

Youth Participation, Unemployment and Poverty in a Democratic Nigeria: Towards a Policy Response for Sustainable National Security and Economic Development.

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Abstract

The neglect of human resources is no doubt the most pernicious of waste and social evil whose repercussions not only rebound on the individual, but also the entire society. That there is transcendentally presence of entities known as “youth” is a widely accepted norm. Also universally acknowledged is the fact that youths form the bedrock on which the society is anchored, hence leaders of tomorrow. Consequently, any nation who toys with the welfare and development of its youthful population could be said to be jeopardizing its future and survival. Arguably, Africa’s most populous democratic nation, Nigeria is enormously endowed with abundant resources which when properly harnessed could empower the youth for positive contribution to national security and economic development that is sustainable. Paradoxically, majority of the youthful segment of the Nigerian population live below the poverty line due to unemployment, underemployment and even unemployable. It is no longer news that there is a growing recognition amongst development experts that poverty and its alleviation is best actualized through participation and empowerment of the vulnerable groups by giving them the right and the opportunity for economic choices and self-actualization. Development outcomes to a great extent depend on effective political relations as well as an active and efficient citizenry which can facilitate robust and collective action. This no doubt can result into effective and better targeted public services, social justice, equity, accountability, transparency and good governance. However, the current scenario in Nigeria is such that the magnitude of youth unemployment and lack of participation in the labour market has created related socio-economic crisis, hence national insecurity, a disturbing feature no rational government can turn a blind eye.

Arising from the above, this paper using data elicited from documentary and archival sources discuss youth and its attendant socio-economic problems anchored on the opportunistic attitude of the new political elites, democratic legitimacy, offering insights about the nexus of youth, participation, unemployment, poverty and structures of pathologies of democracy and national security challenges in Nigeria. The paper elucidated on some fundamental questions such as why is Nigeria not serious about the welfare of its youths despite the existence of agencies like the National Directorate of Employment, Ministry of Women and Youth Development? The paper therefore contends that lack of youth participation, their unemployment and poverty are as a result of the character of the Nigerian State that has continued to swim in the ocean of institutionalized corruption, lack of Federal Character and over politicization of national development issues. The paper concludes, among other set of mutually reinforcing practical recommendations to bring about a robust synergy between youth participation, effective and efficient democracy and sustainable national security and economic development. That effort aimed at addressing these issues must first tackle these nascent problems as against usual lip-service mechanism that create avenues for primitive acquisition of public funds, while emphasizing the notion that economic development must not only be inclusive, job-creating and poverty-reducing, but it must also result to self-empowerment that will bring about sustainable national security and sustainable economic development that is broad-based.

Keywords: Youth, Participation, Unemployment, Poverty, Democracy, Sustainable Security And Economic Development.

Introduction

The importance of the youth agency is very fundamental due to the fact that they are expected to provide support for the aged members of the family (Adesanya, 1992; Abdullahi, 2008). While articulation of youth struggles have been seen within the ideology of social youth movement that entails the perception of youth’s unequal and inequitable position in the society, their oppression and subordination vis-à-vis the rest of

the society gave rise to the ensuing commitment and struggle to rectify the status quo (Kisekka, 1992).

Arising from the above is the fundamental fact that unemployment among the youth has remained unacceptably high, with sporadic increase in the level of poverty thereby giving rise to insecurity, a nascent feature that has dealt a deadly blow to the nation's image, while it has severely dampened the country's economic potentials in the area of distraction of government's meager resources from productive public investment, bad climate for foreign investment and general business destabilization. All these, combined with the global financial and economic crisis have worsened the situation that the Nigerian youth find themselves today.

Consequently, this paper using data elicited from documentary and archival sources examines the challenges of mobilizing employment for the youth, poverty and security which are so intricately interrelated that we are tempted to pose a number of questions, i.e. How can the State, being the "Chief-Economic-Manager" become more development-oriented that will mainstream the youth agency towards re-engineering Nigeria's economic transformation? What is the situation of the youth agency in Nigeria? What is or are the gender experiences of poverty and risks generally as a result of poverty? What are the factors responsible for the high statistics of youth affected by unemployment and poverty in Nigeria? What steps have been taken to address the problem of youth unemployment and what are the outcomes? What is the history of Nigeria's youth participation in labour force? What are the macroeconomic policy challenges towards building youth institution that will ensure national security and economic development that can be sustained? The answers to all these questions form the basis of this paper.

As an agency, some transcendently real presence of entities called youth has gained a wide currency and has been variously classified into such age brackets as 15-24 years (World Bank and United Nations); 15-29 years (Common Wealth Youth Programmes); while for many countries, the figure varies from 13 -18 years, 20 - 25 years, and 12-20 years (Bello-Kano, 2008). On the other hand, the Nigerian Council on Youth Development defines youth as "all young males and females aged 18-30 which are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (National Youth Policy of Nigeria, 2001:4).

What is also very factual is that virtually every country and multilateral institutions have a "Youth Policy" as well as a "Youth Action Plan". For instance, the Nigerian National Youth Policy, The ECOWAS Commission Youth Policy, African Youth Charter, Commonwealth Youth Charter, United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth, etc. It could also be recalled that in his second-coming, Rtd. President Obasanjo in 2006 established the Ministry for Youth Development. Generally therefore, the youth described as "the greatest asset that any nation can have....the future leaders ...the greatest investment for a country's development .and ...a virtual resource (National Youth Policy of Nigeria, 2001:1) all point to the reality of the existence of young people as naturalized entities that are assets to any society. Thus the notion of youth as discernible in the discursive practices of many institutions like the State (government department concerned with youth employment and development), family and society (traditional family anxious about youth behavior and transition to adulthood), and the market economy (market advertisement concerned with youth culture), all shows the importance of youth agency which necessitates the crucial roles that the State as an institution must play in mainstreaming the youth agency towards re-engineering the transformation of the Nigerian economy. Empowering the youths have always been used as a propaganda during political campaigns, yet, no action has been put in place to mainstream the youths into all sectors of the economy, i.e. political, social, economic and development efforts.

Arising from the above is the fact that national security and economic development starts with the process of eliminating the obstacles that hinder people from transforming their physical, biological and socio-economic environment for their individual fulfillment and for the benefit of the society as a whole (Onuoha, 2006:4). In this respect, the rate at which these obstacles can be reduced or eliminated according to Onuoha (2008), depends to a large extent on the government's method and manner of utilization of societal human and material resources. To him, this underscores the role of governance in the area of political leadership as well as how power and resources are committed towards eliminating the obstacles. Also, Roberts (2007) opines that to realize the potentials of youths as the engine of (national security and economic) development, governments have a salient role to play in addressing these obstacles and facilitating a successful transition to adulthood through pursuit of programmes and policies that alleviate poverty and expand opportunities for employment.

In an empirical study of 123 countries by Braungart and Braungart (1989) cited by Onuoha (2008), a strong relationship was demonstrated between the size of youth population and national development in terms of the level of opportunities the nations provided their young population. This according to Onuoha (2008) "suggests that a nation's development is largely dependent on the extent to which the enormous potentials of its youths are harnessed and utilized by the government to promote and sustain economic growth and social progress. This is usually achieved through a patterned process of youth development or empowerment, hence the interface between youth unemployment, poverty and national development. Thus, when youths are schemed out, not mainstreamed into the fabrics of the society's socio-economic and political processes or disempowered, it

portends serious consequences for national security and economic development that is sustainable. In the light of the foregoing, the next issue that agitates the intellectual mind is the features of a typical Nigerian youth in the contemporary times.

2.1 Conceptual Review of the Features of Contemporary Youth Situation in a Democratic Nigeria

Youth-hood can be defined as that phase or period of life in which one passes from childhood to maturity. Maturity on the other hand refers to a situation whereby one becomes fully developed. In Nigeria, the youth usually fall into the 18 – 35 years age bracket, i.e. both genders (male and female) (Abdullahi, 2008). The youth agency in any society is/are the future leaders of tomorrow. They are the wealth, the power-base and image maker of the nation. That the Nigerian youth in contemporary times are at the crossroad is no longer in doubt. Also not in doubt is the fact that the plight of the younger generation in the present day democratic Nigeria is fast losing its cherished African value in the area of care. Indeed, the Nigerian youth constitute the most vulnerable segment of the society despite the fervent prayers of every rational parent to see their children have a better life than they did. The question however is whether the democratic Nigerian environment of today has made adequate provision for the society to actualize these lofty dreams for the youth? (Abdullahi, 2008).

According to Abdullahi (2008), the contemporary democratic Nigerian society is such that is characterized by obsession with certificate syndrome rather than acquisition of relevant skills and training demanded by the new global economic order. Ronald (1978) refers to this as “*the diploma disease*”. In addition to this issue is the fact that the current generation of the youth agency in democratic Nigeria lack self-will, determination and discipline, i.e. factors that are crucial for creativity, achievement and enduring success for national security and sustainable development (Oghene and Achoja, 2001).

Over the years, various regimes came up with programmes for youth empowerment, through re-orientation, re-education and skills acquisition for self-reliance and sustainable livelihood. In order words, the idea is to create a generation of youth that are sufficiently, functionally skilled, psychologically, educationally and vocationally well equipped with a career focus for sustainable livelihood, i.e. the development of a cadre of youths that will constitute the vanguard of sustainable human development efforts in all ramifications of societal life activities (Project YES, 2003).

At this juncture, it is easy to observe that despite all governmental efforts at youth empowerment, through some of her institutions like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and the Ministry of Women and Youth Development, the Nigerian youths still command high position in the statistics of unemployment and poverty, WHY? The answer to this fundamental question will enable us to critically examine the general nature of youth unemployment and risks of poverty on the basis of gender experience.

2.2 Youth Unemployment and Poverty Nexus: The Gender Experience in a Democratic Nigeria.

The unemployment crisis in a democratic Nigeria has continued to loom higher. This trend has become more worrisome due to its resultant high effect on the rate of poverty level. Consequently, youth unemployment experiences and its attendant risks of poverty are best gauged against the fundamental question of “who experience poverty more: is it male youth or female youth? Empirical evidences have revealed that the female gender generally experience poverty more than male gender (Abdullahi, 2004). By implication this means that the Nigerian youths with particular reference to the females suffer more from poverty, hence lack access to the basic needs of life (Abdullahi, 2004). At this juncture therefore, the question is – do (does) female gender experience of poverty, or living under the threat of poverty, going without food or warmth results to poorer health conditions for females hence more prone to unemployment? One way of focusing on this wide debate on factors determining female unemployment and the potential links between health and poverty is a critical examination of the apparent paradox in the question of female health experience, i.e. the differences between the sexes in terms of life expectancy and levels of illness.

Payne (1991:87) and Abdullahi (2004) observe that (female) specific risk of poverty stems from the structuring of (female) economic dependency, within families and marriage and in the sexual division of labor that come together to create a gendered vulnerability to poverty and deprivation. Consequently, females are more prone to the experience of poverty during the course of their lives with the resultant effects on their health, and are more likely to suffer the ill-effects of living with the threat of poverty (than male). In other words, the female gender may live longer, but experience poorer health during their lives as a result of the way in which poverty affects health resulting into unemployment. A lot of factors have been isolated as being responsible for female gender health experience due to poverty and unemployment. Some of these factors according to Payne (1991) include: female gender experience of poverty within the household; the biological or physiological differences between the sexes; differences in experience in paid employment and risks; the impact of longevity on health and the issue of health measurement, etc.

Arising from the above is the fact that inadequate income determines the quantum spent on essential goods and services that are flexible with high elasticity, e.g. food (Daly, 1989). Income thus measures resources which when acquired will improve the well-being of an individual, with unemployment having negative

implications for well-being in a more direct manner (Abdullahi, 2004).

Nevertheless, the effect of unemployment on well-being can be linked to loss of earnings, in addition to depending on family for support which is too inadequate to ensure a level of living above or even at subsistence level. Thus, the stress resulting from unemployment has serious impact on the well-being (Stitt, 1990; Lang, 1984; Cole-Hamilton and Lang, 1986; Fagin and Little, 1984; Arber, 1987).

According to Arber (1987), gender and sexually segregated labour market have created two models: the one for the male gender is more marked, as unskilled men have seven times chances of employment, while unskilled women suffer higher rates of unemployment. The crucial question at this point is: what are the factors responsible for the high statistics of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria?

2.3 Factors Responsible for the High Statistics of Youth Unemployment and Poverty in a Democratic Nigeria

In contextualizing and sketching youth unemployment and poverty nexus in Nigeria, it will be useful to observe that Nigeria is a nation caught in the midst of affliction and affluence. It is an irony of fate that in over five decades, Nigeria generated unprecedented wealth from crude oil alone, yet the youth populations have continued to wallow in abject frustration, unemployment and poverty. Having the 6th largest deposit of gas and the 8th largest oil-producer in the world, with over 100 tertiary institutions that churn out 200,000 graduates of various disciplines annually (Soludo, 2006:10), yet all these abundant endowment have remained largely untapped and at best grossly mismanaged. Thus, between 1991 to 2006, the population of Nigerian youth increased from 22.5 million to 30 million. This most vulnerable segment of the nation is confronted with serious challenges, the top on the list being the problem of unemployment, poverty and security.

A study by ILO (2004) reveals that youth unemployment increased from 11.7% in 1993 to 14.4% in 2003. Also, it has been observed that youth make up 25% of the global working-age population, but they constitute 43.7% of the unemployed (Onuoha, 2008). However in the democratic Nigeria, despite all efforts by the government to create jobs, especially following the introduction of NEEDS, and its counter part at both the state and local government levels, i.e. SEEDS and LEEDS, the rate of unemployment has continued unabated. This problem has continued to worsen among the youths over the years due to weak political will thereby resulting to about 70% of the young Nigerians in the statistics of the unemployed with a resultant effect on poverty scourge (Youth Position Paper, 2007). In the same measure, it has also been estimated that more than 80% of the Nigerian youths are unemployed, while about 10% are underemployed (Onuoha, 2008). Thus, with very weak economy and high rate of unemployment, poverty scourge has continued unabated, i.e. youth poverty is as a result of high unemployment rate which is a consequence of exclusion from viable economic activities, a scenario Soludo (2006:29) termed “the dynasties of poverty”. Nigeria as a democratic nation has no doubt seriously underdeveloped the youth population, the consequence of this abject neglect of the Nigerian youths on national security and economic development are best imagined. A trip to all the crannies and corners of the Nigerian cities will reveal the pathetic condition of the youths as a result of systemic disempowerment. To eke out a living therefore, the devil finds useful tools in their hands to unleash their frustration on the general society via hawking vandalized and adulterated petroleum products, area boys’ syndrome in Lagos, rabbles of militants in the Niger Delta, boko haram in Maiduguri (on the part of the male youth), while the female youths result to call-girl activities and other menial duties, a real life statistics which could serve “better than official statistics in unraveling the extent to which the democratic Nigeria has underdeveloped and or disempowered her youthful population arising from pervasive unemployment and poverty in Nigeria” (Onuoha, 2008).

2.4 Steps taken by the Nigerian Government to Address Youth Unemployment and Poverty over the Years

It is useful to note that empowerment or development of the individual is very crucial to both national security and economic development. Over the years, however, the Nigerian leaders have been observed to have taken some steps towards addressing the problem of both youth unemployment and poverty, bearing in mind the constructive contribution to the project of national security and economic development by the youth agency. Paradoxically, viewing the state of the Nigerian youths in recent times, it is clear that there is absence of any conscious attempt by the democratic Nigerian state to judiciously harness, mobilize as well as channel the energies of the youths for sustainable economic development that will result to lasting general security.

It will also not be an exaggeration to observe that efforts at youth empowerment have been meted with both levity and laxity. Indeed, there has never been any strong zeal to empower the youth in terms of capacity building i.e. strengthening their capacity to determine their values as well as their priorities which constitute the basis for development (AbdulMalik, 2008). This is in view of the fact that the present youth unemployment in Nigeria as it is today has its roots in the country’s economic development policies (Ikebude, 2008). According to the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), cited by Ikebude (2008), “the absence of well-articulated policies that guide strategies and programs is the reason why the national goal of unemployment reduction has not yet been achieved in any substantial way”. Consequently most governmental efforts with regards to youth

unemployment via youth policies since independence has “fizzled out amidst non-commitment in their implementation and changes in regime type” (AbdulMalik, 2008).

However, in 1984, the Federal Government adopted a National Youth Policy whose objectives include:

- *Involvement and participation of Nigerian Youth in the social, economic and cultural development of Nigeria.*
- *Fostering of national and international understanding and unity among youth.*
- *Inculcate virtues of patriotism, discipline, selfless service, honesty and leadership in the youth with a view to ensuring a purposeful sense of direction for the nation.*
- *Provision of opportunities for vocational training for schooled and unschooled youth oriented primarily towards self-employment and self-reliance.*
- *Encouragement of active complementary role of voluntary youth organizations for the overall development of Nigerian Youth (Momoh, 2000).*

All the above lofty objectives notwithstanding, the non-commitment to the policy left nothing for the improvement in the condition of wellbeing of the Nigerian youth. In the year 2001 also, the Obasanjo regime came up with new policy termed “Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), an offspring of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The programmes embedded in this policy include:

- *Capacity Acquisition Programme.*
- *Mandatory Attachment Programme.*
- *Micro Credit Programme, etc.*

Thus, the upsurge in the security challenges in Nigeria today are the off-shoot of the inherent frustration and desperation faced by the typical Nigerian youth which has given rise to the insane behaviour of the youth population, 43% of whom are involved in armed robbery operations, drug peddlers, area boys, Niger Delta Militants, *Yandaba* (Ya’u, 2000 and Momoh, 2000), and the most recent being the Boko Haram. All over the nation, youth involvement in ethno-religious crises have become unprecedented in the history of Nigeria. Nigerian citizens can no longer live in peace. For instance, the various bomb blasts in Maiduguri, Kaduna, Kano, Abuja, Suleja, Plateau, Yobe, Okene, etc, in recent times are cases in point. Infact the year 2012 has been marked with serious security problems across the hitherto peaceful nation.

3.1 The Macroeconomic Policy Challenges towards Building the Youth Agency for Participation in National Security and Sustainable Economic Development

The macroeconomic condition of the democratic Nigeria in recent times has been observed to be “growing strongly, but economic growth is not leading to development, (a scenario described as) Nigeria’s Growth Paradox” (Nnadozie, 2012). According to him, “unemployment is one of the main concerns in Nigeria (as) the strong economic growth of the past decade has not translated into higher employment rate. The following tables throw more light on the unemployment statistics in Nigeria.

Table (1): Trends in Registered Unemployment in Nigeria and Vacancies: (1995 to 2005).

Year	Old Registration	Fresh Registration	Re-Registration	Total	Vacancies	Placements
1995	27,926	36,039	32,615	96,580	11,156	2,139
1996	27,210	39,273	26,675	85,158	13,030	2,378
1997	33,967	79,718	31,399	145,084	16,502	4,988
1998	66,625	30,003	19,534	116,162	14,154	2,506
1999	52,737	26,128	17,190	96,055	14,052	3,474
2000	55,043	20,355	14,354	89,752	7,637	1,917
2001	77,769	19,896	12,848	110,515	14,529	2,924
2002	66,812	3,449	4,882	75,143	3,864	985
2003	69,463	2,492	3,432	75,387	3,735	1,251
2004	68,930	2,052	1,295	72,227	3,786	859
-	-	2005	-	-	-	-
1 st Qtr	73,755	3,154	1,960	78,869	3,875	1,369
2 nd Qtr	75,313	3,633	2,248	81,194	4,143	1,463
3 rd Qtr	77,989	3,633	2,307	83,691	4,262	677
4 th Qtr	79,574	2,156	1,434	83,614	4,446	965

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin, Dec. 2005 (Culled from Fed. Min of Employment, Labour and Productivity, Lagos).

Table (2): Nigeria's Unemployment Rates (1976 – 2005)

Year	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	National (%)
1976	-	-	4.3
1980	-	-	6.4
1984	7.9	4.4	6.2
1985	9.8	5.2	6.1
1986	9.1	4.6	5.3
1987	9.8	6.1	7.0
1988	7.8	4.8	5.3
1989	8.1	3.7	4.5
1990	5.9	3.0	3.5
1991	4.9	2.7	3.1
1992	4.6	3.2	3.4
1993	3.8	2.5	2.7
1994	3.2	1.7	2.0
1995	3.9	1.6	1.8
1996	6.1	2.8	3.4
1997	6.0	2.6	3.2
1998	4.9	2.8	3.2
1999	5.5	2.5	3.0
2000	14.2	19.8	18.1
2001	10.3	15.1	13.7
2002	9.5	13.3	12.2
2003	17.1	13.8	14.8
2004	11.0	12.1	11.8
2005	10.1	12.6	11.9

*Sources: CBN (2004), Major Financial and Social Indicators;
National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2005).*

Table (3): Nigeria's Composite Unemployed by Educational Level (1976 – 2005)

Year	No Schools (%)	Primary School (%)	Secondary School (%)	Tertiary Institution. (%)
1976	65.4	26.5	7.8	0.3
1983	7.1	43.5	48.7	0.7
1985	22.6	23.9	51.1	2.4
1990	12.2	22.9	60.9	4.0
1992	19.1	10.4	65.6	4.9
1993	17.2	17.9	60.9	4.0
1994	13.3	13.2	68.7	4.8
1995	16.2	13.5	59.5	10.8
1996	17.0	11.8	52.8	18.4
1997	21.1	12.7	46.2	20.0
1999	23.9	13.1	45.3	17.7
2000	29.0	15.6	40.3	15.1
2001	29.4	17.2	39.9	13.5
2002	21.7	18.1	47.2	13.0
2003	24.3	18.6	45.8	11.3
2004	50.5*	17.8*	24.2	7.5*
2005	51.9*	16.3*	25.3*	6.5*

Source: CBN (2004), Major Financial and Social Indicators.

**Data obtained from Statistical News (2005).*

Table (4): Nigeria's Composite Unemployed by Age Group (1976 – 2003)

Year	15-24 Yrs (%)	25-44 Yrs (%)	45-49 Yrs (%)	60-64 Yrs (%)
1976	71.1	26.3	2.6	0.0
1983	68.9	28.0	2.9	0.2
1985	69.1	26.5	4.3	0.1
1990	70.2	23.9	5.9	0.0
1992	73.1	20.8	6.0	0.1
1993	69.0	25.2	5.8	0.0
1994	70.4	21.0	8.6	0.0
1995	57.5	28.7	13.8	0.0
1996	42.9	46.0	11.1	0.0
1997	44.3	49.7	6.0	0.0
1999	41.9	51.1	7.0	0.0
2000	51.2	43.9	4.9	0.0
2001	54.3	42.7	2.0	0.0
2002	53.5	44.7	1.8	0.0
2003	54.0	43.9	2.1	11.3

Source: CBN (2004), Major Financial and Social Indicators

Table (5): National Underemployment Rates in Nigeria (1992 – 1998)

Years	National (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
1992	18.3	11.6	25.1
1993	18.8	15.5	22.0
1994	16.4	12.7	20.2
1995	14.7	9.3	20.1
1996	15.9	11.4	20.4
1997	13.7	8.8	18.6
1998	18.5	11.2	20.1

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) (2005).

Table (6): Unemployment Rates by Sex (2003-2004)

Sex	2003 (%)	2004 (%)
Male	10.6	10.4
Female	11.2	14.1
All Groups	10.8	11.8

Source: Statistical Fact Sheet (SFS) (2005)

Table (7): Major Macro Economic Data in Nigeria (1980 – 2004).

Year	Unemployment (%)	GDP (%)	Inflation (%)	Capacity Utilization (%)	Population Growth (%)	Lending Rate (%)
1980	6.4	0.2	10.0	70.1	2.7	9.5
1984	6.2	-5.3	40.7	43.0	3.3	13.0
1985	6.1	9.3	4.7	38.3	3.4	11.8
1986	5.3	3.7	5.4	38.8	3.2	12.0
1987	7.0	-	10.2	40.4	3.3	19.2
1988	5.3	2.2	38.3	42.4	3.4	17.6
1989	4.5	7.0	40.9	43.8	2.0	24.6
1990	3.5	10.9	7.5	40.3	2.1	27.7
1991	3.1	2.2	13.0	42.0	2.7	20.8
1992	3.4	3.0	44.5	38.1	2.2	31.2
1993	2.7	2.7	57.2	37.2	3.4	18.3
1994	2.0	1.3	57.0	30.4	2.9	21.0
1995	1.8	2.1	72.8	29.3	2.8	20.8
1996	3.4	3.4	29.3	32.5	2.8	20.9
1997	3.2	3.2	8.5	30.4	2.8	23.3
1998	3.2	2.4	10.0	32.4	2.9	21.3
1999	3.0	2.8	6.6	34.6	3.3	27.2
2000	18.1	5.3	6.9	36.1	3.1	21.6
2001	13.7	4.6	18.9	39.6	3.1	21.3
2002	12.2	3.5	12.9	44.3	3.0	27.7
2003	14.8	10.2	14.0	45.6	2.8	21.6
2004	11.8	6.1	15.0	45.0	3.2	26.0

Source: CBN (2004), Major Financial and Social Indicators

Tables (1 to 7) are self explanatory. However, in the year 2010, the National Bureau of Statistics reveals that the rate of unemployment stood at 21.1%, with rural unemployment being higher than in the urban areas. Also, gender based unemployment statistics reveals that there are more unemployed females than males (see table 6 above). Consequently, the nexus between “youth unemployment is the missing link between growth and poverty reduction.....a fact often lost in public policy” (Nnadozie, 2012).

On a general note, broad macroeconomic stability, competitive markets, public and private investments in both physical and social infrastructures are widely recognized as very crucial steps towards achieving national security and sustainable economic growth and development (Abdullahi, 2005). It is also useful to observe that in the process of drawing up Nigeria's National Development Plans, the ordinary citizens (especially youths) have been sidelined. Their felt-needs, interest, aspirations, goals and expectations, and how best these can be permanently achieved and what they believe their specific inputs into their actualization can be have never been considered. The total absence of these crucial and essential inputs has robbed the Nigerian nation of "real" or "sustainable" development (NPC and UNDP, 1997). It is very useful to stress that the youth agency has (have) not fared well in most of Nigeria's National Development Plans. The question now is what are the ways forward, especially in the area of policy formulation and implementation for a democratic Nigeria?

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

That Nigeria has come a long way in managing excruciating macroeconomic challenges is no longer in doubt, given the manner she has confronted the global financial and economic crisis in recent times. However, what is factual is that Nigeria is still facing daunting socio-economic crisis anchored on the opportunistic attitude of the new political elites, democratic legitimacy, the nexus of youths and their participation, their unemployment and poverty as well as structures of pathologies of democracy and national security challenges in Nigeria. For instance as vividly captured by Abati (2006):

"Young persons at an impressionable age in their lives read about thieving Governors...Ministers who have inflated contracts, and collected or given bribes...hear about Governors who dress like women and jump bail in foreign land; Local Government Chairmen who go to the Council only at the end of the month to share money, lawmakers in the National Assembly who collect ₦50 million to mortgage people's sovereignty....they see all these persons who by Nigerian standards are considered successful".

Little wonder the Nigerian youth do not have any good examples of role model who can motivate them for self actualization and self-development. This is because "development is all about people who are both the subject and object of development" (Uchechukwu, 2008), while the ascendancy of self and the erosion of a strong sense of civic responsibility on the part of our leaders has led to a situation whereby private interests are placed above the broader social goals of the nation. Thus national development is absolutely impossible in the absence of real role models. Consequently, when youths are not well equipped or totally not equipped to participate in socio-economic development of the nation, two issues may result, negative or positive outcomes. In the democratic Nigerian scenario, the negative outcome has taken root, thereby creating serious macroeconomic challenges in all ramifications for the nation as a result of bad governance, i.e. "the inability of state actors, institutions and agencies to (judiciously) utilize public resources and authorities to ensure the protection of lives and properties as well as the delivering of social services or public goods necessary for the advancement of human security and development" (Onuoha, 2008). As way of moving forward therefore, the leaders must as a matter of responsibility undertake the following steps.

Firstly, for Nigeria to attain peace and general security, the need to transit from the narrower concept of **National Security** to a broader concept of **Human Security** cannot be overemphasized. The role of the youth agency in this transition is very crucial and urgent. This also calls for a holistic and integrated approach to youth matters requiring integrated sectoral and holistic intervention through the acknowledgement of the diversity, socio-cultural and environmental factors as well as historical antecedents, religion and tradition of Nigeria and Nigerians. This is in view of the fact that in the global arena, human security has gone beyond the threats of "weapons of mass destruction" to the threat of youth unemployment and poverty.

Secondly, one of the most unfortunate aspects of life in a democratic Nigeria is the lip-service being paid to macroeconomic policies and programmes that directly affect the youth. For instance, cases of NAPEP, NDE, etc, all targeting the youths never really achieved their set objectives. Both in concept and practice, it succumbed to the usual machinations of elitism which (has) characterized all socio-economic policies in Nigeria in recent times (Oguonu, 2004). Therefore, as we journey through the millennium, the Nigerian leaders should create inclusive and responsive programmes deliberately built to promote value-creation by targeting youths as a matter of priority.

Thirdly, the need to address the unemployment and poverty scourge plaguing the nation's youth despite her island of stupendous wealth is another area seriously requiring both urgent and permanent solution. While the government has not been sleeping over this, it is however sad to note that most of the approaches adopted so far are as usual fire brigade in nature. For instance the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Document (I & II) which was launched in 2004 and 2007 respectively, aimed at addressing these problems was observed to have been hurriedly put in place. Many lapses were observed, especially with respect to the over concentration on the private sector that are still at their infant stage and lacking conducive environment (Sheidu, 2004; Abdullahi, 2008). There should be an honest interest and the

political will to actualize all poverty alleviation programmes already on ground, like NAPEP.

Fourthly, there is no doubt about the fact that history has shown times without number that the nature, quality and commitment of leadership are the most essential antidote towards sustainable economic growth and development. Consequently when judiciously co-opted, the Nigerian youth could make meaningful contribution. The inability of the nation to tap the potentials of her youth is due to institutionalized corruption (Abdullahi, et al, 2011) which has negated all attempts, thus destroying efforts at fighting unemployment, poverty, social injustice, a scenario that has negated opportunities for economic reforms and the collapse of institutions, etc. In the light of this scenario, there should be a discontinuation of the current political manipulation as well as the negative economic instrumentalization of youth groups in favour of gainful employment both by the government and the private sector towards eradication of youth poverty and the prevailing atmosphere of alienation and dejection by the Nigerian youth.

Fifthly, the need for the government to create conducive environment for sound, judicious and effective economic management policies cannot be overemphasized. In the light of this, there should be a clear clarification of the nature and functions of macroeconomic policies and their direction. In this respect, policy goals must be specific with regards to orientations, targets and operations, while eliminating the room for contradiction and duplications. In addition, macroeconomic policies should be devoid of unnecessary bureaucratic sentiments, while competent hands with human face(s) should be entrusted in order to bring overall improvement in the general human wellbeing.

Sixthly, the government should avoid a situation of subjecting macroeconomic policies to political party sentiments and affiliation by strictly basing all policy-making positions on merit. In this respect, transparency and accountability must be the watch word, while coordination as well as harmonization of policies at all levels of government (Federal, State and Local) should be favored in order to bring about maximum positive externalities.

Seventhly, there should be effective institutions for political stability as well as management of conflicts. In the light of this, the need to re-visit the nation's Constitution becomes imperative. There should be a good Constitution clearly spelling out the rule of law regarding the fundamental rights of all and sundry, irrespective of cultural or religious background, etc. In this regard, the need for a combination of both orthodox and heterodox approaches through participatory method cannot be overemphasized and the youth must be given equal opportunity to contribute to this effort.

Finally, if Nigeria is going to maintain her "giant" status in Africa in particular and among the committee of great Nations in general by year 2020 and beyond, she cannot afford to ignore the urgent need to include the youth agency in her march towards national security and sustainable development. The challenge of effective and mainstreaming of youth participation must go beyond mere political rhetoric and superficial inclusion to take cognizance of crucial issues relating to the social norms and value system of the Nigerian societies. For instance there should be genuine efforts on the part of policy makers to promote equitable growth, generate employment, raise incomes, improve agricultural production, promote and expand informal sector livelihood. In this regard, the leaders must not only be seen to be serious, but must be totally committed by matching words with action, bearing in mind that a destroyed youth agency is a jeopardized future, while they (leaders) should stop preaching and practicing monologue and autocracy in favour of dialogue and true democracy.

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