An Overview of the Challenges Facing Youths in Nigerian Society

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Abstract

The paper did an overview of some of the challenges facing Nigerian youths with the result that majority of the youths are incapacitated. The paper was premised on the fact that youths' inclusion in any government is imperative as no nation can prosper without its youths making contributions in government and for this to happen, challenges facing the youths must be removed. The paper did a survey study among the National youth Corp Members in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, making use of 130 Corp members for the study. Questionnaire tagged "Challenges facing Nigerian Youths" (CFNY) was used to collect data for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the data collected. The study revealed that a lot of challenges are being faced by the Nigerian youths which subsequently have led them to being indulged in various criminal activities, drug abuse, prostitution and violence of one kind or the other. The paper concludes by recommending the need for every hand to be on deck in planning for the future of this country by planning for its youths.

Keywords: Unemployment, national development, functional and quality education, crimes, empowerment.

Introduction

"Youth" is generally perceived as the time of life between childhood and adulthood (Macmillan Dictionary 1981). The age range that constitutes youth varies from one society to another because an individual's actual maturity may not correspond to their chronological age. However, the United Nations define youths as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNESCO, <u>www.unesco.org</u> – 21-5-13). The United Nations recognize the fact that young people are heterogeneous group in constant evolution and that the experience of being young varies across regions and within countries. There are some characteristics of youths that make them most vulnerable for development; the most important of which is their vigour and the spirit to achieve if an enabling environment is created for them. They are young, agile, and virile and are expected to be innovative. But how much of these characteristics in youths are being taken advantage of in the country today?

Challenges Facing Youths

There are myriads of challenges facing youths in the Nigerian society. The challenges are so enormous that if care is not taken they make youths to be depressed and loose interest in activities going on around them.

Population is on the increase by the day and this has in turn led to increase in the turnout of Nigerian graduates on a yearly basis. The job situation could thus, not cope with the graduates turned out from the universities. This posses a great problem for youths hence a lot of young people who should be involved in building the nation are found in criminal activities such as armed robbery, prostitution and fraud (James Okeyonye, <u>www.asorock.com</u>). Ndyanabangi Bannet, the UN Population Fund's deputy representative in Nigeria once stated that 60 percent of the population is under 30 and needs to be accommodated with education, training and health care (Nigerian Youth Population: <u>http://lagostokwara.blogspot.com</u>). He stated further: It *is a plus if it is taken advantage of he said of Nigeria's youth. But if it is not harnessed, it can become a challenge, because imagine what hoards of unemployed young people can do*. The population growth rate must therefore be curbed because the economy of the country cannot keep pace and there is a daily surge in the number of unemployed youths who are involved not only in anti-government protests but also in various criminal acts.

Population increase is taking its toll on Nigerian youths in that there is a great difficulty in finding jobs and this has discouraged many youths from getting married and this can account for the increase in the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS. Population increase has brought in associated evil in the Nigerian society. Nigeria which has a population of 140 million (NPC 2001: unfpa.org) has one third of her population being young people aged between 10 and 24 years and the Nigerian National Youth Policy 2001: 2 (unfpa.org) defines youth as comprising all young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years and who are the citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. There must therefore be rational policy making, planning and programmes for the youths of this country in order to prepare them for future leadership. Getting adequate information about Nigeria's population especially about its youths becomes germane in removing barriers facing the youths in this country. Planning for them should also be a priority because the future of Nigeria belongs to the youths who have tremendous roles to play towards national development and integration.

Access to functional and qualitative education remains a challenge to Nigerian youths. Adequate projection for population growth rate will involve planning for the educational needs of the youths. Majority of the youths have restricted access to functional and quality education yet the Nigerian philosophy of education is one that emphasizes "self reliance". Some youths still lack basic functional skills needed to support their post school life. Early school drop outs and poor quality education leave youths poorly prepared and ill equipped for work life. Qualitative education is also hard to come by when there is lack of educational infrastructure which will make functional education a reality. It is imperative therefore for the curriculum content and delivery of the Nigerian school system to be in relationship with post school employment requirements.

Access to Information/Communication Technology (ICT) by all remains an illusion making it difficult for everybody to have access to relevant information except for the children of the rich. The challenge of transition from school to work leaves many young people unemployed or underemployed (UNECA, 2006 <u>http://nigeria-youth.blogspot.com/ 2008/10/challenges-facing-nigerian-youth.html - 21-5-13</u>).

Equipping youths with life skills and technological knowhow would set them on a track of being self-reliant. Employment opportunities are far below the growth rate in the youth population due to lack of commensurate investments and appropriate technologies. This fact is corroborated by Juan Somavia, Director – General, International Labour Organization that *only through decent employment opportunities can young people get chance to work themselves out of poverty. Every country must therefore focus more on youth development. (International Youth* Foundation www. Iyfnet.org/centre/work 20-5-13).

There is a lot of advertisement on youth empowerment in Nigeria today, but the number of youths being empowered and those involved in the empowerment scheme leave much to be desired. There have been such an empowerment programme as Subsidy Reinforcement and Empowerment Programme (SURE) meant to empower youths. The scheme was designed to provide 10,000 jobs for youths in each of the state of the federation stated the Minister of Youth Development in February 24 2012 (Abdulai, 2012). He further stated that the Ministry's Youth Development Centres are places where youths can acquire skills and develop capacities. Nigeria has a youthful population of about 80 million which is about 60 percent of her population and it is disheartening to know that 70% are unemployed after obtaining relevant work experiences and other qualifications necessary for the job. Though there are programmes to empower youths but the way it is done and those who stand to benefit are to be determined. Nigeria should copy good examples around the world to solve its problems of unemployment. An example of combating youth unemployment is the IYF Work Programme which provided more than 38,000 Latin American Youth with knowledge and skills they need to compete effectively in the 21st century labour market. (International Youth Foundation

http://www.iyfnet.org/centre/work 21-4-13).

There is the challenge of putting work programmes in place by the government so as to improve young people's workability prospects. Youths are neither trained for quality jobs nor for entrepreneurship, which stands as impediments to getting quality jobs.

Relegation of the Nigerian Youths to the background in the scheme of things remains a major challenge to them. Hamzat (2013) is of the opinion that youth inclusion in government is imperative as no nation can prosper without its youth taking key decisions and making significant contributions in government because youths are the backbone of any nation and so must neither be relegated nor neglected in the scheme of things. Nigerian youths to Hamzat represent over 60% of the voting population and are not always involved in government yet the government is always looking for the support of the uninvolved youths especially in political activities. Realizing the importance of youths in nation building therefore, giving them their rightful position to enable them to be involved in shaping the society through their being involved in decision making is imperative.

Unemployment is a great challenge facing youths in Nigeria. Hamzat (2013) states "the competent, upright and intelligent youths who had no godfathers or no parents who could give positions to them as gift would never be involved in government".

This amounts to shutting the doors of leadership on the youths that are ready to use their intelligence to contribute to the progress of this country. Youths with distinctive character and leadership zeal for excellence don't ask for chance, they create it, they don't ask for leadership, they work their way to it. Hamzat (2013) concludes that the youth of any nation are incompetent and incapable implies that the elders and leaders of such a nation are failed people.

Unemployment of these youths lead to criminal acts hence they are involved in drug addiction, sexual abuse and all sorts of abuses. The government is not unaware of this challenge of unemployment facing youths as the minister of Youth Development in February 24, 2012 stated that the federal government will partner with states to address the issue of youth unemployment and the challenge of street children in the country. He was however quick to add that the people belong to the states and so governments at the state level must seek for ways of effectively addressing the problem of unemployment and street children (Abdulahi, 2012).

There are so many schemes put in place to benefit youths of this nation in each state of the federation, the effectiveness of this scheme and who the beneficiaries are, need to be determined to ascertain whether it favours youths generally or whether it is of benefit to the "privileged few". When hindrances to youths' employment are removed, they would have the full opportunity to participate in shaping the affairs of the nation.

Governor Adams Oshiomole realizing the problem unemployment can cause stated that "government alone would not be able to provide all the jobs that the citizens require and thus enjoined every company to come to the aid of the youths in curbing unemployment (Oshiomole, 2013). He sees youth employment as a sure way to end the security challenges facing the country.

There are various other challenges facing the youths as identified by Mustapha (Sta.uwj.edu/clubs/unwijs/files/challenges-facing_youth.doc). These include:

- (a) Identity crisis
- (b) Lack of self identify and low self esteem
- (c) A sense of hopelessness

All these identified challenges could be as a result of unemployment. Unemployment could lead to lack of self identity, low self esteem and having a sense of hopelessness thus leading to identity crisis.

Another major challenge facing youths today is about technology. The society has witnessed a great change in technology over the last few decades and this has altered the way people think about life. This has taken youths away from the culture of interpersonal human relations to more of self-centered individualism, such that self-serving and ego centeredness is the order of the day among the youth. Television programmes and films of various types are always appealing to the destructive and disintegrative instincts of the youth to provoke greed, unlimited self gratification and absence of moral restraints in the youths. Parents who should play active roles in the moral development of their children till maturity is reached do not create time to communicate effectively with their children. This is a great challenge as these youths have the enticing pressure from outside their home to participate in undesirable activities. Mustapha (2013) sums it up by stating that *everyone should recognize that there is serious challenge on ground, to ensure that today's children (tomorrow's adults) would experience a better world than we are living in today, we should work towards this objective and not wait for crisis to occur and them react. We should be prepared.*

Peer pressure, people think, always have negative influences on children but often they are positive role models. Peers also listen to each other, understand the frustrations and challenges being faced by peers and they offer a sense of acceptance and belonging that youths' needs. Much as positive as these peer groups can be, they can also exert negative influences on youths.

Youths whose friends smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs or engage in other frivolous negative behaviours are likely to engage in such behaviours. However, youths, whose friends have high educational aspirations do well in school and engage in healthy behavior (http:familyplus.bgca.org/youthfamily/ challenges/problems).

Another trend in the challenges facing youths has to do with poverty and which subsequently has led to the increasing disparity between the wealthiest and the poorest. Darmani (1999) states that as polarization increases those who have lots of problems and limited skills remain at the bottom and those who have opportunity of achieving high skills (which can be obtained through post secondary education which is becoming more difficult for poorer families to access) get to the top.

Media diet is another major challenge facing youths. Media exposes them to consumer culture, brands and materialistic values and the idea that "you are what you have". This idea leads them into risky behaviours such as unprotected sex, drug and alcohol use and thereby becoming depressed and displaying low self esteem.

To help the youths out of the negative impact of media, Nwogu, (Punch ,May 8, 2013) called on managers of organizations and wealthy individuals to invest more in the human capital development and employment generations in various communities. In the same light, Senator Olasunkanmi Akinlabi in the Punch of May 8, 2013 stated that we have to make our youths especially the unemployed productive. He stated further that we are going to make sure that the youths genuinely learn skills, vocational and entrepreneurship education so that they will not only be useful to themselves but also to the community.

Statement of the Problem

A lot has been said about problems facing youths in Nigeria, a lot of advertisement has also been made on youth empowerment but the fact remains that youths still face several challenges in spite of all these efforts to make them productive and live well. The focus of this study therefore is to critically examine the challenges faced by the Nigerian youths and look for ways of bringing them to productivity without relying so much on the government to provide jobs for them. This study is therefore out to answer the major question: What impact will the challenges faced by youths have on them and the future of this country?

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- 1. Will there be any effect of school curriculum on the challenge of unemployment facing the Nigerian youths?
- 2. Is there any relationship between youth empowerment and their contributions to the development of the society?
- 3. Is there a relationship between media diet and criminal activities for unemployed youths?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were generated for the study.

- 1. There is no effect of school curriculum on the challenge of unemployment facing the youth.
- 2. There is no relationship between youth empowerment and their contributions to the development of their communities.
- 3. There is no effect of media diet on criminal activities of unemployed youths.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research of the survey type. The population for the study consisted of all youth corps members in Ibadan North Local Government area of Oyo state.

Sample and Sampling Size

A sample of 130 respondents was selected through the use of stratified random sampling. The youth Corp members were first stratified into batches and the simple random sampling technique was used to select the 130 subjects.

Instrument

A 15 item self designed questionnaire titled: "Challenges Facing Nigerian Youths (CFNY) was used to collect data for the study. The data were analysed using percentage and frequency counts and t-test and Pearson's Moment correlation.

The questionnaire was given to experts in the Tests and Measurement unit of the Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti for its validation and it was corrected. The instrument was pilot –tested for the study making use of test-rest method. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.68 which was deemed high enough for the study.

Results

Research Question 1: Will there be any effect of school curriculum on the various challenges facing the Nigerian Youth?

| S/N | Items | SA | Α | D | SD |
|-----|--|------|------|------|-----|
| 1. | Youth is the time of life between childhood and adulthood | 87 | 31 | 9 | 3 |
| | | 66.9 | 23.8 | 6.9 | 2.3 |
| 2. | Access to functional and qualitative education to some youths is a | 48 | 39 | 40 | 3 |
| | problem. | 36.9 | 30.0 | 30.8 | 2.3 |
| 3. | The present education system is responsible for unemployment | 24 | 87 | 7 | 9 |
| | | 18.5 | 66.9 | 5.4 | 6.9 |
| 4. | The present curriculum should be reformed and made employment | 74 | 33 | 20 | 3 |
| | based | 56.9 | 25.4 | 15.4 | 2.3 |
| 5. | The curriculum reform should relate to preparing students for self | 59 | 57 | 14 | - |
| | reliance rather than for white collar jobs | 45.4 | 43.8 | 10.8 | - |
| 6. | School work should be tailored towards societal needs. | 33 | 85 | 12 | - |
| | | 25.4 | 65.4 | 9.2 | - |

 Table 1: Effect of School Curriculum on the challenges of unemployment facing youth

Table 1 above reveals that access to functional and quality education is not available to majority of the Nigerian youths. 66.9% attested to this fact while 30.8% refuted it. 107 respondents representing 82.3% agreed that the present curriculum should be reformed and made employment based while 89.2 percent and 90.8 percent respectively agreed that school curriculum should prepare students for self reliance and that it should be in line with the societal needs.

Research Question 2: Is there any relationship between youth empowerment and their contributions to the development of the society?

| S/N | Items | SA | Α | D | SD |
|-----|---|------|------|------|-----|
| 1. | Youths are to sustain the values of society | 32 | 58 | 40 | - |
| | | 24.6 | 44.6 | 3.8 | - |
| 2. | The capacity of youths should be built for self-reliance | 47 | 76 | 4 | - |
| | | 36.2 | 58.5 | 3.1 | - |
| 3. | Youths should be empowered to live well and contribute to the | 42 | 76 | 12 | - |
| | development of the society | 32.3 | 58.5 | 9.2 | - |
| 4. | Empowering youths will make them assert their independence in | 74 | 33 | 20 | 3 |
| | making the right decision | 56.9 | 25.4 | 15.4 | 2.3 |
| 5. | Empowering youths will make them self reliant thereby making | 41 | 73 | 16 | - |
| | them to be innovative. | 31.5 | 56.2 | 12.3 | - |
| 6. | Empowering youths by making them to participate in local issues | 49 | 69 | 9 | 3 |
| | is important | 37.7 | 53.1 | 6.9 | 2.3 |
| 7. | Empowering young people means creating an enabling condition | | | | |
| | under which they can act on their own behalf rather than on the | 30 | 56 | 35 | - |
| | direction of others. | 23.1 | 43.1 | 26.9 | - |

Table 2: The Impact of youth empowerment on the development of the society

Table 2 showed the importance of empowering youths for the development of the nation. 79.2 percent and 94.7% respectively of the respondents agreed that building the capacity of youths would lead to their sustaining the values of the society; 90.8 percent agreed that empowering them will enable them to live well and contribute to societal development.

Empowering youths to be self-reliant and thus making them confident so that they are able to assert their independence in decision making; 82.3% and 87.7% agreed to these items. 66.2% respondents agreed that empowering youth means creating an enabling environment under which they can act on their own-behalf rather than on the direction of others.

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between media diet and criminal activities among unemployed youth?

| S/N | Items | SA | Α | D | SD |
|-----|--|------|------|------|-----|
| 1. | Unemployed youth watch uncensored video games/ films and television | 33 | 85 | 12 | - |
| | a lot | 25.4 | 65.4 | 9.2 | - |
| 2. | Violent films, video films and video games could be a risk factor for | 49 | 69 | 9 | 3 |
| | criminal behavior | 37.7 | 53.1 | 6.9 | 2.3 |
| 3. | Media violence could lead to increase in aggressive and violent behavior | 49 | 69 | 9 | 3 |
| | | 37.7 | 53.1 | 6.9 | 2.3 |
| 4. | Youth should use media for relevant and useful information | 41 | 73 | 16 | - |
| | | 31.5 | 56.2 | 12.3 | - |
| 5. | Youth joblessness could lead to crime perpetration | 94 | 33 | 3 | - |
| | | 72.3 | 25.4 | 2.3 | - |
| 6. | Youth joblessness could lead to crime perpetration | 94 | 33 | 3 | - |
| | | 72.3 | 25.4 | 2.3 | - |

| Table 3: Media Diet and | Criminal Activities |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
|-------------------------|----------------------------|

Table 3 reveals that unemployed youths have the tendencies of watching uncensored films, television programmes and video games a lot. 118 respondents (90.8%) agreed to this while 90.8% also believed that violent films and video games could be risk factors for criminal behavior. 90.8% of the respondents also agreed to the fact that media violence could manifest in violent behavior in unemployed youths. 87.7 percent of the respondents agreed that youths' joblessness could lead to crime perpetration.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no effect of school curriculum on the challenge of employment facing the youth.

| School Curriculum | Ν | Mean | Std. | df | t | Sig. |
|-------------------|----|-------|------|-----|-------|------|
| High | 93 | 13.15 | 1.26 | | | |
| Low | 37 | 11.97 | 1.48 | 128 | 4.571 | <.05 |

Table 4 Effect of school curriculum on the challenge of unemployment facing Youth

Table 4 Indicates that school curriculum had significant effect on the challenge of unemployment facing youths in Nigeria at (t (128), 4.571; P < .05). 93 respondents agreed that school curriculum had high effect (mean = 13.15) on youth unemployment while only 37 viewed the situation differently. Hence, t-value showed that school curriculum had significant effect on youth unemployment. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and challenges facing Nigerian youth. This was tested using Pearson's correlation test.

Table 5: Pearson's correlation showing relationship between youth empowerment and contributions to societal development

| Variables | Ν | Mean | Std. | df | t | Sig. |
|----------------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|
| Youth empowerment | 130 | 128 | .74 | <.05 | 12.60 | 2.44 |
| Challenges facing Nigerian youth | | | | | 10.26 | 1.74 |

Table 5 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between youth empowerment and their contributions to the development of the society at (df = 128; r = .74; P <.05). This means that the more the challenges facing youths are removed the more useful they are to themselves as well as the community in which they live and the more they are able to contribute to the development of their communities. This result negates the tested hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: There is no effect of media diet on criminal activities for unemployed youth.

| Variables | Ν | Mean | Std. | df | t | Sig. |
|-------------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| Media Diet | 130 | 128 | .18 | <.05 | 7.07 | 1.89 |
| Criminality | | | | | 4.85 | 1.24 |

| Table 6: Pearson's correlation showing the Relationsh | in between Media Diet and Criminal Activities |
|--|---|
| Table 0. I carbon 5 correlation showing the Kelationsh | ip between media blet and Criminal Activities |

Table 6 revealed that media diet has a significant positive relationship with criminal activities among unemployed youths at (df = 128; F = .18; P < .05). This implies that criminal activities increase with uncensored media diets. The null hypothesis is thereby rejected.

Discussion

The study discovered that Nigerian youths are faced with a lot of challenges. It was discovered that the present education system is responsible for gross unemployment among the youths. The earlier statement of Aboya, the secretary general, Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) supports this finding when he stated that the *present education system is responsible for unemployment, that the curriculum is not designed to meet the everyday needs and the challenges of the nation*. Msiska (1994) supported this finding too by stating that school leaver's, unemployment could be tackled through curriculum reform and that such should relate to preparing students adequately for self or small business employment rather than seeking white collar employment. Adeyeni's (2013) earlier finding also lends credence to this finding that the Nigerian educational curriculum is structured in a way that graduates are prepared to be job seekers rather than job creators. The views of the Association of school and college leaders also lend credence to this finding in the following statement.

With the job market as tight as it is and many young people struggling to find jobs; for their sakes, we cannot afford to make mistakes with the curriculum. This is not a political or ideological argument. This is about giving young people an education that will motivate and engage them and will properly prepare them to be good employees with the skills to fill the jobs available.

The above made it clear that there is a strong link between the present curriculum and unemployment. It was also revealed that there is a great relationship between youth empowerment and the challenges facing them. This finding is supported by the earlier opinion of Vavrus and Fletcher (2006) when they stated that:

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people.

The above implies that youth empowerment is a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democratic building. The study therefore reveals that when youths are empowered, they become self-reliant and thus are able to assert their independence by making right choices and decision thus building a high self esteem for themselves. Their empowerment will also make them contribute immensely to the growth of their communities.

The views of the Nigerian Minister of Finance also support this finding when she states, that when youths are empowered, the result could be over whelming. She thus, commended the young entrepreneur for their creativity, ingenuity and managerial capacities.

The study also discovered that there is a strong relationship between media diet which is a form of challenge facing Nigerian youths and criminal activities. To keep them from being idle and stop them from irrelevant diet, Nwogu supporting this finding states *we have to make our youths especially the unemployed productive*.

Implication of Findings

That; for Nigerian youths to be kept from various challenges facing them, they must be kept from being idle. They must be relevantly and productively engaged in rewarding activities. This will lead to their development thereby being relevant not only in this country but all over the world.

Recommendations

The study had attempted an overview of challenges facing Nigerian youths with the aim of making them more relevant not only to themselves but to Nigeria and the world in general. The study, based on the discoveries thus made these recommendations:

- 1. The Federal Ministry of Education should embark on curriculum reform and this must be done by involving education professionals and subject specialists and adequate and effective career guidance should be put in place in schools to help young people make right choices early in life. The government should also enforce the integration of entrepreneurship into educational curriculum as this will reduce the challenge of unemployment among youths.
- 2. The government should develop and implement measures to promote self-reliance in youths through a range of measures ranging from micro-credit and entrepreneurship education to reviewing the federal/state budget and how they affect young people. The government should do all in its power to empower the youth.
- 3. Parents should take time to control the media diet of their children right from the time they are young. Parents as well as society must learn to keep children from being idle and teach them to be productive right from when they are young so as to keep them from accessing wrong information, watching wrong films and playing bad video games that would lead them towards criminal acts when they grow old and are idle.

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