

Our Youths Are Not Lazy: Depreciating Unemployment through Sustainable Development Policies in Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite the global adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria has made little progress when compared to other countries. Specifically, Nigeria has done little in terms of socioeconomic and political development. This is evident with the low school enrollment of children and the surge of poverty. Many have argued that Nigeria's low scorecard on development is motivated by incessant conflict and recently, by the tragedy of COVID-19. However, the problem is more the nature of policies enacted and applied. To attain the SDGs-2030, Nigeria needs to review its developmental agenda and policies and adopt progressive practices that is youth-centered. This study examines the existing policies and practices in eradicating poverty and attaining quality education in Nigeria, and the innovative policies and practices that could eradicate poverty and improve quality education in Nigeria. The study adopted secondary sources for data collection, used qualitative research technique for data analysis, and applied structural functionalist theory for smooth interrogation of variables of interest in the disquisition. It was discovered that although the existing policies possesses some sought of benefits to an extent, little impact of the existing policies has been felt in the Nigerian economy due to lack of continuity, accountability and transparency, nepotism, corruption, inadequate funding, selfishness, inefficiency, and bad leadership. However, there is a need for the government to improve the nation's infrastructure, reduce corruption and deploy strategies that will improve the nation's foreign exchange. This, if done will improve the nation's human capital base and position it for sustainable development.

Keywords: SDGs, Unemployment, Youths, Quality Education, Poverty Alleviation

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Introduction

The most obtainable idea in practically every development circle suggest that development describes a physical state and a frame of mind which is highly sensitive to the reality or height of development

in the environment that human dwells (Akintoye & Adejumo, 2014). Development which demonstrates changes and advancement in the society that human exists is undoubtedly a precursor for human development and ultimately the growth of every nation and hence should be sustainable. According to the United Nations, sustainable development refers to the development that satisfies the present demands without adversely affecting the ability of satisfying the need of future generations (United Nations, 2020). Considering the dominant socioeconomic and environmental issues especially COVID-19 that has befallen nations of the world, sustainable development is a clear apotheosis for the global community. There exist seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); albeit this study is primarily concerned with the SDG eight 1-5 and 8 which directly bothers on poverty eradication and empowerment of the youths.

Youth development and economic growth maintains a noticeable position in the discourse of sustainable development. However, one of the most severe challenges of development faced in Nigeria and other countries in Africa is youth unemployment (Anyanwu & Duru, 2020). This menace has hampered several economies from manifesting their development potentials because of the high level of idle youths (Olukayode, 2017). The increasing level of youth unemployment has in recent times become a challenge faced in most countries especially in Nigeria, which has attained practically no progress bothering on achieving the goals of development as evidenced in the Medium-Term Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) and Vision 2020 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Anyanwu & Duru, 2020; Karahman, 2011). The World Bank (2006) in the World Development Report of 2007 refers to the connection between development and the role of future generations where it maintained that government and development associates should consider youths as investment opportunity that is worth committing funds and efforts towards alleviating poverty and ultimately increasing economic growth (Anyanwu & Duru, 2020).

Unemployment and poverty are issues that birth the several existing societal challenges including insecurity, bad leadership and governance among others that has exerted adverse effect on human social-existence and development (Oduwole, 2015). The significant role of youth population in national development necessitates the urgency of youth development and the need to specifically reduce unemployment, which has taken the fore in the schedule of international development as outlined in the 8th pillar of the SDGs (Osborn, Cutter & Ullah, 2015). In the bid to guarantee decent and advantageous work for the youth, the Youth Employment Network (YEN) was created in 2001 towards harnessing the underutilized potentials of the youth (FMOYD, 2008). The youths are the most important parts of a society considering their strength, skills, and enthusiasm, which is why the government is concerned and thereby putting structures in place to address the burdens caused by unemployed youth in the society (FMOYD, 2008).

Notwithstanding this drive, the issue of youth unemployment has remained alarming as unemployment rate keep surging with time. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2018) noted that the unemployment rate in the country in 2017 and 2018 stood at 20.42 per cent and 23.13 per cent respectively. Furthermore, the number of unemployed young people in 2019 was 26.58 per cent but shoot up to 29.72 per cent in 2020. More specifically, the aggregate number of unemployed individuals in 2018 stood at 20,927,648 million and the youth constituted about 13,145,708 million thereby suggesting that the youth are the most affected by the problem. The data from the bureau clearly infer that the nation exposes young people to, extremely dangerous behaviors vis-a-vis drug abuse, alcohol, and unprotected sex which is motivated by increasing population with limited basic infrastructure, lack of quality education and health services, which colored the economic narrative of Nigeria. Ahmed, Cruz, Go, Maliszewska, Osorio-Rodarie (2016) envisages an increase in

economic productivity if the number of employed individuals is increasing relatively compared to the unemployed; this ultimately attenuate the threats that affects social and political stability which stems from scarce employment opportunities.

Again, the issue of insecurity which is common in Nigeria is undoubtedly the fruit of youth unemployment. The unemployed young people are engulfed in shame, anger, unfriendliness, and frustration which breed aggression that they demonstrate in crime, violence, and other social vices (Anyanwu & Duru, 2020). Furthermore, Okojie (2003) affirmed that some unemployed youths get themselves embroiled in criminal activities while others indulge in militancy as manifested in the Niger Delta region, prostitution, oil bunker, kidnapping and robbery. A good number also submit themselves for terrorism and banditry in recent times, while some are into advanced fee fraud commonly referred to as '419' or 'yahoo-yahoo'. The Nigerian youths particularly adopts these activities to demonstrate their frustration to a system that excluded them from enjoying remunerative employment and these have placed the economy of Nigeria in a grossly underdeveloped state over the years.

These issues have been attributed to poor economic management, which in recent time placed Nigeria's poverty rate at 40.1 percent indicating 82.9 million people living below the poverty line (NBS, 2019). This buttresses the World Bank in 2019 where it stated that Nigeria is a poverty leading country, revealing that the nation is practically making very low progress despite having the largest economy in Africa with about 519 billion dollars aggregate Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is attributed to the fact that Nigeria underutilizes the potentials of the youths evident in the increasing unemployment as an aftermath of low or no job opportunities in the country (Infrastructure Consortium for Africa, 2020). The idle youths have become utterly delinquent, hence, causing tension especially in the North which in effect has severely affected the quality of education in Nigeria. The Chairman of Northern governors' forum affirmed that the number of school enrollment of children keeps cascading every year because of insecurity motivated by juvenile delinquents. However, in other parts of the country, the dilapidated state of infrastructure, insufficient fund and limited educational resource available to teachers has further dragged down the quality of education below the standard obtainable in other developing countries (Soto, Mozsoro, & Pico, 2020)

In the bid to address socioeconomic issue mostly bothering on unemployment, which appears to be the root cause, several policy measures have been implemented by several administrations per time in Nigeria. These policy measures includes Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), National Employment Policy, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), National Youth Development Agenda, National Development Plan, National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), National Youth Policy, Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), Graduate Job Creation Loan Guarantee Scheme, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), N-Power Program, Youth Empowerment in Agricultural. Although a handful of these programs attained noticeable success while many others made almost no difference thereby sustaining the level of unemployment in Nigeria. This is despite the fortune spent by successive governments on the adoption of numerous policy movements, social development programs and economic improvements initiatives aimed at depreciating youths' unemployment. Youth unemployment remains an issue that is hampering the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing issues, this study examines the existing policies and practices for eradicating poverty in Nigeria, and the existing policies, and practices for the attainment of quality education in Nigeria.

Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development describes the development that satisfies the desires of the present without hampering the chances of meeting the needs of upcoming generations (Akintoye & Adejumo, 2014). Sustainable development is also referred to as the new way of life and system of economic and social activities of every society, which aligns with environmental preservation that can be attained with the adoption of viable and effectual management of existing resource for the sustenance of human urgent need and future generation (Onimisi, 2021).

Premised on the experience of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nation acknowledged the need for concerted efforts for the attainment of sustainable development by 2030 (United Nations Foundation, 2019). For this purpose, seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established as change drivers for aiding the achievement of 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The general aim of the global development Agenda was to create a group of universal goals that satisfies the important environmental, economic, ecological, and political issues that consistently befall nations like Nigeria (Ogbodo, Bichi & Ogbodo, 2021). The table shown below indicates specific sustainable development goals designed with the desire to make provision for both the present and future needs of the citizen through improved technology, social facilities and efficient use of economic resources towards reducing poverty, tackling inequality, injustice and climate change by 2030 (Dansabo, 2016).

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goals

Goal	Issue
1.	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2.	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3.	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4.	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
5.	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6.	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7.	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8.	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9.	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10.	Reduce inequality within and among countries
11.	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12.	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13.	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14.	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15.	Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16.	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17.	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: Adapted from Malaolu and Ogbuabor (2017)

Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment refers to persons in the labour force or individuals of within the age range of 15-24 that are willing and serious wants a job but cannot obtain one for less than twenty (20) hours during the reference period (NBS, 2017). Youth unemployment in Nigeria has scaled up as the number of graduates from institutions of learning also increases (Makinde & Adegbami, 2019). In fact, the government of Nigeria has in recent time failed to release quarterly reports on job creation prepared by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics; this is in its bid to avert severe criticism from citizens and foreign observers as the rate unemployment has gone beyond 40 per cent (Christian, 2019). It is in line with this situation that the Minister of Labour and Employment - Senator Chis Ngige referred the situation to as alarming; in the lecture offered while kick starting a two days' workshop titled "Breaking the Resilience of High Unemployment Rate in the Country", the Minister pointed out the alarming state of the situation we found ourselves in Nigeria in respect of unemployment.

The position of Senator Chris Ngige did not differ from the stance of the former Minister of Agriculture of Nigeria and the substantive Chairman, African Development Bank (ADB) Dr. Akinwumi Adesina who averred in 2014 that youth unemployment rate is over 50 percent, and it suggests that the future remains bleak for Nigerian youths and the future implication for the country is weak development. Youths in their desperation to get jobs have filled few urban cities particularly Lagos and Abuja and considering the influx of youths in these cities in Nigeria in their bid to get a job to at least stay alive, the population of these few cities has skyrocketed. Despite the demographical issues posed by the influx into these cities, the lack of job even in these cities has further aggravated social problems especially insecurity related problems. The situation has summed up with existing challenges of housing, sanction, transportation and other issues faced in these states and more shockingly, crime has now become the most growing economic activity and even relatively profitable than several civil jobs (Makinde & Adegbami, 2019).

The significance of youths in the state could be better comprehended by the National Youth Development Policy (2001: 2) as noted in Anasi (2010: 2); the National Youth Development Policy posited that:

Youths are the structure of the society; their strength, innovation, character and beliefs signal increased pace of development and security of a nation. With their creativity and energy, a nation causes noticeable efforts towards sociopolitical achievements and economic development. In their hopes and expectation, a nation might find her motivation; on their strength, she establishes attainable purpose and energy. And considering their dreams and good interests, the future of the nation in terms of development is guaranteed.

However, notwithstanding the significance of the youths in aiding sustainable development as well as the prospects of the nation as demonstrated by the National Youth Development Policy, the inability to get employed exerts noticeable adverse impact on their future hopes and dreams. The worsening situation according to Akwara et al. (2013), is that the increasing height of youth unemployment has made poverty to eat deep into the lives of most useful youths thereby occasioning heightened insecurity of lives and properties of citizens in Nigeria. Adebayo (2013) further maintained that the youths that should be advocate for and steer paths of development in Nigeria are increasingly becoming violent and angry per time as a result of the frustration that they have sustained from the bad shape of development which is believed to be highly caused by the low commitment, incompetent and corrupt leadership that exists in Nigeria. The spillover effect of these

characters of leaders has spelled bad governance for the country, unemployment for the youth and poverty for the masses.

Sustainable Development and Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Over the years, Nigeria has dealt with several crisis ultimately causing the death of lots of people and loss of properties; it is undoubted that the youths are the perpetrators of these illicit activities which and at the end, they blame their actions on poverty and unemployment. Therefore, the worsening state of insecurity in Nigeria has not only increased with impunity but it has reduced Nigeria's sustainable development which has occasioned severe poverty, relatively reduced industrial output, poor business performance, exchange rate volatility, increasing inflation rate, dilapidated infrastructural facilities, large stock of domestic and foreign debt, brain drain, low foreign exchange and the existence of tension among the populace as the height of economic uncertainty increases per time. Surprising, the economic implication of anarchy perpetrated by unemployed youths is extreme as it has reduced the amount of foreign direct investment attracted into the country considering the height of insecurity (Olojede, 2020).

Additionally, this bad situation has also denied Nigerian youths the chance of getting gainful jobs which has in effect deteriorated the level of poverty and unemployment that has made sustainable development almost impossible to attain in the country (Olojede, 2019). This is premised on the level of insecurity that has severely threatened sustainable development in the country as it constrains business and economic activities which has attracted little or no response of the government (Ishaq, Musa & Abdulhafiz, 2019). Similarly, the reduced response of the government which is seen in its inability to provide employment opportunities has negatively affected the economic environment and impeded the significant contribution to the sustainable development and improvement of the societies vis-à-vis idea and economic resources; this demonstrates that sustainable development has been prevented over time by a noticeable number of unemployed youths who expectedly could contribute to the development of their societies if they had been engaged (Olojede, 2019).

Structural Functionalist Theory

This was propounded by the English philosopher and biologist Hebert Spencer in 1820 and has been redefined by several scholars including Emile Durkheim in 1893. The theory advocated that the various part of a society works together to keep it functioning, and revolves around the notion that a society is composed of a system of interconnected parts that have their own particular functions. Durkheim (1893) stipulated that a society, being a complex system that consists of interrelated and interdependent parts, works together to maintain stability. The functionalism of a society refers to the contribution it makes to its social stability, continuity and structure. It addresses the society in relation to the function of its constituent elements such as the norms, customs and institutions (Kahraman, 2011).

Social functionalism also referred to as functionalism is a macro-level perspective of the society that believes that stability is achieved when society social institutions such as the government, judiciary, religion, norms and so on works together to meet the needs of the citizen. For instance, the manifest function of quality education is the transmission of knowledge and skills that will aid the eradication of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria; but a sound policy and progressive practices is needed to be provided by the government to achieve this. The sound policy and practices enacted will enable the achievement of SDGs and combat criminal activities. Hence, Nigeria as a society needs to improve its functionalism through sustainable development (Hussaini, 2014), and this can

be achieved through the pursuit of an inclusive economic growth targeted at eradicating poverty, with a focus on establishing policies and setting a sustainable practice that will increase the quality of education and the level of school enrollment by children, and eradicate or drastically reduce youth unemployment.

Table 2: SDGs Programmes on Unemployment and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

Year	Poverty Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Functional SDGs Programmes
2019	40.1	26.58	<p>The diverse policies for poverty alleviation and unemployment reduction in operation from 2015 till date was created under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N-Power • National Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) • Medium and Small-Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) survival fund • One-off #30,000 payment to support 330,000 self-employed people • Formalization support to register 250,000 new business with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) at no cost • N-TECH • N-AGRO • FARMERMONI • TRADERMONI • MARKETMONI • Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) • Digital Youth Nigeria • Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme
2018	92 from	23.13	
2017	2010-	20.42	
2016	2018	13.91	
2015		15.80	
2014	92 from	8.41	<p>The SDGs policies during these periods was termed transformative agenda under the leadership of the former President Goodluck Jonathan. The policies stem from the Late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua's vision 2020. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Creation of 5million Jobs • Youth Employment Safety Net Support Programme • Increment in primary school enrollment irrespective of socioeconomic status of parents • Teachers training and capacity building • The review of the undergraduate Basic Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education
2013	2010-	9.84	
2012	2018	9.68	
2011		9.56	
2010		9.58	<p>The policies in place during this period was termed Vision-2020 under the leadership of Late president President Umaru Musa Yar'adua's. It cut across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Wealth Creation • Poverty Alleviation • Agriculture • Nation's Energy • Land reforms and security.

Source: Authors' Compilation (2022)

Discussion of Findings

This study bothers on the scourge of unemployment in Nigeria and the efforts made by government based on the dictates of SDG. As outlined in the table above, several efforts have been made by the state of Nigeria to assuage unemployment problems mostly during the ravaging COVID-19. The table also presented policies over some years. It is important to examine the outcome of these policies to determine the successes and failures. For instance, during this study, we found that N-Power engaged about 510,000 youth so far and successfully (Bello, 2021). The money realized has enabled most of the youths engaged to established small businesses thereby creating some numbers of employment. This is a laudable program that need to be sustained because it diversified sources of employment in Nigeria. Some of the youths that benefitted also employed few others. If this is sustained, it is a very good means of strengthening the economic base of Nigeria as stipulated in the MDG. Similarly, the MSMEs survival fund targeted 103 million jobs across the country, which is expected to impact 35,000 individuals per state. This was in response to the emergence of COVID-19 to enable them to survive the shock. The scheme has been significantly implemented and millions of Nigerians benefitted. The implementation has been very successful, while the impact is another subject of discussion. Part of the success story is the opportunity provided by the formalization support, which enabled young entrepreneurs to register their business at no cost.

It was also found that Part of the poverty reduction program as indicated in the table above commissioning of Almajiri Education Program in Sokoto, Girls Education Programs in Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Delta, and Akwa-Ibom, and licensed nine private and federal universities to improve access to higher education. It also funded the construction and equipping of 105 blocks and 4 classrooms, 2 exam halls, 4 local libraries, 4 generator house, 9 computer centers, 3 boreholes and 15 toilets in 15 states of the federation through the help of MDGs. About 135 licensed innovation and vocational enterprise facilities to support technical and vocational training were provided. These facilities have relatively enhanced the provision of Education mostly for girl-child. They have also assisted parents who could not provide for their children's education.

Furthermore, scholarship awards were also approved as counterparts funding for foreign students, teachers were deployed to public primary schools in 34 states, and funds were made available for teacher capacity building in all the 36 states of the country. As part of the efforts of diminishing unemployment, the policy success report during this regime states that the government established a database committee for unemployed Nigerian youth with the goal of obtaining correct statistics for suitable employment policies, planning, and an electronic database on approved Private Employment Agencies (PEAs).

However, as laudable as the poverty reduction programs, they were hampered by some challenges. For instance, traders, farmers, and market women are consistently affected by inflations, tribal conflicts, and unionism. There is also the issue of Fulani-herdsmen destruction of farm produce and killing of farmers. All these have negatively impacted the farmermoni, tradermoni and marketmoni policies. Another instance is the GIS which was designed to provide work experience that will prepare youths for future employment is affected by the age barrier policies established by employers. On the overall, the issue of corruption, nepotism, and lack of transparency in the Nigerian system prevented the youths from participating and benefitting equally from these policies. Another issue is inadequate funding, which reduced N-POWER duration from 2years to a year.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has assessed the existing policies and practices in eradicating poverty and for the attainment of quality education in Nigeria by evaluating the benefits, failure and the implication of the policies resulting in insecurities in Nigeria. Discovery has shown that although the existing policies possesses some sought of benefits to an extent, little impact of the existing policies has been felt in the Nigerian economy, because the existing policies has been met with humongous failure arising as a result of lack of continuity, accountability and transparency, nepotism, corruption, inadequate funding, selfishness, inefficiency, and bad leadership. This has escalated the rate of poverty and youth unemployment in Nigeria to the extent that it has become embarrassing for the government to release the accurate report of exact poverty and unemployment rate in the country to avert criticism from citizens and foreign observers. Infact, the incumbent president at a point in his tenure and leadership declared the Nigerian youth as being lazy to cover the irregularities and failure of the government as regard poverty alleviation and youth unemployment. To this effect, the study therefore put forward the following innovative policies and practices that could eradicate poverty and improve quality education in Nigeria. The study recommends the improvement of infrastructures such as power, roads, and communication network that will encourage production and translate to more employment generation. The government should engage in deliberate efforts at reducing corruption that could thwart their effort and engage strategies at improving exports of quality finished commodities to improve the nation's foreign exchange. This, if worked upon will translate to more production capacity and results in more employment generation. There is also a need for the government to prioritized quality education of the citizens at all levels, starting from the elementary level. Quality education at the elementary level should not be left only for the private sector, because, if all children irrespective of the socio-economic status of their parents were able to access quality education up to the high school, the human capital development base of the nation will improve. The curriculum at the tertiary level should be revisited and be tailored towards the employability skills required from employers in the labor market. Lastly, security of life and property should be worked on. Once this is settled, foreign investors will be encouraged and this will give room for production stability, thereby reducing the issue of unemployment.

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