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Dominic A.A. (Ph.D) & Patrick S.W. (Ph.D)

### YOUTHS EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TECHNICAL/VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY

By

Dominic, A. Akpan, Ph.D  
Department of History and International Studies  
University of Uyo, Uyo  
dominicakpanhistory@gmail.com  
GSM: 08035806603

And

Patrick S. Williams, Ph.D  
Department of Vocational Education  
University of Uyo, Uyo

#### Abstract

*Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now, youths unemployment have become alarmingly high owing to increase in the number that graduate from different levels of education who are unskilled to meet the challenges of the new world economic trend. Before now, many youths were totally depending on government for jobs. Today the trend has drastically changed. The dependent on government for employment is the product of Euro-centric education the country imbibed from the colonial masters. Then very little was done to encourage technical/vocational education. Technical/vocational education propels employment creation at both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. How, because of lack of employment, quite a large number are becoming violent, militant; some have taken to armed robbery, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, rapists, sea pirates among others. These have created insecurity in Nigeria and by extension dampened the growth of the economy. The emerging economies such as ours need stabilization to be able to key in the new world economic order that is orbiting through knowledge economy and by extension industrialization and creation of markets. The paper is advocating for the establishment and equipping of at least three technical/vocational schools; at least two comprehensive schools per local government area in Nigeria. Parents and youths should be sensitized on the need to attend technical/vocational schools through counselling and other enlightenment strategies. The Federal Government should introduce social security in Nigeria.*

#### Introduction

Youths empowerment is one of the buzz words often use in different fora when issues of insecurity, violence are discussed. However, Nigeria is the second largest economy next to Republic of South Africa in Africa. She has about 150 million people with youths constituting about 51 percent. It is not enough to say that 51 percent of Nigerian population are made up of youths. It would be pertinent or worthwhile to say what is the quality of the youths population? Or how healthy is the population and what is the impact on democratic governance, economy or by extension productivity? And because the youths population is idle, unhealthy, it explains the low productivity, violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, which in turn has negative effect on the growth of the Nigerian economy as an emerging nation. There are questions begging for answers in this discussion. These are, why are Nigerian youths violent, engages in armed robbery, kidnapping, pipeline



vandalism and becoming sea pirates among others? The answer lies on the fact that they are idle and unemployed. They need to survive just like others in the society. Why are they idle in spite of the fact that some are graduates from different levels of education? Many of these youths are educated but they lack necessary skills of this age to fit in the changing phases of the new world economy. And Nigeria as an emerging market/economy cannot grapple with the new market because of poor state of industrialization. In this connection, the Euro-centric (grammar) education given to us by the colonial masters are the causes of our poor state. Little preference was given to technical/vocational education by the colonial masters – the trend continued even after Nigeria's 'flag' independence. But the modern economy and indeed world economy requires diversification from the old order. The world is driven by liberal market economy, and the only way a nation can key in is its own contribution through industrialization. Industrialization is the production of technology – this although not all times generates from technical/vocational schools. Against this background that our youths who are the leaders of tomorrow need to be empowered through technical/vocational education to avoid violence, reduce dependence on white collar jobs and prepare Nigeria to meet the new challenges in the global system.

### Understanding the Youths

The term youth is sometimes difficult to place contextually because of the various meanings attached to by persons or organizations. Within the Nigerian context, it is still difficult to explain. However, the United Nations Organization defines 'youth as a person between the age of 15 and 24' (Obebode, 2011). On the economic rating and production within the system, Professor Akpan H. Ekpo, an economist defined youths as persons between the ages of 17 and 35 years. In this context, they are supposed to be strong as well as being able to give and take the best society offers. It is not surprising therefore, that during the dubious Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, those who were shipped to Americas and Europe to work under harsh and inhuman conditions were basically youths. The hard infrastructure built in the U.S.A., for example, was undertaken with slave labour (Williams, 1964; Uya, 2005; Ekpo, 2011). In the 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. Nigeria, through her constitution sees youths as persons between the ages of 18 and 45 years – at that age bracket one is considered matured, in psyche, reasons thus can contest for a public office – can vote and be voted for in an organized election. On a more simplistic way, youths are persons from the ages of 12 and 30 years.

### Contextualizing Empowerment

Empowerment is a concept that has been variously espoused by scholars and non-scholars alike, but lacks a precise definition. It has become so because it is used depending on the intention, purpose in which the user applies. Indeed, for the purpose of this paper, one will attempt to discuss few of such concepts. Nwosu (1998) viewed empowerment as a rise to participate in top state affairs or in parastatal institutions such that one is in a position to partake in important public policy-making, execution or education. He went on to espouse that one should have been able to acquire reasonable level of education as a pedestal to social hierarchy. Thus, youths empowerment is determined by the margin of their access to the state or its institutions. The access ensures participation in key state matters and in power and other resource dispensations. It means that the more under-represented the youths are in the state, the less empowered they are. Based on the above, the contention is that education is necessary but not an absolute requirement for youths empowerment. The actual empowerment should rest on the shoulder of the social order as provided under the auspices of the state. Narayan (2002) opined that empowerment as an expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives; and on the other hand Karl (1995) sees empowerment as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making process, control and transform actions, so that they can perform better towards improving themselves, their families and contribute to the overall development of the society. Empowerment implies provision of education, information, that would increase youths self-reliance, the strength to participate in the economic, social and political discourse that affect their lives and that of the society to sustain civilization.

Empowerment must be sustainable. Thus, Todaro and Smith (2009) viewed empowerment as the idea of giving people power over their economic, social and reproductive choices that will raise their status, promote development, and reduce population growth. Goldstein & Prevehouse (2008) see empowerment in the

development context to mean, the grassroots efforts of poor people to gain power over their situation and meet their basic needs. In this connection, therefore, empowerment is a condition in which people who wallow in want, who cannot meet their basic needs to life such as good food, shelter, health, education are being lifted out of these condition not only for a moment but sustained for a long period even beyond a generation.

### Conceptualizing Security

The term security lacks a precise definition although it is a word commonly use by all manner of persons. Thus, security implies a state of mind not necessarily an objective state of being. It describes the peoples feeling, not whether they are justified in feeling that way. It depends on the perceptions that people have of their environment, not necessarily on an objective view of that environment. Imobighe (1985) perceived security as a feeling of being protected, and a feeling of freedom from danger, fear, anxiety, oppression and unwarranted violence. According to Nnoli (2005) security is a cherished value associated with the physical safety of individuals, groups or nation states, together with as similar safety of their other most cherished values. It denotes freedom from threats, anxiety or danger. Therefore, security in an objective sense can be measured by the absence of threat, anxiety or danger will materialise. In other words, it is a value associated with confidence in physical safety and other most cherished values. No matter how much safety exists or will exist, there is no security. Even when no safety exists in objective terms but there is confidence that it exists, then there is likely to be security, at least in the short term. In this latter case one may speak of false security. One person's security may be another person's insecurity.

### Concept of National Security

Security is security whether in the context of a nation, state or an individual. Imobighe (1985) espoused national security as the feeding of the people within the nation of being protected from fear, anxiety, violence, oppression, unwarranted restriction. National security means developing relatively stable patterns of economic development and political growth at home and abroad. National security by extension encompass 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 inhabitants. Such needs include, hunger, poverty, unemployment, inequality and justice among other things. The issue of hunger, poverty, unemployment are interwoven. One aspect may be responsible for the manifestation of another. Let us now link these variables to insecurity. According to Collins (1981) and Nnoli (2006) national insecurity is not all about absence of threat, violence, killings or in short human security. It encompasses other aspects of like such as food security, environmental security, economic security, social, cultural and space security. These other securities are for the utilization of man. Man lives and depend on environment for his other activities to thrive. Without the environment human security would have no meaning. Without viable economic activity, 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 cosmology that has direct link with man. So poverty, poor health, unemployment, injustice and lack of adequate education can destroy the bases of these securities. Natural occurrences such as flood, desertification, earthquake and man's creation such as modern slavery (human trafficking) are all some aspects of national insecurity.

### Youths and National Insecurity

Many Nigerians see National insecurity as, perhaps, violence that was experienced in the Niger Delta over the issue of resource control, or the Odua Peoples Congress episode in the South-west, the Egbesu in Bayelsa, and of recent, the Boko Haram terrorists of North-east Nigeria. In addition, it is also linked to the spate of kidnappings that is almost becoming part of the peoples' culture in South-east and South-south Nigeria, or the armed robbery being experienced all over the country. In all these occurrences the Nigerian youths, some employed and majority not employed-are at the centre.



However, though it is generally said that Nigerian economy is doing well – but added that about 400,000 barrels of crude oil are being stolen daily in the Niger Delta. Again those at the centre of this oil-pipeline vandalism and connected theft of the oil are equally youths. For a long time now, many youths are engaged in drug trade within Nigeria and outside. Although millions of dollars are being realized from this trade; it has negative effect on the psyche of Nigeria as a country and secondly these group are the financiers to terrorists who are the bane to our development. Youths again are the pillars of this trade.

Meanwhile, the above analysis are connected with the use of or related to violence, arms and violation of human rights. The phenomena, therefore, constitute part of the national insecurity. Indeed, other factors that constitute national insecurity is poverty. It is accepted that about 51 percent of the 160 million people in Nigeria are youths. But it is said that about 68-70% of this population are unemployed –, they therefore constitute security risk to the nation. These poor youths are willing tools to economic buccaneers, spineless politicians during elections and become personal assistants to warlords. Closely following this is the fact that these poor youths must eke a living, they therefore engage in poor farming methods through unconventional means for higher yields and in the process assist in land degradation. It is this same poor youths that are responsible for deforestation either for farming or logging for fuel wood in some communities in Nigeria.

National insecurity embraces other things such as food insecurity, air, water and land pollution, climate change, uneven development, unemployment and underemployment, desertification, flood and its attendant atrocities. Some of these are link to the youths and the role they are expected to play.

Thus to unlock the chain of national insecurity and fully integrate into global development of this century, there is need to develop technical/vocational education, create and equip skill acquisition centres, train and motivate instructors, shun corruption and primitive wealth accommodation. In this way, sustainable development, well-being of every Nigerian would be guaranteed.

#### Concept of Emerging Economy

Emerging economy is that economy progressively moving from weak industrial or subsistence level to more advanced level of economic development with a dynamic and sustainable industrial sector having close links with advanced market economies in finance and investment system (Akpan, 2011).

#### Prognosis of Technical and Vocational Education

Vocational educational and training "prepares learners for careers that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific, occupation or vocation". In other words, it is an "education designed to develop occupational skills". Vocational and technical education gives individuals the skills to live, learn and work as a productive citizens in a global society". In general therefore, education sharpens the mind, opens the way for something worthwhile. It is the nucleus or epicenter in which other aspects of development clime radiate. In this connection vocational education offers:

1. A wide range of artisanal specialized employable functions such as auto mechanics, sheet metal work, electricity, painting and decorating, blacksmithing, welding, woodworking, masonry, carpentry, generator repairing, plumbing, tiling etc.
2. It also provides equally wide range of activities in Agriculture. There are quite a number of agricultural activities for employment creation that are sustainable-crop and horticulture, snail farming, piggery, fish farming, poultry farming, vegetables, goat and rabbit keeping.

Other vocational areas include but not limited to dress making, leather working, bead-working, barbering, carving/wood and bronze), sculpturing, catering, pottery and ceramics, blacksmithing and goldsmithing.

However, it is necessary to add here that agriculture or farming have since been abandoned by the youths. The youths see agriculture as the function for the aged, illiterates and poor people in the rural areas. They view it with disdain because of its nature. Agreed, the age of crude farming is over with modern technology in place. Though not necessarily recommendation, the youths need to form themselves into cooperative societies and seek assistance from government, donor agencies, banks for loans to enable them acquire modern farming implements that would enhance productivity and reduce labour. They should also as a society

request from government a land to expand their farms for increased yields and by extension be provided the improved seedlings (in case of crops) and new breed in the area of birds and animals. They too would become employers of labour.

Meanwhile, the government should provide some social security until such a time their farms begin to yield. This it is hoped would assist reduced friction and violence, curb excessive and rampant armed robbery, kidnapping and even rape. The activities in these agricultural and other sectors would create wealth in the society, add value and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), thus enhancing and improving the standard of living of the people.

Indeed, youths who would be able to advance to the Universities of Science and Technology, Polytechnics would climb the industrial ladder of the nation. For the young engineers with natural creativity, the government should show special interest by empowering them through the award of scholarships for overseas study with a bond of returning to Nigeria to assist in the development after graduation.

#### Youth Empowerment

It is true that over the years government and individuals at various levels have done much to empower the youths. For instance, on the level of government, education is the epicentre for empowerment. In this connection, government of Nigeria through her constitution has made education free from primary school to JSS 3. In some states of the Federation Education is free and compulsory from the primary school to the secondary school level. In the same corollary, some state governments have provided scholarships, loans and bursary to students to study within and outside Nigeria. There are empowerment symbols. In addition, government also provide job opportunities at different levels according to ones area of specialization after graduation; in some states skill acquisition centres are equally provided.

On the individual perspectives, very many rich Nigerians have established foundations and provided funds to enable poor Nigerians to benefit from education as the beginning of ones empowerment. For instance, Fahewemi the late radical lawyer and Human Right Activist established a Fahewemi Foundation for Nigerians. Other Nigerians established industries where youths with required skills are employed. The likes of Aliko Dangote, the wealthiest man in Africa, Emmanuel Inwinyawu among others.

It is also argued that politicians are on the fore-front of youth empowerment. It is often read or seen that politicians do empower the youths through provision of funds, tri-cycles, cars of various makes. It is argued that all these are good ways of empowering individuals but these kind of empowerment are never sustainable. Providing one with a car, money when the individual has nothing to sustain him maintain the car or tri-cycle is counter productive. It is put forward that any empowerment to be made for an individual or group of persons should be sustainable. It is also a yoke or laughable matter to think that for one to become a "personal assistant" to a politician is empowerment – it is not true. Rather it is a rent seeking venture that ends with the end of the political office holder.

However, it stressed here that the youths are not sufficiently empowered, to a large extent it is responsible for the army of unemployed youths in Nigeria. For instance in 1970 the poverty rate in Nigeria was about 30 percent. Now, the poverty rate range between 68 to 70 percent. Nigerian youths are the worst hit in poverty ladder because about 51 percent of Nigerians are made up of youths ranging between 15 years and 35 years (Akasike & Onuba, 2013).

To really espoused on the state of Nigeria economy, security and unemployment, in 2011 Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, put the rate of unemployment in Nigeria at 41.6 percent of the total population. In 2010, Olusegun Aganga, then Minister of Finance, was reported to have said that 50 million Nigerian youths were unemployed (Akaeze, 2013). In a country of approximately, 160 million, this figure is astronomically high. It should be noted that youths unemployment and by extension lack of empowerment was responsible for the Arab Spring of 2011.



### Obstacles to Youths Empowerment

It is important to observe that youths have a role to play in Nigeria in all spheres of human endeavour be it economy, social or political, but often their roles are usually not accorded the positions they deserve.

#### 1. Lack of access to Education

Education is the power for development. It liberates the mind. It is a tool that prepares manpower to meet the requirement for modern world in areas such as health, agriculture, security etc. Research indicates that about 45 percent of Nigerians do not have access to basic education mainly made up of youths especially those living in northern Nigeria.

2. Youths all over the world have a great role to play not only in the socio-economic development of the society, but also in leadership at various levels is undisputable. Meanwhile, going by the 2006 census figure, youths constitute more than half of the population of Nigeria. Yet they are relegated to the background in the scheme of things. But their role in Nigeria project can be determined not only by the significant achievement of contemporary youths but also by the considerable contributions and activities of youths folk in the years gone by. For instance, going by the concept of youth as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, General Yakubu Gowon assumed the leadership of this country when he was 28 years old, and Navy Commander Dilete Spiff of the old Rivers State also became a state governor when he was relatively young at aged 27.

3. One other obstacle is the acrimony amongst some youth organizations in the country. Despite the fact that, they have the primary functions of liberating themselves from poverty, more often than not, they are never collaborative. What appears to be in vogue is that they thrive on unnecessary acrimony and unproductive activities. For instance, the militancy in the Niger Delta was a product of youth organizations, and perhaps the Boko Haram palaver of North-east Nigeria is the youth organization seeking to be relevant. Thus each organization is always trying to up-stage the other while seeking undue recognition from government or donor organizations.

4. It is often been argued that poor funding of organizations or Ministry of Youth Development by government is a serious factor that hinders youth empowerment in Nigeria. Though the records are not provided, Ehindero (2001) in his study argued that, despite some budgetary provisions made in the budget, hardly did these institutions get what were due towards empowering the youths. Although, he was quick to add that, this is not peculiar to only youth organizations but to others including women organizations.

5. In one of his comments on rural transformation and general lack of development in Nigeria in relation to corruption, Obasanjo (2003) argued that on nation can witness any form of development at all, where corruption thrives. Indeed, a huge sum of money was spent on programmes during the Babangida and Abacha administrations to steam the economy and empower the youths and others respectively. Some of these programmes were the National Directorate for Empowerment (NDE), Better Life for Rural People – that was to target the youths. Regrettably, these programmes without any meaningful impact on the target group, created another group of rich urban dwellers including the friends and families of the initiators and political associates. These in a long run have adversely affected the various empowerment programmes in the country.

In addition, there is the lack of effective enlightenment strategies on the empowerment opportunities for the youths. The enlightenment has to do with sufficient information to the youths. The current enlightenment strategies where there are no community radio, newspapers and other forms of information dissemination are inadequate. Thus the rural youths are on the disadvantage – and this is the environment in which the largest concentration of youths are found.

On the other hand, there is the lack of political will to empower the youths. This is so because the Niger Delta militancy forced the Federal government to develop a policy (Amnesty) – that of training the militants in various vocations in some countries of Africa, Europe, Asia and America. In this connection, the Federal government has sent about 10,000 ex-militants for vocational trainings – the gesture has brought about relative peace in the Niger Delta (Punch, September 16, 2003).

### Recommendations

The functions or activities of youths cluster around three basic spheres of human endeavour. These are education, politics and economy. Professor Philip Egweali and Okere identified three basic ways of empowering people – youths and others. These are:

1. **Access to qualitative education:** In their words, education is the surest means to develop an individual as well as empowering such as individual. In this connection, empowering the youths through accessible and affordable educational opportunities would enable them to participate in the process of national development. However, in an emerging economy such as ours, there is need to development an aspect of education to be able to fit in into the new world economic market. The new market emphasis the need for industrial products rather than the primary products of the old. The United Nations Educational, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) says any country that wishes to become part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be devoting 30-40 percent of her total annual budget to education (Adesanmi, 2013). So far Nigeria is budgeting between 9 and 11 percent of her budget to education. Hence there is need to train our youths in technical and vocational oriented school subjects. In other words, emphasis should be placed on vocational/technical education – that would reduce unemployment, stabilize the economy and provide the much needed security for rapid economic development and improve the standard of living. Thus three or more technical/vocational schools be established and equipped per local government in the country. Closely following that is to equip the existing polytechnics, Universities of Science and Technology by government and private well-to-do individuals and organizations. Youths should be enlightened on the need to attend technical and vocational schools through counselling and other strategies.

2. **Political Empowerment:** Youths should be encouraged to take active part in politics. Although Nigerian politics is characterised by two means – one of violence that elections must be won by all cost, and secondly excessive use of money. The two attributes should be played down to make room for youths participation. Following that is youth participation in decision making. Youths are the future leaders of any country, and since politics is the art of rendering service to the society, youths with proven ability should be part of the decision making in the micro community, local government and indeed the country.

#### 3. Youths Economic Empowerment:

There are various ways in which youths of this nation can be empowered economically. This range from

1. Government should increase budgetary allocation to youths based organizations for assistance to youths in dire need of funds for development.
2. The unhealthy rivalry amongst youths organizations should be discouraged. Rather, a collaborative efforts should be encouraged, so that collectively their present conditions or position for national development changed.
3. Any form of empowerment either by government, organizations, individuals to youths should be sustainable for community and national development.
4. Empowerment of youths require the removal of formal and informal institutional barriers that limit their access to resources and prevent them from taking control of their destiny.

### Conclusion

The paper espouses youths empowerment through technical/vocational education that sustains, that youths are the future leaders and key elements of development of any nation. In this connection their role cannot be undermined or underestimated. Youths make up about 51 percent of the total number of 160 million habiting this nation. Out of this about 68-70 percent are unemployed, hence they are security risk and thus would dampened development in all perspectives. The reasons for the production of this army of unemployed youths anchored on the kind of education in Nigeria – the Eurocentric which produces unskilled manpower. The emerging global economy makes the Eurocentric education less relevant to our needs. The paper is advocating that to achieve national security in an emerging nation such as ours, and to avoid the Arab Spring experience, technical/vocational education be encouraged as a means of youths empowerment for the future. No meaningful development can be achieved in any nation without qualitative youths. National security is anchored on youths empowerment and development – by extension sustainable skill acquisition through technical/vocational education.



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