YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

DRIVE – AN INVALUABLE STEP TO SECURE
NIGERIA’S FUTURE PROSPERITY

BY:

ALAO IDRIS IBRAHIM

3rd Prize Winner

Annual National Essay Competition of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPMN)

September 2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cover Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of the Nigerian Youth</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts at reversing the trend</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing Nigeria’s Future Prosperity through Youth empowerment and Development drive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining the Empowerment and Development strategies</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

No other time is the issue of youth, empowerment and development more apt than the present time where the youth are faced with so many back-breaking and unprecedented challenges. In the world of over seven billion population, governments and policy makers are increasingly finding it difficult to grapple successfully with youth unemployment, the world appears ominously heading towards a dangerous precipice that will defy all economic theories and postulations, corruption becomes prerogative of public office holders as insecurity threatens the corporate existence of many nations of the world. The provisions of education, critical infrastructural facilities, improved health care services, employment opportunities and stabilized economy are sine qua non for any nation that anticipates a prosperous future.

Nigeria, as one of the developing countries of the world is struggling with numerous problems at each level of her education system, inability to halt continuous increase in the rate of youth unemployment, redundant artificial restrictions placed on self-employment, job creation opportunities and outright lack of social services such as roads, water systems and electricity networks. It is in this regard that this paper contends that empowering the younger generation and eliminating the above hydra-headed challenges are the keys to securing a prosperous future for Nigeria.

Key words: Youth, Empowerment, Development, Nigeria and Prosperous future.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

If anything, the Nigerian youth have been denied opportunities to develop in diverse realms of human endeavours. Ineptitude, mediocrity and intellectual dearth have become the three hallmarks of the Nigerian youth. In a national survey jointly sponsored by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Education Trust Fund (ETF) in 2004, 61% of 20 organizations rated Nigerian science graduates poor in skills needed in the work environment such as literacy, oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analytical, problem-solving and decision making (Okafor, 2011).

Although, Sections 17 and 18 of the constitution state that the government shall provide free and compulsory education in order to promote science and technology and eradicate illiteracy...[such that]...opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment is ensured (CFRN, 1999), the same constitution made it unenforceable by virtue of Section (6)(6)(c).

The National Youth Policy is full of platitudes and little has been done to bring it into full implementation despite several reviews of the policy since its formulation in 1981. Admittedly, the federal government noted that policy attempts hardly provided a concrete framework for addressing the heightened problems confronting the youth in the 1990’s. This was partly because the implementation mechanisms of the policy were weak and ineffective (SNYPD, 2009). Bondzi-Simpson (2011) was therefore right to have asserted that enforcement challenge undermines the rate of development in most African states. Until 2007, there was no separate ministry for youth development in the country.
Governments at all levels have continued to lay claim to several jobs created. Yet, the jobs are nowhere to be found by the massive youth. Dwindling economy resulting from corrupt practices (Otumba, 2013), lack of entrepreneurial skills (Alao, 2013), job creations, marketable and productive skills (Emeh, 2012) have all been identified as the root causes of youth unemployment.

The crux of the matter is that apart from the youth unemployment rate put at 23.9 percent in 2011, there is the problem of unemployable youth arising from gross incompetence. There is a wide gap between employers’ needs and employees’ skills.

The commonly suggested way out from these precarious situations is youth empowerment that will drive development in several sectors of the economy. This paper contends that youth empowerment and development drive are the invaluable steps to secure Nigeria’s future prosperity.

2.0 STATE OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTH

Youth globally have no exact age range. The United Nations often use the age range 15-24 for statistical purposes (SNYPD, 2009). The National Youth Policy (2009) defines youth as all young males and females aged 18-35 years, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This age range represents more than one-third of the Nigerian population.

Regrettably, the Nigerian youth are grossly unemployed and their potentials underutilized thereby making development precarious. With over ten million almajiris (child beggars) wandering the streets of Northern Nigeria; 23.9% of employable Nigerians unemployed; and 112 million Nigerians (61%) living on less than a dollar per day (Muhammed, 2012), Nigeria’s future prosperity becomes insecure.
Low economic growth, low economic activity and low investment have been adduced as factors contributing to low job creation and due to increase in population growth, the small labour market is unable to absorb the resulting army of job seekers in Nigeria (Emeh, 2012).

The unabated increase in the population of youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is problematic for development to thrive. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, is therefore justified to have said:

...the youth constitute 18% of the world population but African countries under invest on the youth at great consequences such as breeding an unproductive segment who live under the poverty line of two dollars a day.

In summary, the chart, graph and statistics given below produced by the Rise Networks perfectly show how appalling the situation is.
UNEMPLOYMENT
Unemployment occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work. Unemployment is often used as a measure of the health of the economy.

The number of young people in the world is at an all-time high, at around 1.2 billion.

Global youth unemployment rate is projected at 12.7 percent in 2013.

And within the next decade a further one billion people will come of working age.

Nigeria’s unemployment rate for the year 2011 was at 23.9 percent with youth unemployment rate at over 50 percent.

Young people are the next generation of potentially productive economic and social actors. This growing youth demographic, in the context of developing nations, represents a once in a lifetime opportunity for locally led economic growth which can secure a prosperous future for some of the world’s poorest people.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
The most frequently cited measure of unemployment is the unemployment rate. This is the number of unemployed persons divided by the number of people in the labor force.

With 16% percent unemployment growth rate, what is the way forward for Nigerian youth?
The implications of the above facts and figures are that unemployment looms high among the youth in Nigeria and except something urgent is done to reverse the trend, no meaningful development can be envisaged let alone hoping for a future full of prosperity.

3.0 ATTEMPTS AT REVERSING THE TREND

Many economic and financial reforms as well empowerment interventions put in place from the recent past till the present time to salvage the youth predicament did not yield significant results. We remember with ease, past and unsuccessful interventions such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS) initiative, the N200 billion Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Guarantee Scheme (SMSEGS), the N200 billion SME Restructuring/Refinancing Fund, the N100 billion Cotton, Textile and Garment (CTG) Fund and the N2 billion National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) Facility all established by the federal government through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to allow access to credit by small and medium enterprise, pursue radical transformation of the subsector through the provision of adequate and cheaper funding and set the pace for the industrialization of the economy.

And recently, the minister of youth development, Alhaji Inuwa Abdul Kadir, disclosed that the challenges of land allocation had hampered the development of youth centres. This is coming in less than four years after the pioneer minister for youth development, Senator Akinlabi Olasunkanmi, announced to the nation in a press briefing dated 17th December, 2009 that the second phase of the building of six national youth development centres is ongoing.
Granted that the youth population is an estimated 81 million Nigerians (Abdul Kadir, 2013), it is expedient to harness the potentials of this strong work force to boost the nation’s economy. The innate potentials in the youth must be brought to the economic front through youth empowerment programmes that will provoke economic ideas and spring developmental actions. In his witty submissions on policy and execution, Tunde Lemo, the Deputy Governor (Operations), Central Bank of Nigeria, said;

*The economic benefits of youth participation in development process are varied.*

Youth empowerment has multiplier effects on the national economy, including boosting productivity, wealth creation, consumption and tax revenue. The rate of development of a country depends largely on how productive and creative the youths are...the nation cannot achieve development when they are mostly idle and unproductive.

Empowerment initiatives such as Youth Empowerment Programmes (YEP), Youth Empowerment Services or Schemes or Solutions (YES) are aimed at providing an enabling platform for youth to acquire skills, access credit facilities or create opportunities for job placement, employment counseling and enhance community development.

Given that “the security and welfare of the people is the primary purpose of government” (CFRN, 1999), it becomes imperative on the tiers of governments through their Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to step up their works and initiate youth empowerment programmes that will address the off-putting challenges confronting the youth. The private sector and non-governmental organizations can also collaborate with the government in tackling the youth problems.
4.0 SECURING NIGERIA’S FUTURE PROSPERITY THROUGH YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DRIVE

For Nigeria to secure her future prosperity, the governments must renew efforts at creating massive jobs by aggressively embarking on empowerment and development programmes in agriculture & agro-allied, manufacturing, information technology and telecommunications, educational establishments, production services, tourism, solid minerals, construction, etc.

The development envisaged for a prosperous future must have three dimensions; quantitative, qualitative and distributive development. The gross domestic product (GDP) and per capita income must exceed a certain threshold (quantitative), certain social services critical for the enjoyment of life must be made generally available such as, sense of security, education, medical health care, etc (qualitative) and tangible and intangible benefits of the nation – the goods and services – are made largely available to the majority of citizens (distributive) (Bondzi-Simpson, 2011).

Of equal importance is the emphasis on technical and vocational education and the development of the rural areas to check rural-urban migration. This can be achieved through concerted efforts of relevant MDAs such as the ministries of agriculture, youth development, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and other empowerment and development agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), private sector, non-governmental organizations and individuals.

For instance in Ghana – a lower-middle-income economy like Nigeria – the implementation of the National Youth Empowerment Programme (NYEP) led to the creation of a total of 200,000
new jobs in 2006 compared with 125,000 in 2005 thereby contributing to a reduction in the level of unemployment from 11.1% in 2005 to 10% in 2006. As of June, 2012, a total of 457,779 youth have been engaged in the NYEP. To this end, the following empowerment and development strategies are suggested:

1. Improved Skills and Training

Several approaches have been suggested as panaceas to end youth unemployment. One of such was a sponsored bill at the Federal House of Representatives seeking to provide monetary incentives to unemployed graduates between 18 and 35 years.

From all indications, the bill is ill-timed. It is not what we need. Payment of incentives will only make the youth lazy and compound economic challenges. It is like giving them fish. In the alternative, the government should teach the youth how to fish. This can be done by engendering skills acquisition in diverse human endeavours. The efficacy of skills acquisition has been found in the creation of skill acquisition centres by the Lagos State government under the state ministry for women affairs and poverty alleviation. As at May, 2013, 26,049 students have been trained on various skills acquisition programmes. Also in Osun state (one of the least paid states in the revenue allocation), 18,000 jobs were created—as at January, 2013- through the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES). This has resulted into improved economy of the states, wealth creation and empowerment of different families.

2. Entrepreneurship Promotion

The government on its part should provide a national fund to give grants and/or loans targeting youth as recipients, in order to promote entrepreneurship or lend financial support to trainees
under the empowerment schemes. The youth enterprise with innovation in Nigeria (YouWin) project of the federal government initiated to give financial support to aspiring young entrepreneurs in Nigeria with business idea to develop and execute the ideas, is a right step in the right direction and should be allowed to continue with proper monitoring entrenched.

3. Employment Services

Employment services include job placement, search assistance and access to labor market information. These services are offered by some public and private agencies. They assist job seekers in achieving their long term goal of employment in the open labour market and ensure employers get loyal staff perfectly suited to their needs. In so doing, the requirement of the employers alongside the vacant positions are made available to job seekers through the print and electronic media or online. Section 2 (c) of National Directorate of Employment Act states as objective, the maintenance of a data bank on employment and vacancies in the country, with a view to acting as a clearing house to link job seekers with vacancies in collaboration with other government agencies. The government therefore must use its implementation mechanisms to give effect to the above provision.

4. Provision of Infrastructural Facilities

Infrastructural facilities that will improve the socio-economic life of the people are grossly inadequate. Bad road networks, power outage, dilapidated bridges, inadequate water supply, poor health care systems are commonplace. This is the reason Nigeria is ranked 153 out of 186 countries in the 2013 UNDP Human Development Index (UNDP report, 2013), 131 out of 185 economies in the 2013 IFC Ease of Doing Business Index (IFC, 2013) and 115 out of 144
countries assessed in the Global Competitiveness Report Index (GCR, 2012). For development to thrive, the government must provide basic infrastructures that will enhance job creation. Unless this is done, the youth may still face difficulties in developing their businesses.

5. The Role the Law in Development

Law is a key driver of development. However, the unenforceability of the provisions of chapter II of the 1999 Constitution – which provides for political, educational and socio-economic benefits of the citizens – is a cog in the wheel of development. This has led to governments paying lip services to development issues as they cannot be challenged in the court of law for failure to provide basic necessities for the citizens. A reversal of the status quo is essential for securing the future prosperity. This can be done through declaratory order given by the court against any erring tier of government.

6. Political Empowerment

The political destination of a country rests on the shoulders of her youth. Prosperous nations are judged by economic and political power. Political empowerment therefore implies inclusion in the democratic process. Within the youth context, political empowerment refers to youth participation in the political process through transfer of capabilities and positions to them and lending their voices to governmental actions. The effects are that; citizen and government relationship is strengthened; information becomes easily accessed and state accountability and responsiveness improves tremendously. Thus, the government must ensure greater participation of the youth in the political process.

7. Leadership Training
Bad leadership has been an all-time factor affecting development in Nigeria, which implies that no significant development can occur with bad leaders at the helm of affairs. To change the trend, the youth must be given training in leadership. The future leaders must be prepared for the complexities of political and administrative duties. The government should organize leadership seminars covering youth in both urban and rural areas.

5.0 SUSTAINING THE EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

As earlier noted, several youth empowerment programmes have been initiated with low performance rate, it is pertinent therefore to address how best the suggested empowerment and development strategies can be sustained.

**Strong political will:** the political leaders must demonstrate strong political will. The youth population is a vibrant stakeholder for government at all levels to utilize in building a self-reliant economy and securing a prosperous future. In an address at the University of Pennsylvania, Franklin D. Roosevelt noted: “*We cannot always build the future for our youths, but we can build our youths for the future*.”

**The mindset:** the mindset of the Nigerian youth must be directed towards embracing the empowerment schemes. In this regard, the National Orientation Agency has a key role to play in changing the mentality which prefers white collar jobs as the only means of survival. Self-employment is the panacea for unemployment. Only self-education can make them successful. It is often said that one can only earn a living with education; but with self-education, one can earn a fortune. Therefore, the youth must pursue their passion vigorously and that will open ways for them. The idea is “think OYO” (think on your own). Every individual should think and identify
the inherent talent in him and thereafter make use of the empowerment strategy that will serve him better in showcasing his talent.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Widespread youth unemployment and low development rate necessitate an urgent and holistic intervention to reverse the status quo without which the future remains uncertain. The intervention is the youth empowerment and development strategies suggested as practical steps to be taken to secure the nation’s future prosperity. The success or otherwise of these strategies largely depends on the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. Therefore, Nigeria’s future prosperity lies in our hands.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


10. Ikechukwu Emeh “Tackling Youth Unemployment in Nigeria; the Lagos state development and empowerment Programmes Initiatives” in Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences Vol. 3, No. 3.4 Quarter IV 2012, ISSN: 2229 – 5313.


