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YOUTH EDUCATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NIGERIA: POINTERS FOR ACCESSING SDG GOAL 8

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ABSTRACT

There exist a link between the youth and education-employment-entrepreneurship. This link expresses an age-long interaction and futuristic tendencies. It is such that the education of the youth determines their employability. Youth unemployment has however pervaded the make-up of the Nigerian society as such youth have resorted to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship education has gained general empathy as the solution to tackling unemployment. In the event of Sustainable Development Goal 8 which aims at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all men and women regardless of their capabilities and incapacities, how can the pointers of education, unemployment and entrepreneurship be used to produce a lasting framework that would lead to the achievement of this goal by 2030? This paper employs qualitative research methods in collecting data and analysis and concludes that achieving SDG goal 8 given these pointers requires a holistic approach.

INTRODUCTION

On the completion of my compulsory one year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme and after 3 months of teaching in a primary school (a choice I made because I didn't want to sit at home) to apply for multiple job openings, not less than 5 every week (most of which I didn't qualify for), I landed a job at my Alma mater.

With this job, I no longer qualified as 'unemployed' but, maybe 'underemployed'. However, many of my friends who had graduated before, with, and after me still go from one interview panel to another, surf the internet all day and nights with no suitable position to apply for (as most require 2-5 years of experience), resort to learning a trade and become self-employed, take up jobs that they have no qualification for, take online courses and certifications, become depressed and give up on searching. The rich and affluent ones can't get suitable jobs due to relatives declaring "things are hard everywhere" while other groups resort to cybercrimes.

It is significant to know that the average Nigerian youth mind has, before this age, been construed towards the system of getting a 'good' white collar job after leaving the university. In the absence or limited availability of this job, the Nigerian youth is first destabilized and concludes the degree, he dedicated 4 to 7 years of his life to, is a waste and finally secures funds from friends and relative and starts a business.

Buist, (2014) wrote, "*we were told that education was a ticket to employment when really, it's more like vague directions to the station... the grownups insisted: education, no matter how apparently arbitrary, leads to jobs*". Realistically, getting a degree doesn't mean you'd be able to use that degree to secure a suitable job, as such, the school of thought subscribed by our parents that suggest that education is a ticket for employment is beginning to get moribund.

Nowadays, employers are in the business of requesting for years of experience and professional qualifications which most often what a "fresh graduate" wouldn't possess. As such, the system of going to school, getting a degree, and getting a job no longer works. This particularly is linked to a default in the educational system which aims at creating job seekers rather than job creators. In Obiageli Ezekwesili's words "*education that doesn't match the need of the society is the end result*". (Ikpefan, 2016; Yurchenko, 2018)

The above is the reality a higher segment of the youths in Nigeria find themselves. It is a condition that necessitates self-reliance amongst young adults which evolves an opinion that degrees don't get you employed and getting one is a waste of time and money.

This is construed in the minds of youths that get-rich-quick schemes are the way forward and that solutions lie beyond the shores of the countries thus resorting to illegal migration. The productivity of the present generation is not only challenged by this but is equally challenged by the possibility of a sustainable future for the Nigerian youth.

Resorting to entrepreneurship has been a consolation prize for most youths with an appreciation to various entrepreneurial schemes, scholarships, and programs that have facilitated youth interests in entrepreneurship.

Unemployment is a global challenge, an intractable problem (Pinelli, 2015). This is why the enactment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals features as its number 8 goal: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all. It was premised on the realization that unemployment slows down economic growth and development of countries and that 'a continued lack of decent work opportunities, insufficient investments, and under-consumption lead to an erosion of the basic social contract underlying democratic societies: that all must share in progress'. (<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>).

It is particularly a national emergency for Nigeria and as such, higher institutions, particularly private universities, are inculcating various entrepreneurial training programmes into their curricula. While this initiative has been taken, it moves us to ask some questions; how well provided for is our future generation? How is the present generation being prepared for the future? Will this framework have a sustainable and lasting impact? Is entrepreneurship achieving the goal of a decent work and in economic growth? Does entrepreneurship salvage youths from the grip of poverty? It is based on these questions that this paper addresses the link between youth education and entrepreneurship and what it means for sustainable development goal.

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH, UNEMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There exists a link between the youths and education-employment-entrepreneurship. This link expresses an age-long interaction and futuristic tendencies. It is such that the education of the youth determines their employability which is therefore important to understand each of these 'concepts' and their peculiarities to this discourse.

It is important that we understand that the concept 'youth' has no generally accepted clarification. It has been perceived as a question of age, physical development, and responsibility (in this sense, the ability to be independent). Given the framework within which we are considering this concept, it is important to look at various descriptions of the youths. The United Nations recognizes Youths for statistical purposes in measuring the rate of the unemployed and educated population as individuals between the age of 15 and 24. Youth is regarded as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. That is the movement from the dependent formative years to the independent productive years.

Abbink (2005), however, regards the youth as people belonging to a 14-35 years of age; Pilcher insists that the concept of youth ... is a way of understanding the "growing up" stages in the life course. As such, she insists that youth is best understood as a stage of transition between childhood and adulthood (1995, 58); The African Youth Charter (2006, 3) however, regards the youth or young people as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. (Cited in Adesanya and Olominu, 2017).

For the purpose of this paper, the African Charter description will be our reference point given its consideration to the African character and conditions. Given this, the UN asserts in a report that the number of youth in Africa is growing rapidly.

In 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa, accounting for 19 percent of the global youth population. By 2030, it is projected that the number of youth in Africa would have increased by 42 percent. Africa's youth population is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055 (UN, 2015). With this skyrocketing figure and prognosis, African nations are challenged with the problem of properly educating the increasing population and consequently providing enough job opportunities for them. In Nigeria, with an ever-growing population of over 182million lives, more than half of this population falls under the age of 30. (<http://population.gov.ng/nigerias-population-now-182-million-npc/>).

Increasing population, however, means inculcating the factor of the extra numbers into policy making of a country since it is known that rapid population growth as well may affect the achievement of educational goals. For instance, Joint Admission matriculation board (JAMB) registered 1.6 million students for examination into the tertiary institution, a critical situation because the aggregate of Nigerian tertiary institutions cannot cater for the bulk of these 'jambites'. (The Premium times, 2018). Bloomberg Markets (2016) commented that this population increase puts a severe strain on a nation like Nigeria which is suffering from a downward slope in the economy and a decline in revenue to provide enough schools and health facilities. This inability to provide enough schools is also prevalent in the inability to provide enough job opportunities for the large population. While a large youthful population entering the labour market can be an economic asset, they could also constitute a challenge in countries with economic troubles and therefore account for increasing unemployment rate.

What then is Unemployment? **Unemployment** generally can be described by people as the inability to get a paid job. Generally, the international community defines unemployment according to a resolution of International Labour Organization in 1982. One can only be called as “unemployed” if he/she is:

- “without work”, meaning he/she was not in paid employment or self-employment during a particular reference period;
- “currently available for work”, meaning he/she was ready for a paid employment or self-employment during the reference period;
- “seeking work”, meaning he/she had taken specific steps in a specific period to seek a paid employment or self-employment.

Summarily, The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as the number of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left their work. Uddin and Uddin (2013) assert that “unemployment exist when members of the labour force wish to work but cannot get jobs”. Adesina resonated thus “unemployment is an economic condition where an individual or individuals seeking jobs cannot manage to get themselves”. According to the Nigerian National Bureau of statistics, unemployment is the proportion of those in the labour force (not in the entire economic active population, nor the entire Nigerian population) who were actively looking for work but could not find work for at least 20 hours during the reference period to the total currently active (labour force) population. As such, you are unemployed if you did absolutely nothing at all or did something but for less than 20 hours during the reference week. (NBS report, 2017).

NBS (2017) equally noted the difference between unemployment and 'not working'; and unemployment and underemployment thus 'a youth may not be working but may not necessarily be unemployed. A youth not working will only be termed unemployed if he is willing and able to work and actively looking for work within the review period. It is also important to note the distinction between unemployed and underemployed. You are unemployed if you do nothing at all and underemployed if you still manage to do something for some money for at least 20 hours a week and not fully engaging relative to your skills, time, and qualifications'.

Oyebade (2003), cited in Uddin and Uddin (2013), classified Nigeria's unemployment into two categories: first, the older unemployed who lost their jobs through redundancy or bankruptcy and second, the younger unemployed, most of whom

have never been employed. Majority of Nigerian youth falling into the second category are often university graduates going from one job interview to another or those who have not been able to apply for a single job opening in four weeks because they do not have the skills and experience required for the position.

Statistically, the number of unemployed in the labour force, increased by 351,015 persons, resulting in an increase in the national unemployment rate to 14.2% in the 4th quarter of 2016. This unemployment rate increased to 18.80% in the 3rd quarter of 2017 compared to 16.20% in the 2nd quarter. Unemployment has been on the highest for those within the age of 15-24 which represents the youth population. In terms of age groups, the unemployment rate was highest for those between the ages of 15 - 24 (25.2% in Q4 2016, 25.0% in Q3, 24.0% in Q2, 21.5% in Q1, and 19.0% in Q4 2015). For the 25 - 34 age group, the unemployment rate also increased to 15.4% in Q4 2016 from 15.0% in Q3, 14.5% in Q2, 12.9% in Q1, and 11.4% in Q4 2015 (NBS, 2017).

The NBS (2017) report reveals also that there is higher unemployment amongst women than men. Given this figure, it is apparent that rather than have a productive youth population, Nigeria suffers from youth unemployment. (NBS, 2017) Uddin and Uddin thus declare thus; 'Youth unemployment, therefore, could be described as the conglomerate of youths with diverse background, willing and able to work, but cannot find any; or cannot find the type of job that they are trained to do, and which they will be proud to do as their area of expertise'.

Unemployment in Nigeria has been linked to several factors: first on the list being population increase itself without commensurate economic and social provision, rural-urban migration, corrupt practices, educational system that has failed to respond to the needs of the present, wrong impression about technical and vocation schools, poor enabling environment, adoption of untimely economic policy measure, for instance, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986, poor teacher training, absence of adequate industries to absorb competent graduates, inconsistent public policies on employment, etc. (Adesina, 2013; Akande, 2014; Uddin and Uddin, 2013).

While all these causes seem to reside on the part of governmental parastatals, Kachi Ogbonna in his book 'How they started' pegged that 'An average Nigerian youth possess the entitlement mentality and indulges in blame game; both culminating in the inability to reach his/her full potential.' He portends that higher institutions must focus on curricula that aim at producing job creators rather than job seekers (Apeh, 2017). Mohammed Yunus speaking along this line declared "don't ask for a job, make your own. Everybody is an entrepreneur". This aphorism underlines the concept of Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship education has gained general empathy as the solution to tackling unemployment. (Osunkoya, 2012; Apeh, 2017; the Vanguard, 2015). Oyelola et al (2014) describe that entrepreneurship education is the preferred instrument to create enterprise culture and sufficiently mitigate youth unemployment. This could be said to be the foundation of programs like Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN), Osun State Youth Employment Scheme (O-YES), N-Power, and support foundations for emerging entrepreneurs like the Tony Elumelu Foundation and many others. It is based on the realization that in many developed countries of the world, small and medium enterprises employ more and contribute to the economy more than big multinational companies.

Pinelli (2015), writing for World Economic Forum, asserts that 'entrepreneurs play a vital role in job creation and providing opportunities for young people'. Greg Watson opined that 'Entrepreneurship is more than just starting a business. It is a process through which individuals identify opportunities, allocate resources, and create value'. Entrepreneur identifies the problem as opportunities, discover solutions to those problems, and then sell to customers who will pay for the problem solved.

Entrepreneurship is thriving in Nigeria with various start-ups at every corner you turn to, based on the realization that employment by government agencies and multinational companies alone cannot solve the problem of unemployment in

this country because of the prevalent large population.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) 8: STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

It is important that to understand SDGs, a clear definition of sustainable development be given. The most widely accepted definition of sustainable development is the one given by the Brundtland Report of 1987: “sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. It contains within it, two key concepts:

- The concept of **needs**; sustainable development emphasises that overriding priority should be given to meeting the essential needs of the world's poor.
- The idea of **limitations**; **SD identifies that the environment's ability to meet present and future needs is often limited by existing technological use and social organization.**

As such, the long-term aim of sustainable development is the stability of the economy and environment made possible when economic, environmental, and social concerns are integrated into the decision-making processes and policies of countries. The Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Global Goals originated from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio De Janeiro in 2000. The SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000-2015 as a mechanism for achieving global development since the MDGs were peculiar to third world countries.

On the 1st day of January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at a historic UN Summit. The goals have a lifespan of a period of 15 years. The UN asserts that the uniqueness of the new goal is such that they call on all countries; rich, poor, and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address social needs such as education, health, social protection, and job opportunities while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

Of particular reference and importance to us in this paper is the SDG goal 8 which enunciates thus; Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. This is such that by 2030, achievement of full and productive employment, decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value will become a reality.

This goal is premised on the reality that many youths across the world and particularly in Africa, as we discussed earlier, are incapacitated by unemployment and as such unable to give back to their national economy through a system of inclusiveness brought forth by employment. It is saddening that these classes of people have been invested on in terms of education and since education is like an investment that can help foster economic growth, contribute to personal social development and reduce social inequality.

Their countries are unable to reap the fruits of their labour personally, socially, culturally and broadly economically. This, therefore, creates a productivity gap and limits economic growth.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Having identified that youth unemployment has been growing in Nigeria and that entrepreneurship has been resorted to, I enunciate that SDG policies must put these areas into consideration.

It is for these reasons this paper proposes that Nigeria must put into consideration, the direct and indirect impact and relevance of education, employment, and entrepreneurship in achieving a nation where youths are an integral and inclusive part of the system.

First, the education systems that focus on the futuristic need of the country must be put in place. Policymakers must be aware of certain areas that are overcrowded with experts with no commensurate companies and industries to employ them. Other fields with little or no awareness/interest by students should be facilitated to cater for the future. Such educational system must also have at its core the main aim of creating intellectual individuals who, despite their limitations, can be job creators more than they can be job seekers.

Secondly, having established in this paper that entrepreneurship is the way forward for unemployment to elude the Nigeria youth, it is however important to declare that the mindset of Nigerian youths must be shifted away from the 'entitlement mentality' (given the peculiarity of our society/government) that is constantly waiting to be handed a job because he/she deserves the mentality as proposed by Muhammed Yunnas; 'constantly see yourself as an entrepreneur'.

Our national government must also support and engage youths in training programmes that propels them towards sustainable development. Replicating what is done in Uganda which ranks as the most entrepreneurial country in the world, would go a long way.

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FURTHER READING

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/background.html>