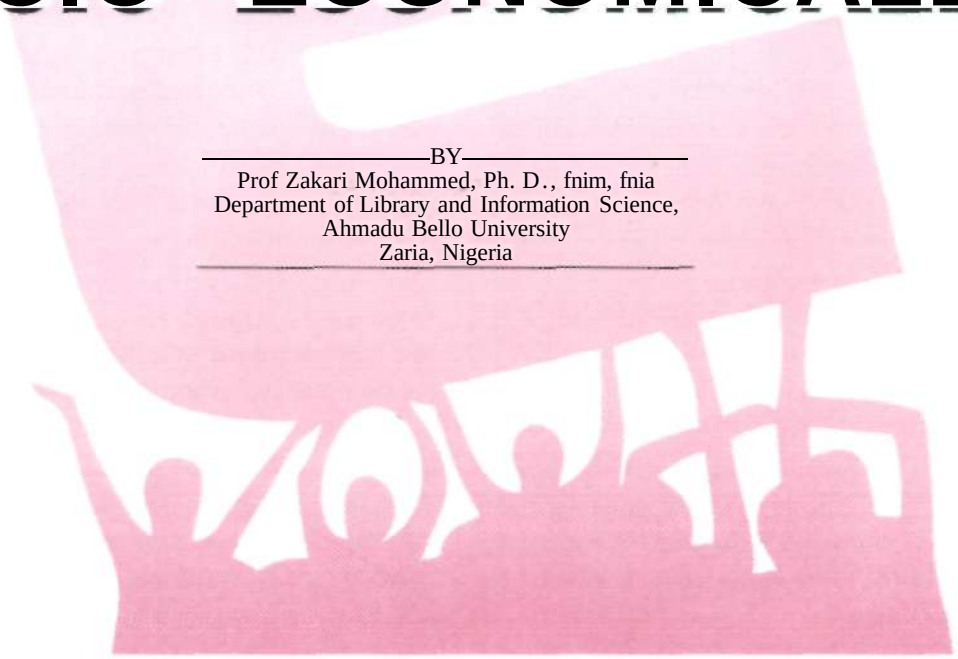
# EMPOWERING THE NIGERIAN YOUTH SOCIO- ECONOMICALLY

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Abstract

The concept and impact of unemployment phenomenon and consequences in the society were reviewed. What youth empowerment is all about was discussed and what successive Nigerian governments have directly and indirectly evolved to empower Nigerians particularly the youth were highlighted. It concluded by advocating for the need to ensure the socio-economic empowerment of Nigerians, particularly the youth utilizing whichever viable means possible and practicable to reduce unemployment and poverty to a digit percent limit.

**Introduction**

It is a known fact that there exists disequilibrium among the nations of the world and within the nations especially as it relates to cultural, scientific, socio-economic and political development and advancement. What is worrisome is the continued sharp differences among all and sundry in societies, communities and nations to have equal opportunity to:

- Education;
- Health care services;
- Socio-economic and political inclusion;
- Better life expectancy; and
- Other good things of life.

What is prevalent these days in all nations, societies and communities are:

- Socio-economic and political marginalization;
- Socio-political discrimination;
- Racial and cultural deprivation;
- Economic exploitation and dependency;
- Social injustice and inequity;
- Political victimization and exclusion;
- Racial segregation;
- Labour insecurity; and
- Injustice.

The foregoings are continually being meted on people due to their gender, race, culture, religion, tribe, political lineage, and socio-economic background. What is even more worrisome is the increasing gap between the haves and have not; and more particularly unemployment among the youth who are not only seen as the future general of the leaders of the nation, but who constitute the major active role players and stakeholders in the scientific, social. Political cultural and economic advance of the society. Given their vast untapped energy, skills and talents, the youth can safely be conceived to be the most productive segment of the society when given the appropriate opportunity and the enabling environment.

**Unemployment Phenomenon.**

According to International Labour Organisation (1982), **unemployment simply implies being jobless .** One is considered jobless when he/she is without any source of income from the labour market in return for a work done. Basically, one is considered as being unemployed when he or she is not formally or informally working for an establishment /organization/an individual in return for financial or martial gain in form of income; or is not self-engaged/self-employed in any form of entrepreneurial activity in return for an income. Entrepreneurship can be opportunity-based when a prospective entrepreneur foresees a business opportunity ahead or chooses to pursue one conceived to be lucrative and easy to manage. On the other hand, entrepreneurship can be necessity-based when prospective entrepreneur is left with no alternative viable source of income than to go for any available business plan to earn a living and be economically independent. In another dimension, one can be entrepreneurial when he/she engages in securing additional source of funds in form of private practice (PP) in addition to the regular income he/she receives from formal workplace.

It could be argued that unemployment is a global phenomenon cutting across nations at different levels of economic status. According to Allawadi (2010), the average unemployment rate within the African continent showed South Africa recording 25%, Botswana 17%, Angola 25%, Kenya 11% and Nigeria 23.9%. The key issue is how each country tries to manage its unemployment situation effectively and efficiently to reasonable satisfaction. The reality of unemployment situation on ground wherever, is that there is an inverse relationship between the available job vacancies and the applicants seeking for employment, qualified or not. While quoting Obadiah M. Gambari (2014) lamented that while growth averaged over 7% during the 2003 – 2007, the indices of poverty and unemployment continued to worsen. The World Bank described the phenomenon as 'jobless growth'. That the civil service, in spite of the rhetoric of reform remained a Byzantine behemoth, characterized by graft, venality and sloth. He added that over dependence on petroleum for the bulk of our revenues remained a stumbling block. Due to the acute shortage of available vacancies for employment across the board, the concomitant effect of seeking for employment in any

quarter turns out to be more like chasing a wild goose. It could be argued that the felt genesis and impact of unemployment or rather joblessness starts with when there is over dependence on bureaucratized jobs to make money to feed, cloth and shelter. The side effects of inability to be gainfully employed include sturdy/street begging, thievery, sycophancy, boot leaking, mouth-watering, slavery , errant boyhood, etc.

Although Yusuf (2012) is of the view that after China and India, Nigeria is the fastest growing economy in the world with a growth rate of 7.2%, Omoh, G. (2012) observed that the growth of unemployment in Nigeria has risen from 7.7% in 2006 to 16.7% in 2011. Similarly, Doreo Partner (2013) remarked that unemployment rate in the country is growing at about 16% per annum impacting more on the youth. In another dimension, Ruth (2011) reported that unemployment in-between male and female is 17% by 23.3% respectively. He added that while the unemployment rate for applicants within the age range of 60 – 64 years is about 16.7%, that of those in their 15 – 24 years is 41.6%. Besides, according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the estimated inflation of 7.9% in November 2013 had accelerated to 8% in December, 2013 (Chijioke 2014). Perhaps this explains the youth's apparent involvement in all sorts of social restiveness and criminality such as theft, robbery, banditry, abduction, kidnapping, political thugry, computer hacking, militancy and other sorts of social vices making them unfit as gentlemen and women of the society expected to contribute positively to the overall advancement of the nation. Woolfolk (1998) remarked that the youthful years mark the critical stage of human development when they are amenable to training in entrepreneurship as opposed to self destructive behaviours.

**Threats to Employment**

Several studies and commentaries abound on the genesis, crisis and impacts of unemployment across nations and societies including Nigeria, some of which contradicted each other due to the differences in the sources, methodology and time frame of data collection as well as the objectives, management and use of the reports. One of the major root causes of unemployment in Nigeria centre on the inconsistences in the nation's educational policy and policy implementation. Lamenting on the inconsistences in education systems, Chika (2014a) remarked that ' the problem over the years has continued to be two-fold: it is either we are saddled with ministers and policy-makers who have no idea of why they are there and what they are supposed to be doing or we have ones who have sights properly set on worthy goals and objectives but who are constrained by poor government funding attitude. In another dimension, it has been asserted that the vast majority of our youth do not get further education and that while only 22.3% get basic, 28.3% go beyond that and get further secondary education, and 1.5% get tertiary education either in colleges of education, technology , polytechnic or university. That between 1999 and 2004, 4,467,708 who applied for JAMB admission, 432 of them succeeded. It is projected that in the same manner, the JAMB rejectees will hit 51.6 million by 2020 (Chika, 2014b). The basic question is 'where will these rejectees go to or fit in the scheme of things for the overall advancement of Nigeria?

However, the general assessments of threats to employment in Nigeria include:

- Global economic downturn and solvency of the economy;
- Lack of strategic national development plan;
- Politicisation and poor implementation of vision 20-20 plans;
- Poor implementation of annual budgets;
- Rising population growth;
- In access to education and improved health care services;
- Negatively skewed national economy;
- Inconsistent educational policies;
- Increasing cost of labour, wages and salaries;
- The dwindling power of the local currency in relation to the foreign currencies;
- Uncoordinated and politically inclined socio-economic intervention programmes at the three tiers of government

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- Politically motivated economic intervention programmes;
- Non-readiness of school graduates to engage in non-white collar jobs;
- Rising costs of interest and bank rates;
- Increasing cost of factors of production;
- Racial, ethnic, tribal, religious and political exclusion;
- God fatherism
- Systemic corruption and corruptive tendencies;
- Systematic mismanagement and embezzlement;
- Lack of awareness of sources of information on job vacancies;
- Lack of information and ICT literacy;
- Over dependence on oil revenues;
- Insincerity of purpose;
- Strategic swindling of innocent job seekers by smart people of the underworld/undertakers in the name of application fee, registration fee and the likes;
- Over and covert neglect of agricultural sector considered as the main source of employment;
- Get rich quickly syndrome;
- Gender biases
- Merger and acquisition of especially business oriented institutions and organisations;
- Negatively skewed budget allocation in favour of non-productive sectors; etc

The concomitant effects of the fore-goings on the Nigerian society include:

- Inability to employ qualified and competent workforce as at when due;
- Inability to replace outgone staff on retirement, termination or dismissal;
- Inability to recruit new qualified and competent staff;
- Increase in staff retirement, retrenchment, termination and dismissal;
- Increase in non-motivated, frustrated and overworked workforce;
- Decline in the morale or potential job seekers;
- Inducement of desperate job seekers in unethical and unholy activities and behaviours;

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- Arguably upholding to the doctrines of downsizing and rightsizing of workforce;
- Continued impoverishment of the citizenry and the society at large; and
- Decrease in overall productive sectors of the economy.

What is therefore needed is to employ viable strategies to enhance the productive sectors of the economy especially through employment, retention and sustenance of qualified and competent workforce and the provision of the right enabling environment and opportunities to operate, excel and meet up to expectations.

**Youth Employment**

Generally, an individual is considered to be a youth when he/she is within the age bracket of 18 – 35 years and extension at most is up to 40-45 years. A majority of this crop of youth are those:

- Who have no opportunity of any sort to attend any form of formal or informal education system perhaps due to differences in their socio-economic religious, gender and cultural background;
- Who are fall-outs from primary and secondary schools who are unable to continue with their education pursuits after secondary level and could

not secure admission into any of the tertiary levels of education;
- Who need some level of practical skills to secure jobs or be self-employed;
- Who may not be academically inclined and competent to continue with higher education;
- Who have relapsed in educational pursuits due to some disabilities; and
- Who have some learning difficulties due probably to socio-economic , cultural, gender and physical challenges.

Apparently, youth unemployment in Nigeria could be said to be a time bomb and has reached a crisis level. This ugly situation can be buttressed by the recent stampede at the national stadium in Abuja on 15/3/14 when about 700,000 applicants scrambled for the test papers for interview of which about 6000 candidates may be offered job in the Nigerian Immigration Service. The stampede led to the death of about 20 of the applicants including pregnant women and several others sustaining injuries. Successive Nigerian governments at one time or the other and in all the three tiers of government in the country have tried to introduce some policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving the nation's economy and increase employment rate. One of the noticeable policy is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1986 – which was reported to have reduced unemployment from 7.1% in 1986 to 1.8% in 1995. Other policies and initiatives include:

- Establishment of Industrial Development Centres (IDC);
- Establishment of Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI);
- Establishment of Women Development Centre;
- Establishment of Skills Acquisition Centre;
- Establishment of Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Development Agency;
- Youth Empowerment Solution (YES) for skills development – critical awareness and opportunities;
- National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP);
- Establishment of Agricultural Development Banks;
- Establishment of Bank of Commerce and Industries;
- Establishment and promotion of Micro Finance Banks;
- Establishment and promotion of Community Banks;
- Establishment of Better Life for Rural Women;
- Establishment of Vocational and Technical Schools and Colleges;
- Operation Feed the Nation (OFN);
- Green Revolution;
- Inclusion of Entrepreneurship Education in schools' curriculum at all educational levels;
- Establishment of Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN) for the youth and women;
- Empowering Niger Delta Youth;
- Establishment of You Training and Enterprise Programme (YTEP)
- Work Force Programme (WFP);
- Establishment of Young Apprenticeship and Enterprise Scheme(YATES);
- Non Violence and Conflict Management Training ;
- Establishment of Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP);
- Establishment of Nigeria Youth and Social Support Operation (YESSO);
- Establishment of State Education Programme Investment Project (SEPIP);
- Establishment of National
- Directorate of Employment(NDE);
- Establishment of People Living With Disability Programme;
- Establishment of Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA);
- Establishment of Operation Keep the City Clean/Environmental Sanitation Agency;
- Establishment of Subsidy Re-Investment Programme (SURE-P);
- Establishment of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC);
- Establishment of National Economic Development Strategy;

- Establishment of Nigerian version of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- Putting genuine structures for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
- Development of Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan (NIRP). and
- NEPARD, SEEDS, etc.

Good as these policies and initiatives are their implementation is more often than not mired in poor implementation, political rascality and jingoism. The effect of these ill-fated projects to create employment especially for the youth can also be seen from the outcome of the implementation of all the similar types of the state and local government projects found to be mostly politically motivated and executed. They usually survive and fissile away with the administrations that introduced them as there is no guarantee for their sustenance and genuine plans for managerial continuity. While some of the projects and programmes are even World Bank assisted, not much practical impacts are visibly felt by the target population in the long run beside the beautiful statistics presented to showcase some levels of accomplishment. However, good as these government policies, initiatives and programmes may look like at the on-set, a majority of them fusel out in no time with little or no visible impacts on the target audience and the society in general due mainly to:

- Misconception of the underlining mission and objective;
- Lack of needs assessment for proposed intervention scheme;
- Non implementation of needs assessment proposals on intervention scheme;
- Defective design;
- Nepotism;
- Exclusion of target beneficiaries;
- Absence of political will;
- Lip service;
- Non-continuity of past projects syndrome;
- Mismanagement and corruption; political jingoism; etc.

The extent of a nation being developed economically is largely a function of the extent to which the youth, being the major labour force, participate fully in its building in all sectors of the economy.

These therefore point to the need to empower the people, particularly the youth to be empowered or be self employed as the case may be and become self-reliant. It is expected that empowered youth will ensure:

- Freedom from economic slavery and servitude;
- Availability of skilled youthful labour force;
- Healthy and prosperous national economy;
- Overall national development and advancement;
- Transparent social and political systems;
- Less dependency on government and white collar jobs;
- Freedom from socio-political prostitution and bondage;
- Socio-economic development; and\national, internal and political harmony; etc.

**The Way Forward**

Conventionally, any member of a society has a right to be socio-economically and noticeably stable and also contribute to the overall development and advancement of such society without any encumbrance. This presupposes that an individual must have to acquire or possess some level of socio-economic and political leverage to be relevant in the schemes of the society. Essentially, the extent to which an individual is socio-economically and politically stable and also contribute to the overall development and advancement of a society is largely dependent upon one's socio-economic and political level of empowerment. An individual is said to be self-employed or rather socio-economically and politically empowered when he/she:

- Is economically self reliant, resourceful, productive and industrious;
- Possesses the capacity, ability, competence and confidence to realistically exploit and harness his or her potentials to his or her socio-economic advantage without any hick up;
- Can be self determined and confidently rake one's destiny in one's hands or rather can courageously take charge of one's life optimally;
- Can strategically make positive changes, choices and

set targets and goals to meet up to socio-political and economic expectations;
- Is free from political prostitution and servitude;
- Free from socio-economic slavery and bondage; and
- Can identify and explore alternatives to effectively and efficiently utilize his or other strengths, weaknesses, limitations, challenges, values, skills circumstances and temperament to achieve the desired goals and aspirations without any hindrance.

By and large, a socio-economically and politically empowered person is that who is: un-marginalised, un-deprived, productive, contributive, self-confident, self-knowledgeable, self-cared, self-reliant,, self-supportive, visionary, purposive, appreciative, committed, decisive, pro-active, entrepreneurial, wise and actively involved and current about the on-goings around. What is therefore needed is to provide the entire necessary enabling environment and opportunities to have self-empowered individuals who must have the capacity and ability to:
- Develop a sense of autonomy, self-dignity and self-confidence;
- possess the knowledge, skills, values and awareness for self determination;
- explore and exploit positively opportunities for education, employment, health care and improvement in quality of life;
- be self-sufficient, resourceful and entrepreneurial;
- creative, innovative and progressive;
- exist and survive without daily dependence on charity or welfare;
- exploit situations and circumstances positively and effectively;
- develop and maintain decision-making power;
- utilize one's potentials effectively and efficiently;
- be proactive, assertive, tactical and diplomatic;
- initiate, create, promote and sustain position socio-economic and political changes;
- develop skills for rational thoughts and behaviours;
- promote positive self confidence and image; and
- maximally exploit available necessity-based and opportunity-abased Entrepreneurship schemes.

One of the strategic steps to empowering the youth is to 'catch them young' especially at the primary school level when they need to be introduced and encouraged to appreciate and be actively involved in handcraft lessons where their creative powers will be nurtured and developed in the right direction to suit their innate skills, competencies and capacities. This is the stage where they will also learn and appreciate the concept and phenomenon of dignity of labour and self-reliance. At the secondary education level, the scrapped vocational and technical schools should be re-introduced to carter for those whose competence is not truly academically inclined. It is this crop of graduates who will first appreciate the need for self-empowerment since they will not be looking for government jobs or any other types of white-collar jobs to survive, be economically stable and self reliant considering the array of economic activities they will be engaged in depending on their areas of interest skill, capacity and ability. These corpuses of trained individuals will also form veritable sources of engaging the unemployed youth mostly found aimlessly roaming about the streets, sitting in the ghettos and engaging in all sorts of immoral activities due to lack of unemployment, lack of guidance and negative peer groups influences. It is of interest that the government is planning to make entrepreneurship subject compulsory for the WAEC and NECO examinations (Obioma 2014).

In the same vein at the higher education levels, in addition to promoting and supporting vocational and technical education in the polytechnics, similar programmes and courses should be initiated, promoted and encouraged at the conventional and specialist colleges of education and universities where the needed specialist man powers will be educated, trained and churned out. With the provision of the necessary enabling environment, encouragement and support, they could form the bedrock for empowering the less privileged job seekers who will also be systematically educated and trained in their respective areas of specialty and eventually be self-employed on graduation as well. The introduction of entrepreneurship courses at all levels of education which includes universities regardless of the students' areas of specialization is one of the right steps in the right direction even though it may not necessarily bring out truly self-employed or self reliant graduates due to the coverage, infrastructural needs, the weighting and during of courses in the respective institution.

**Concluding Remarks**

It is interesting to note that the Global Economic Prospect (GEP) reported that the growth rate in developing countries would pick up from 4.8% in 2013 to a lower than 5.3 in 2014, 5.5% in 2015and 5.7% in 2016. And that in order to accelerate poverty reduction, developing nations will need to adopt structural reforms that promote job creation, strengthen financial systems and shore up social safety net (Sulaimon 2014). This point to the need for Nigeria to be more aggressive, realistic and forthcoming in its efforts to reduce unemployment and poverty to single digit percent limit.

It is a fact that management has assumed a global dimension. It is a critical phenomenon that retards the development and programme of nations and societies. What is required of every nation is to carry and bear its cross in its own hands and find valuable ways and means of getting out of the shackles of unemployment syndrome. It is also a fact the prevalence of unemployed youth can spell doom to the advancement of any economy more especially where the most active set of the population (youth) are staying idle and wasted. It is necessary that the youth are engaged in the relevant sectors of the economy found readily available and fit for them to try their hands independently or through some tutelage, though with some form of relevant assistance and support for a start, in an effort to get them self-empowered and the socio-economically and politically stable and productive. Such productive sectors of the economy which characteristically is made up of the youth should be enticed to be actively engaged in among others: Agriculture, Trade, Commerce, Manufacturing, Agro-allied endeavours and Small and Medium scale businesses such as animal husbandry; knitting and sewing; hair dressing, metal and wood works; driving and transportation; catering and hospitality; electric and electronic mechanic; auto mechanic, wrist-watch and radio mechanic; brick laying and plumbing; painting and decoration; fashion design; manicure and pedicure; barbing and hair salon; cobbling and shoe shining, butchering and meat selling; fishing and hunting ; etc.

Consequently, it is important and necessary that the youth are exposed to various viable sources and avenues of becoming employers of labour rather been the employees per se. Strategically, they will need to have the knowledge and skills of :

- developing and managing small scale business enterprises; how to secure soft bank loans and credits to finance business;
- identifying/securing alternative viable means of financing small businesses; how to raise non-bank capitals to fund businesses;
- how to register and incorporate business outfits; engaging in cooperative /collaborative business ventures;
- marketing and promoting of goods and services;
- being self-employed in any chosen sector of the economy;
- financial management; etc.

In addition to establishment of innovative enterprises institutions and centres by governments, association, communities and private individuals to develop, nurture and enhance the diverse youth skills and competences, government programmes aimed at promoting self-employment and self-reliance socio-economically should be conceived and managed in the ideal and pragmatic senses rather than viewed within the real and contexts of political jingoism and absence of the spirit of continuity leading to the proverbial 'Old Wine in New Bottle' syndrome.

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