National security by extension encompasses environmental security, human security, economic security, food security- that without national security other aspects of security cannot function to optimum.

### National Insecurity

National insecurity is caused by the failure of national government to address the special needs of its people. Such needs include hunger, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inequality, injustice among others. However, the issues of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment are interwoven because one aspect may be responsible for the manifestation of another. Let us now see the correlation between unemployment, illiteracy and national security.

National insecurity is not all about absence of threat, violence, killings or better still human security, environmental security, economic security, social, cultural security and space security. These other securities are for the utilization of man. Man lives and depends on environment for his other activities to thrive. Without viable economic security the essence of man would be totally unparallel to life. Social security has to do with interactions of people through exchanges in wealth, recreation, etc while space security has to do with the wind, water, and other constituents of the cosmos has direct link with man. So, poverty and illiteracy can destroy the bases of these securities. National occurrences such as flood, desertification, earthquake, are man's creation, just as modern slavery (human trafficking) and all these are aspects of national insecurity.

National insecurity is a condition in nation's development where life is threatened as a result of lapses in governance which have adverse effect on food security, youth employment, health conditions of the people and in the long run breed violence — kidnapping, armed robbery, assassinations, ethno-religious crisis, piracy, human trafficking, religious crises, and or civil wars.

#### Conceptualizing illiteracy

In a more simplistic explanation, illiteracy is the inability of an individual to read or write and change behaviour to conform to modern norms of the society or the inability of an individual to reason or act civilly and meet with the societal values of his age.

#### Concept of Unemployment

Unemployment refers to a situation in which those who are able and willing to work cannot find employment. Meaning that such persons are involuntarily unemployed (Ekpo, 2011). Udo (2012) sees unemployment as the number of jobless people roaming the streets of Nigeria each day with their curriculum vitae from one office to another in search of "white collar jobs". Though Udo sees it purely as those who have acquired formal education and considered office job as the only alternative of securing employment, it is more than just acquiring certificate in a formal school setting and preparing for employment. The International Labour Organization conceptualise unemployment thus: "when people are without jobs, and they have actively sought work within the past four years" (ILO, 2012). Indeed, unemployment is a condition in which persons who are capable and willing to work cannot find work weather in the formal or informal settings. This means that employment exists in institutional structures such as ministries, social environments, manufacturing sectors etc. Unemployment addresses a situation where individuals actively seeking jobs remain unhired (Hussain, 2004).

#### State of Unemployment and Illiteracy Scenario in Nigeria

Unemployment is a common phenomenon both in developing and developed countries. The difference between them is the rate or ratio. France, a developed economy has unemployment ratio of 10 per cent; United States of America has 7 percent (Gidado, 2012). It is difficult to say the number of unemployed Nigerians. Unfortunately, neither the Federal office of statistics nor the Manpower Board nor Federal Ministry of Labour have accurate data of the unemployment and illiteracy rate in Nigeria. For instance the following statistics was obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics as the rate of unemployed Nigerians: in 2009 = 19.7 percent; in 2010 it stood at 21.1 percent; in 2011 the figure rose to 23.9 percent. The National Bureau added that, unemployment is highest among the youths between the ages of 15 and 24, and 25 and 44 with a high valency recorded in rural areas (Okereocha, 2012; Punch Editorial, Friday June 29, 2012).

On the other hand, the World Bank and the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research, NISER, in separate reports specifically put the graduate unemployment at 55 percent and about 60 per cent are underemployed. In the same pedestal, the National Directorate of Employment, NDE, placed the figure of unemployed graduates at over 200,000 (Okereocha, 2012). However, the number is very high because school certificate holders, Elementary School leavers who cannot progress to higher education are not included in s the band of these unemployed Nigerians.

The president of manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) estimates that in 2009 alone, 834 businesses, mostly small and medium enterprises closed shops due to hostile and uncompetitive operational environment, with an estimated 83, 400 redundancies. One can imagine the figure today (Manuaka, 2012; Oshiomode, 2011).

Acquisition of basic and functional Education is the power for development. It liberates the mind and prepares individuals for something worthwhile. It is a tool that prepares manpower to meet the requirement for modern world in areas such as technology, health, security, agriculture, computer etc. Research indicates that about 45 per cent of Nigerians do not have access to basic education, and out of these youths are the most affected. To be precise about 7.5 million mahajerins do not have access to primary education - these are found mainly in northern states of the federation, and about 1.5 million are distributed in the West and Eastern Nigeria (Osugwu, 2011). The ratio of persons acquiring education has no bearing with population. This is so because the percentage of people accessing education is an indication that when people are educated, it is plus to the economy — adds value to the people — care for themselves and the environment which they live. They would also contribute positively to economy thereby stimulating employment. Thus, it is indubitable that

education is the most potent instrument for alleviating and eventually abolishing poverty as well as a means creating employment.

### **Causes of Unemployment**

Issues on unemployment are taking centre stage in almost all national issues — in academics and other fora. One of the causes of Unemployment is the failure of institutional structures within the Nigerian economy. The economic institutions failed because of corruption and poor management which directly or indirectly linked to poor leadership in all spheres. For instance most of the industries that were producing to installed capacity and were employing youths shrunk and collapsed or closed shop, forcing people back to unemployed market. Such industries include the Textile mills in Northern Nigeria, Lagos etc., Newsprint manufacturing Industry at Oku Iboku, Akwa Ibom State and many others.

In Akwa Ibom State for instance, before 1987, there were about twelve industries such as Champion Breweries, Peacock Paints, Plastocrown, Sun Shine Battery, Ceramic, Biscuits etc, but today all have closed shop. When they were operational, thousands of persons — both skilled and unskilled were employed.

Another institutional failure is the Banking and Insurance Companies. Since 1980s, most of the industries owing to harsh operating environment have closed shop — both at state and federal levels. Nigeria paraded over one hundred banks before 1999, poor management and corruption made those banks unhealthy and uncompetitive thus forcing government to recapitalize and in the process many merged into mega banks. Indeed, even at that, these banks are still unhealthy. A number of individuals are still being relieved of their jobs in the banking sectors daily. Though other factors may be there but the most important factor is corruption and poor management.

Before 1970s oil boom, unemployment was not as alarming as it is today, youths to a large extent were interested in farming and other vocation such are carpentry, mechanic and other artisan driven jobs, but there after farming was abandoned to the old people in our rural areas. Thus, 1970s oil boom created a 'new' economy and young people moved to urban centres in search of white collar jobs, thus abandoning their vocations, and since then unemployment swells by day.

In another corollary, the Nigerian education system is to a large extent responsible for the unemployment palaver. Our educational system was structured to prepare individuals for white collar jobs and very little for vocational or entrepreneurial functions. That has been the situation since the colonial times and even now. Colonial education was euro-centric — it was the type of education that prepared people for white-collar jobs. In the colonial and little after post-colonial day the number of literate persons who were prepared to take up jobs in civil service

were small. Today that type of education is no longer productive. The issue is that Nigeria since independence still relies heavily in the euro-centric education and relegates vocational and technical education to the background. In all, the dysfunctional educational institutions turn out fresh graduates, most of whom are ill-prepared or ill-equipped for self-employment. Federal government's capital budget is too small to stimulate major upsurge of activities in the construction industry which, traditionally, provides jobs for blue collar workers.

Another cause of unemployment in this country is the problem of neo-colonialism, which manifests itself partly in excessive reliance on foreign expatriates. Nigeria is blessed with rich human resources, but regrettably the number propelling the economy are few and this is as a result of push factors — insecurity, poor power supply, poor access to good health facilities etc. Indeed, Nigeria has what it takes to change the fortune of our development — but when it comes to construction of roads, building of railway tracks; we prefer the services of foreigners. This applies too to our refineries that have remained comatose for years now, yet there are many petroleum and chemical engineers for the job.

### **Impact of Unemployment on Individuals and the Society**

Employment has a positive linkage effect on any economy. Persons who are gainfully employed would use the wages to chase; goods and services within the economy. In the process, this would expand the needs of the people on the positive, leading to increase in production, expansion of the industries increase in taxed for government for the building of infrastructures such as roads, health centres, recreation arena etc. The reliance on these indices stimulates the economy and improves the standard of living of the people.

Unemployment particularly among youths is counterproductive and has far reaching implications to the economy. For example it may lead or usual leads to youth restiveness. In the Niger Delta of Nigeria, it was and still is responsible for oil pipe-line vandalisms, in which Nigeria lost and is still losing billions of dollars in the process.

Unemployment leads to loss of personal values and self-esteem. It makes the individual vulnerable and often creates room for manipulations by the elites of the society. The political elites who want to win any elective position usually use them especially male youths as political thugs, hired assassins against their political foes. It is also contended that unemployment lead some youths into armed robbery, prostitution, and some form themselves into band of kidnappers etc. The resultant effect of these exploitations is to a great extent responsible for the incessant violence and by extension insecurity in our society. For instance one of the causes of the lethal activities carried out by Kabiru Sokoto, in the name of Boko Haram, would not be far

from unemployment. As earlier mentioned, unemployment is also responsible for prostitution and by extension increase in the risk of HIV/Aids prevalence in our society. All these are bane to national security. It is also known that these Nigerian youths who are looking for jobs beyond our shores have been perishing in high seas and in Sahara Desert in an attempt to make it to Europe.

### Impact of Illiteracy on the Society

It is difficult to know the number of Nigerians who are illiterates or who have no formal education. But it is believed that about 40% of Nigerians mainly youths do not have access to formal education, out of this number, girls and children form the majority. Again the highest concentrations of children who do not have access to formal education are found in northern Nigeria. Punch Newspaper summarized it thus, "...over 10 million of our children, the majority of them being in the north, are out of school..." (*Punch*, Thursday December 6, 2012).

One of the greatest impacts of illiteracy is that it makes the affected people have very low self-esteem, and some of them are used by the elites as pawns. It is contended that the spate of violence going on in the northern Nigeria are carried out by these illiterates. In addition, political violence in some parts of Nigeria is usually the handiwork of Almajiris who had no business with formal education. The logic is that those who have been to school and have access to qualitative formal education would, not be allowed to be used by the elites to cause violence, though this may not be in all cases.

The illiterates are largely found in the informal sector of Nigerian economy. It is from this group that persons such as artisans — electricians, cobblers, mason; farmers, petty traders — are found. They contribute to national development and steam up the economy. Indeed, the illiterates are readily available for any labour at all times. Though they are down trodden, they contribute in no small measure to national development.

### Solutions to Nigeria's Unemployment

The growing unemployment is global, agreed, but Nigeria unemployment is difficult to understand. It is agreed by the economic experts, World Bank, that Nigeria economy is growing at 7 per cent per annum. If the economy is growing at that pace, why is it not generating employment? However, our development stride is poor. Thousands are trained and turned out in our institutions of learning yet the manpower is wasted. The available jobs for the unemployed need serious "connections" or it depends on 'who you know' or 'man-know man' Nigerian unemployment situation has reached a crisis point and thus calls for a drastic method to reduce it.

The following strategies may be helpful in reducing unemployment in our society.

1. Government should fashion out policies that produce jobs and not empty promises on the pages of newspapers and on television screens.
2. Government should ramp up its foreign investment drive, targeting large scale industries with economies of scale to create jobs.
3. Nigerians in the Diaspora with capital should come home and invest.
4. Micro lending programmes already put in place through micro-finance banks should be reformed to allow the youths access the funds through loans with little interest.
5. Government should rebuild national infrastructures especially power, which is the heart-beat of the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy. Power stimulates the informal sector of the economy, informal sector is the engine of the economy because it absorbs the largest number of unemployed people.
6. More technical and trade schools should be opened in our communities: teachers for these schools trained and motivated — this would be the genesis of preparing candidates for self employment.
7. Entrepreneurial subjects should form part of the curriculum in all higher educational institutes in Nigeria. Schools of agriculture, departments of agriculture and vocational subjects in our institutions should be encouraged to inject into their graduates, love for agriculture-in the practical sense of it. At graduation they should get into real practice in communities where they settle.
8. Education should be free from primary to the university and made compulsory to the secondary level.
9. Strong economic institutions should be built and corruption and mismanagement of these institutions be guarded jealously for better results.

### Conclusion

The paper attempts a description of the burden of youths' unemployment, illiteracy and national security. It attempted conceptualizing the youths, security and national insecurity, unemployment and illiteracy and the state of unemployment and illiteracy scenario in Nigeria. It further discusses the causes of unemployment and its impact on the society. It concludes that the problem of unemployment and illiteracy is the dysfunctional education, faulty institutional structures, neo-colonialism, corruption and mismanagement of resources. Others include poor infrastructures such as power and epileptic refineries. It concludes that government should fashion out policies that produce jobs and not empty promises. Nigerians in Diaspora and

foreigners should be given opportunity and friendly environment to come in and invest. National infrastructures should be rebuilt. Strong economic institutions should be established, and the existing ones strengthened for better results. The education sector should refocus on vocational, technical and entrepreneurial disciplines. Education should be free and compulsory at least to the secondary level. Young Nigerians should return to the farm. National security is a failed phenomenon since other indices such as unemployment and illiteracy distort it.

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