

# Youth Unemployment and Conflict: Implications for Agricultural Development and Food Security in Nigeria

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**Abstract - The main objective of this study was to assess the implication of youth unemployment and conflict on food security and agricultural development. The specific objectives include; to identify the determinants of youth unemployment and conflict, examine the implication of youth unemployment and conflict on food security and agricultural development and to identify the strategies put in place to reduce youth unemployment. The identified determinants of youth unemployment and the resulting conflict include; low economic growth rate, poor implementation and adoption of untimely policy measures, sociological and psychological attitude towards vocational studies, neglect of agricultural sector, poor enabling environment, rural urban migration, high population of youths and inadequate power supply. The implications of youth unemployment and conflict on food security and agricultural development include; poverty, food insecurity, high food importation bill, waste of human resource and loss of lives and properties. Programmes across the country to promote and facilitate entrepreneurship among others were some of the strategies put in place by government to reduce youth's unemployment. The study therefore recommends that the current education curriculum be revised or enhanced to meet the needs of the learners and the labour market, diversification of the economy especially towards Agriculture should be facilitated and that rural infrastructure should be provided to reduce rural-urban migration.**

**Keywords:** youth, unemployment, conflict, insecurity, agricultural development.

## 1. Introduction

Agriculture and its related activities in Sub-Saharan Africa have continued to be the dominant economic activity and accounts for 40% of the gross domestic product, 15% of the exports, and about 80% of the employment opportunities, [27]. However, in recent times, the contributions of agriculture have dwindled especially in Africa. Not only does Africa need to increase its food productivity in a changing climate, it also needs to diversify its farming activities and products to include

more people, especially the youths into the sector as part of a career to cater for the increasing population and economic development, [21].

Youth unemployment has been a global trend, but it's more prevalent in developing countries of the world, with Nigeria, [12]. Nigeria as a developing country faces her own share of social, political, economic and cultural problems which have affected the wellbeing of the population. One of such major challenges bedeviling the country is youth unemployment and conflict which have serious implication for agricultural and national development. In spite of the abundant human and natural resources available in the country, unemployment rate has continued to be on the increase, According to the National Bureau of Statistics as cited by [13], unemployment rates were 12.3% in 2006, 12.7% in 2007, 14.9% in 2008, 19.7% in 2009, 21.1% in 2010 and 23.9% in 2011 respectively. Prolonged unemployment in every society has a negative impact on social development, which leads to frustration and low self-esteem among youths, [8]. Unemployment and the resulting conflict have affected agricultural development in a variety of ways, such as low food production, environmental pollution, displacement of labour, lack of accessible market, total relocation of farmers due to insecurity among others.

Nigeria has recorded conflicts and violence over time which has been attributed to youth unemployment, inequality between ethnic groups, ideological differences, lack of consistent policy for youth development, struggle for control of land and general hardship, [19]. The youths remain one of the greatest assets that any community can possess, this is why it is universally accepted that positive fundamental and meaningful changes across cultural settings are usually fostered by youths in the society. As a result of this, youths become instruments of conflict and war, used by politicians to fight their opponents, elite groups against non-elite groups, communities' heads against other communities' heads etc. The youths represent future leaders in every nation and when not gainfully employed, will have little or no experience in the development process, thereby, becoming aggressive and lack inputs to develop. According to [23], aggression and violence

among the youths is the result of gap in their felt needs that is not filled over time. Therefore any culture or community that allows a good percentage of her youths to be misdirected and unemployed, risks her future viability.

It is thus the responsibility of government and other stakeholders across the globe to effectively and strategically tap into this potential of youths and direct it towards significant economic, socio-political and technological progress. Hence, this paper is designed to examine the relationship between youth unemployment and preponderance of conflict as it affects agricultural development and food security especially in Nigeria.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine youth unemployment and conflict and its implications for agricultural development and food security in Nigeria.

The specific objectives include to:

- 1) Identify determinants of youth unemployment and conflicts in Nigeria.
- 2) Examine the implication of youth unemployment and conflict on agricultural development and food security in Nigeria.

### 1.2 Definition of Terms

**Youth:** The term youth is used to describe individuals (males and females) who are not children and not adult, they are within the transition from childhood to adulthood,[26].

**Unemployment:** This is a condition where the available labour force is not used or utilized for the country to derive the benefits in national development. According to the [8], unemployment arises when there are persons able and willing to work but are not able to get jobs at the ruling wage rate.

**Conflict:** Conflict is a wide ranging term which refers to a variety of violent phenomena including insurrections, rebellions, coups and wars, [22].

**Agricultural Development:** Agricultural Development is a gradual change that transforms the agricultural sector into a scientifically and technologically supported sector, such that quality and quantity of outputs as well as standard of living is improved substantially [13]. It could also be defined as the growth and gradual change in agricultural production process, from its narrow, primitive state into a larger, stronger or more advance state, [2].

**Food Security:** This is the state of having reliable access to sufficient quantity of affordable nutritious food.

**Youth Unemployment:** This is a condition where the available labour force within the youthful age willing and able to work cannot get jobs or are not gainfully employed. It is a situation where young people that possess the ability to work are not given opportunity to participate in developing the nation.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Conceptualization of Unemployment and Conflict

Theoretical conceptualization of unemployment and conflict will focus on opportunity cost theory, frustration aggression theory and conflict theory. The economic approach has had a significant effect on the study of violence and war in developing countries and beyond, [9].

Opportunity cost, a concept developed by [26], in the Australian School of Economics, refers to the benefit that a person could have received, but gave up to take another course of action, it represents an opportunity given up when a decision is made. Opportunity cost is the most important concept in macroeconomics and has been described as expressing the basic relationship between scarcity and choice, [20].

Opportunity costs are not restricted to monetary or financial costs, any other benefit that provides utility is considered an opportunity cost. Those groups of people in the society without access to legal, cooperative gainful employment were more likely to maximize their utility by recourse to violent conflict and extortion, [18].

According to [7], a preponderance of young men in a society with a few licit earning opportunities, especially if that society is characterized by a high share of primary commodity exports in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), would predispose that society to a high risk of civil war, implying that the more employment opportunities, the more difficult is rebel recruitment,[22].

Frustration aggression theory is a theory of aggression proposed by John Dollard, and further developed by Miller et al in 1941. The theory says that aggression is the result of blocking or frustrating person's efforts to attain a goal. The theory is used to explain riots and revolutions, both are caused by poorer and more deprived sections of society who may express their bottled up frustration and anger through violence.

The conflict theory was propounded by Karl Max in the 18th centuries. The basic premise of the conflict theory is the incompatibility of individual interests, stemming from the unequal distribution of wealth, power or security in the

society, [10]. Max focused his attention on the concept of domination and exploitation as he viewed the society to comprise two classes; the bourgeoisie (the haves) and the proletariat (the haves not). He believes that the owners of resources (factors of production) dominate and exploit the producers of goods and services. For Max, economics is necessarily the foundation of society because man has to live before he can begin to think politically, morally, philosophically, legally and so on. The common activity which all men pursue is the production of the means to support life and the exchange of the things produced.

According to Max, unemployment has been created by the ruling class because of policies they make, as these policies create inequality in the society,[5]. There is therefore a very widespread view that youth unemployment is a major cause of insurgency and civil war,[6] and [18].

## 2.2 The Nexus between Youth Unemployment and Conflict

The notion that unemployment is a strong probable cause or precipitating factor behind violence and violent conflict is remarkably pervasive in international development. Unemployment triggers participation in insurgencies, prompts people to join violent gangs, drives people to extremism, and it is the primary reason behind domestic violence,[9]. In every society, youth employment promotes social integration, intergenerational dialogue, citizenship and solidarity. Creating income generating job opportunities for young people can have direct positive consequences for poverty alleviation, [8].

However, growing and prolonged youth unemployment has a negative impact on development because it generates frustration and low self-esteem, and can lead to increased vulnerability to drugs and crime among youths. Violent crimes among unemployed youths often become the means not only for expressing the crisis of youth identity, but also for accessing political power and societal relevance,[23].

There is a well-established relationship between youth unemployment and conflict in Nigeria. Politicians have worsened the situation by funding thuggery. The propensity of a youth to display courage and inflict pain on opponents to gain him access to positions of authority and even employment is associated with unemployment. Fierce youth gangs often get engaged to provide security for top government officials [23] in order to carry out their functions, they are guaranteed uninterrupted access to acquisition of arms and ammunition. Access to arms eventually leads to random acts of violence for individualistic purposes, resulting to group conflicts and communal wars,[3].

Recently, researchers carried out a study in some urban areas in Nigeria on the increasing rate of prostitution. From

the findings prostitutes confessed that unemployment was the main cause of their resorting to the fate,[5], maintained that as long as autonomous consumption is inevitable. It makes some feeble minded individuals indulge in robbery. He also stated that examination malpractice in the society is perpetrated by some jobless school leavers who must make ends meet. This teaches the younger citizens negative available options for survival. Similarly, the issue of unemployment has caused hunger and malnutrition, prices of food are continually on the increase. It is commonly said that a hungry man is an angry man.

The positive relationship between unemployment and conflict cannot be over emphasized. Unemployment deprives youths of the happiness and satisfaction that accompany gainful employment, resulting to a change in identity and social vices among youths.

## 2.3 Determinants of Youth Unemployment and Conflict

A Wide Range Of Factors Are Responsible For Youth Unemployment And Conflict, Some Of The Factors Include:

### 2.3.1 Low Economic Growth Rate

According to [4], the overall situation in the country in the 1980s, 1990s and even in recent times has been very hostile to economic growth and development. The high level of corruption, mismanagement of public funds, harsh economic policies and insecurity of Nigerian environment, coupled with long term despotic rule of the military among other factors have affected the economic growth for a long time. In essence, low economic growth is manifested in low economic activities and investments rates, which do not generate enough additional employment.

### 2.3.2 Poor Implementation and Adoption of Untimely Economic Policy Measures

Another crucial factor that has elicited unemployment problem is the type and timing of various economic policies adopted in the country. For instance, with the introduction of the structural adjustment program (SAP) in September, 1986 that ushered in liberalization, deregulation and the devaluation program of the domestic currency, many of the teething domestic firms in the country collapsed. This resulted in the loss of many jobs and thereby rendering many people unemployed. In most cases, loss of jobs results to frustration which predisposes the youth to social vices and crime.

### 2.3.3 Sociological and Psychological Attitude towards Vocational Studies

The wrong impression of students about the place of technical and vocational education also accounts for the

deteriorating state of unemployment in Nigeria. There is an enduring societal biased attitude against technical and vocational education. A large number of job seekers lack practical skills that could enhance self-employment, that is why rather than providing jobs for others, the graduate unemployed persons keep depending on the government and non-vibrant private sector for job offers, [4].

### **2.3.4 Neglect of the Agricultural Sector**

The agricultural sector had been the leading provider of employment in Nigeria, especially in the sixties and in the seventies when the sector provided employment for more than 60 percent of the Nigerian population. Unfortunately, in the wake of oil discovery, the attention on this anchor of the economy was gradually drawn away to the oil sector where employment capacity is very low, [1]. The resulting effect is the large number of job seekers who have no place in the oil industry.

### **2.3.5 Poor Enabling Environment**

The poor economic enabling environment that characterized the economy over the years has continued to pose serious challenges to employment generation in Nigeria. This, coupled with poor security environment has continued to hamper investment drives and thereby reducing the prospects of employment generation,[12]. Many job seekers who would have embarked on self-employment programs are unable to do so because of the hostile production environment and foreign investors' withdrawal from participating in our economic development due to insecurity and inconsistency in government policies.

### **2.3.6 Rural-Urban Migration**

The rapidly growing urban labour force arising from rural-urban migration has been identified as a cause of unemployment. Rural-urban migration is usually explained in terms of push pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from man to land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate,[21]. The factors are further exacerbated in Nigeria by the lack of infrastructural facilities which makes the rural life unattractive. Youths move to urban areas with the probability of securing lucrative employment in the industries etc. In addition to this, there is concentration of social amenities in the urban centers. This means that the rural areas are neglected in the allocation of social and economic resources the consequences of youth congregation in the urban without hope of gainful and legitimate employment can easily be noticed in the high city crime rate, electoral violence; cult conflict, gangsterism and vandalization are traceable to youth unemployment.

### **2.3.7 High Population of Youths**

Young people constitute the majority of Africa's population, [25] and are at the centre of the societal interactions and transformation, [17]. Their lives are shaped and shaken by the economic and political exhaustions especially poverty and lack of voice, [14] and [24]. The uneducated and those with low education have considerably reduced prospects for employment and are susceptible to joining rebel groups and other social crimes as a way of generating livelihood.

### **2.3.8 Inadequate Power Supply**

The epileptic nature of power supply in Nigeria is very discouraging for the running or siting of industries and factories. As a result, production becomes very high and demand for such products becomes very low due to high prices of such products to enable the manufacturers cover their production cost and also maximize profit.

## **3. Implication of Youth Unemployment and Conflict on Agricultural Development and Food Security**

### **3.1 Food Insecurity**

[15], Stated that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. According to[16], the analysis of food security covers three dimensions; availability, access and stability. Availability is related to domestic production, import capacity, food aid and stocks. Access is influenced by level of income, employment, wage rates, food prices, income distribution, access to assets such as land and finance, the efficiency of markets, the provision of safety nets and infrastructure capacity. The utilization of food might be considered as a component of access that is how each individual is able to benefit from food intake, linked to health, sanitation conditions, the nutrient component of the diet and the quality of food. Stability of food security refers to factors affecting variability in supply and access.

In general, youth unemployment and conflict have led to severe food insecurity. There is a well-established correlation between the exposure of citizens to external or internal conflicts and the deterioration or long term stagnation in their food security. Most conflicts and especially the internal conflicts have now become the dominant model of mass violence, mainly affecting rural areas and their populations. They disrupt food production through physical destruction and plundering of crops and livestock, destroy food reserves and interrupt the lines of transportation through which food exchanges and even humanitarian relief take place, destroy

farm capital, conscript young males taking them away from farm work and suppress income earning occupations. These impacts of conflict resulting from youth restiveness as a result of idleness, and other factors on food security often lasts longer after the violence had subsided. This is because assets have been destroyed, people killed or maimed, populations displaced, the environment damaged, health, education and social services shattered,[16].

### 3.2 High Food Importation Bill

Since after independence, Nigeria's food import bill has been on the increase and that has continued to the present times where simple basic staples like rice, wheat and other food items are imported into the country, consuming our hard and scarce foreign exchange earnings. According to [11], with an annual food import bill of over N630 billion, unemployment rate of 9.9 percent and poverty, economic diversification is no longer optional but a necessity to reposition our economy to attain inclusive growth and global competitiveness. He explained that agriculture and agro based industries remained most fundamental to the diversification efforts as a major contribution to the gross domestic product in the country.

### 4. Conclusion

Government alone will not address the challenges of young people, food security and governance, but they can provide the right platform for relevant stakeholders to play a meaningful role in the implementation process. New forms of governance, institutional arrangements, public-private partnerships and social entrepreneurship should be given preference when considering the future of the young people in Nigeria. This paper seeks to bring us back to the principles of human capital development. These principles will be fundamental in moving Nigeria from a dependency stage by empowering the population, and work in tandem to address social and political unrest in most parts of the country. The skills will not only prepare the generation for meaningful participation in agriculture, they will also provide them with a platform to contribute to the development and governance of their country, while at the same time, creating jobs for the increasing population of unemployed youths.

### 5. Recommendations

- 1) There is therefore need to prepare this generation and place them at the forefront of global strategies for food security, agricultural/rural development, and economic growth. The potential to utilize the human capital of youths can be realized if investments are made towards equipping this generation with the necessary skills and

preparing avenues for their meaningful engagement, especially in modern agro-practices.

- 2) Education drives research and innovation: it is the basis of enhancing human capital, the core of economic development. Establishment of vocational training centers where rural young people would otherwise gain skills through education, training and mentoring that will be passed on to future generations while in the meantime lead to a transformation in Nigeria's food basket.
- 3) The current education system has been criticized for preparing learners for examination contrary to the worlds present day state of intergenerational and social learning. There is need for a review or enhancement of the curriculum to meet the needs of the learners and the labour market.
- 4) Diversification of the economy especially towards agriculture is urgently required in Nigeria. Thus, the need to rethink Nigerian agriculture as an economic activity that not only requires technology, good climate, policies, markets but one in need of adequate and sustained human capital.
- 5) The challenges of rural-urban migration can however be addressed through investing in the youths human capital through education, training and mentoring. Also provision of infrastructural facilities in rural areas such as good roads, pipe borne water, electricity, good medical faculties and schools will help to stem down rural-urban migration owing to the fact that most rural areas are well disposed to provide self-employment, especially in agriculture.
- 6) Specific strategic and policy changes need to focus on modernizing and emphasizing analytical skills, problem solving skills, including information and communication technology (ICT) and teamwork.
- 7) University research and development work should be linked with national research institute and agricultural extension services to ensure that communities benefit from new technologies and research findings.

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