

## **Youth Unemployment and Poverty in Nigeria: A Threat to Sustainable Growth and Development**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper focuses attention on the persistent problem of unemployment and poverty among the youths, which is a serious phenomenon in Nigeria. It constitutes a problem not only for the youths themselves but to the overall social, political and economic structures of the country. By examining the condition of the youths, it indicates that there is no concrete attempt by the government to connect, organize and improve the dynamisms of its youths towards sustainable national development. Unemployed youths in the country have not only been neglected and left unattended but have been imposed by unemployment and poverty. This problem not only leads to their disempowerment but also creates a situation that influences them to involve in deviant behaviours such as crime, drug trafficking, prostitutions, internet scam, election rigging and other fraudulent activities. Youth unemployment and poverty threatened peace and national security which shows that the country needs to re-consolidate, educate, and be dedicated to youths by developing policies and programmes that address their problems. Therefore, the problems associated with youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria include government failure to empower youths to sustain a living, high rate of crime, the rapid growth of ethnic militias and Boko Haram insurgency, youth involvement in political violence and drug trafficking. The solutions to the problem of youth unemployment and poverty in the country comprise of youth empowerment, employment creation, establishing well-articulated National youth policy, propagate moral reorientation, provide sporting and recreational services and train youths the philosophy of tolerance and hardworking.*

**Key words:** *Unemployment, Poverty, Youths, Nigeria.*

### **1. Introduction**

Youths are regarded as the future leaders of tomorrow and are usually acknowledged as the bedrock on which the society is anchored. They are possibly and essentially the utmost asset for a country's development (UN: 2007). Therefore, any society or country that plays with the welfare and development of its youths could be said to be playing with its future and survival (Alanana 2003). Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the youths have not only been abandoned and left to their fate but have been inflicted by so many ills, among which are spiral unemployment and abject poverty. In fact, it is an understatement to state that the Nigerian youths today have no future, as there is no serious social programmes or economic policy to cater for the interests and needs of the youths, despite the existence of some agencies in Nigeria, such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic and Empowerment Development Scheme (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) etc., in order to alleviate the suffering of the youths. Still, in Nigeria, youths are confronted with problems of poverty, illiteracy, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, crime, prostitution and fraudulent activities which are all associated with unemployment (Freedom2008).

Unemployment breeds social alienation and frustration among youths which can become a catalyst for criminality and violence. The current situation of Nigerian youths is as a result of the failure of the past and present government policies which aimed at tackling the problem of the youths (Ahonsi-Yakubu: 2001).

## 2. Objectives of the study:

- To explore the challenges posed by youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria
- To examine the problem associated with youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria
- To proffer solutions to the problem of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria

## 3. Methodology:

The data were collected through secondary sources such as National Bureau of Statistics, National Population Commission, National Directorate of Employment all in Nigeria as well as various international research organisations such as Global Poverty Ranking Index (GPRI), Human Development Index (HDI), The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## 4. An overview of youth unemployment in Nigeria:

The current youth unemployment condition in Nigeria originated in the country's economic development policies and performance ever since Nigeria independence in the year 1960. It continued with subsequent policies. Between 1960 and 2000, the pattern of unemployment and the status of unemployment shifted very significantly. The unemployed of the 1960's and 1980's were mainly secondary school leavers, who constituted the majority of the nation's educated people. University graduates were certain of getting jobs on the completion of their programs. But from 1990's up to 2000's the unemployment problems expanded to include those with tertiary education and emerged as the most important problem in this respect. With the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in 1986, the problem eventually degenerated into a free for all situations as it began to affect even those who had the jobs, and the rural and urban informal sectors, thus triggering retrenchments in both the public and private sectors. (Ikebude 2008).

In 1995, the Nigerian government had invited the International Labour Organization (ILO) to assist in the formulation of comprehensive national employment policy that would aim at accelerating employment generation, reduce the high rate of unemployment and ultimately attain full productive and freely chosen employment. In 1998 national workshop was organized on national employment policy in Abuja which comprises politicians, economists, social partners and stakeholders to discuss the adequacy and effectiveness of the national employment policy framework aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2005).

Despite all these efforts, unemployment and underemployment are still the major challenges to national development with consequences manifesting in the economic welfare, social stability and human dignity of the people. The solutions, therefore, does not lie in creating these policies, but in the faithful implementation. Similarly, as indicated earlier, the efforts of the international organizations will not succeed unless the local communities and the public authorities become committed.

The population of Nigeria has been increased from 15.9 million people in 1911 to 163 million people in 2010 as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Population of Nigeria from 1911 – 2010.

YEAR	POPULATION
1911	15.9 Million
1921	18.7 Million
1931	20.0 Million
1941	-
1952	30.3 Million
1962	45.2 Million
1963	55.7 Million
1973	79.8 Million
1991	88.9 Million
2006	140 Million
2010	163 Million

Source: Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010

#### 4.1 Distribution of youth population by single years of age and sex in Nigeria:

Based on the 2010 youth population by single years of age and sex, there are about 44 million youths in Nigeria aged between 18 - 35 years, constituting over 30% of the entire population of about 163 million (NPC: 2010).

Table 2: Youth population distribution by single years of age and sex in Nigeria:

Age (Single Years)	Both Sexes (Males and Females)	Percentage %
18 years	3,777,608	8
19 years	2,087,073	5
20 years	5,825,512	13
21 years	1,692,905	4
22 years	2,372,385	5
23 years	1,878,601	4
24 years	1,665,676	4
25 years	4,950,958	11
26 years	1,685,645	4
27 years	1,891,707	4
28 years	2,348,975	5
29 years	1,334,141	3
30 years	5,538,220	12
31 years	807,082	2
32 years	1,561,540	4
33 years	817,720	2
34 years	742,976	2
35 years	3,538,869	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,517,593</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: National Population Commission, Nigeria 2010

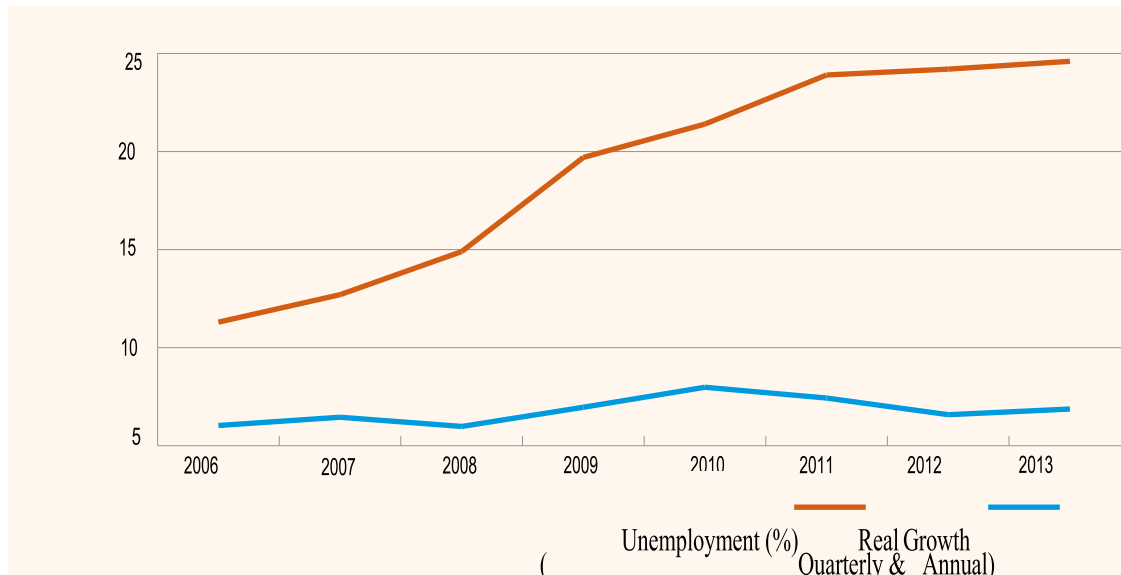
The table above shows that Nigeria has a vibrant youth population whose ideals, energies and labour power if effectively harnessed will promote national development and security. Ironically, it has been revealed that the majority of these young men and women are either unemployed or underemployed with its connection to poverty.

#### 5. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria: The Present Situation

The high rate of unemployment in Nigeria has deteriorated for many years as a result of the fragile economy. It is expected that about 70% of the unemployed youths in Nigeria are teenagers between the ages of 13 - 25 years. More than 80% of the Nigerian youths are jobless. However, about 10% are underemployed. The projected 10% in employment are overburdened and dejected with the entire reliance on family members and relatives (Youth Position Paper, 2007).

Unemployment has increased in the last decade in Nigeria as a result of rapid population growth and rural-urban migration from 12.3% in 2006 to 23.9% in 2011. Unemployment is estimated to stay high in 2014 with 24.3%. However, high unemployment is most severe among young people; 25% of them between the ages of 15-24 years are unemployed, this condition is not expected to decrease in the forthcoming years as shown in figure 1.1. The high and deteriorating rate of unemployment is a disturbing trend and has added high-income disparity witnessed in the country (NBC 2014).

Figure 1.1 Economic growth versus unemployment rate from 2005 - 2013



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2014)

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is being compounded by the phenomena of graduate unemployment and an informal sector harbouring substantial portion of underemployed. Graduate with connections finds it easier to secure jobs after graduation, while those without connections spend years unemployed. Worst still, youths in employment are underpaid (Giwa 2008).

Table 3: Unemployment rate in Nigeria from 2006-2010

DESCRIPTION	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Natural Composition</b>	12.2 %	14.8 %	11.8 %	11.9 %	11.9 %
<b>Urban</b>	9.5 %	17.1 %	11.0 %	10.0 %	10.1 %
<b>Rural</b>	13.3 %	13.8 %	12.1 %	12.6 %	12.3 %
<b>Total</b>	35 %	45.7 %	34.9 %	34.5 %	34.3 %

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2010).

The above table shows percentage rate of unemployment in Nigeria from 2006 - 2010. This shows that in 2006 total percentage rate of unemployment account for 35%, then 45.7% in 2007, 34.9% in 2008, 34.5% in 2009 and 34.3% in 2010. This indicates little or no changes in terms of employment opportunities in Nigeria.

## 6. Unemployment: A direct link to poverty:

The issue of unemployment has directly been linked to poverty; it has been revealed more than 70.1 percent of Nigerians are living on less than one US dollar per day in 2001 and almost 90.2 percent are living in less than two US dollars per day in 2010 (Babatunde, 2014). Global Poverty Ranking Index ranks Nigeria among the countries with high numbers of poor, with the Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.423, which positioned the country as number 142 out of 169 countries with a GDP per capita of US\$2, 156 and life expectancy at birth of 48.4 years in 2006. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in the same year is

0.368 in Nigeria. The United Nation Human poverty index rate Nigeria among the 33 poorest nations in the World in 2014 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

The youths in Nigeria experience poverty like their counterparts in many sub-Saharan African countries. Unemployment and poverty condition in Nigeria differ by gender and region; and experience has exposed that poverty wedged more on youths than the adult population in Nigeria (NBS, 2010). This, therefore, suggests that many youths are living in poverty in both rural and urban areas. In a survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria, it estimated that the total poverty headcount increases from 27.2% in 1980 to 69.0% in the year 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

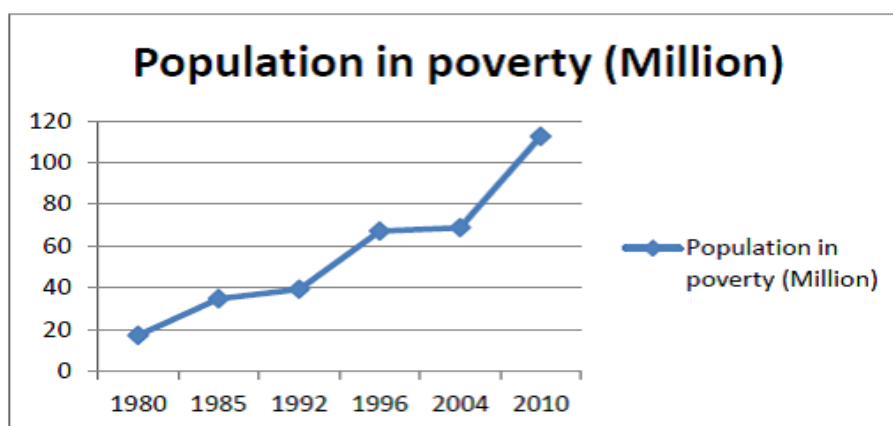
In spite of the fact that Nigerian economy has unexpectedly developed, the proportion of Nigerian population living in poverty is fast increasing every year and their poverty is better appreciated within the percentage of the population surviving below the poverty line as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Relative poverty headcount from 1980 - 2010

YEAR	POVERTY INCIDENCE	ESTIMATED POPULATION	POPULATION IN POVERTY
1980	27.2 %	65 Million	17.1 Million
1985	46.3 %	75 Million	34.7 Million
1992	42.7 %	91.5 Million	39.2 Million
1996	65.6 %	102.3 Million	67.1 Million
2004	54.4 %	126.3 Million	68.7 Million
2010	69.0 %	163 Million	112.47 Million

Source: National Bureau of Statistics. HNLSS 2010

The Nigeria population in poverty from 1980 to 2010 is graphically shown in figure 1.2 below:



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2012).

However, empirical indicators shows that youths engaged in hawking of adulterated petroleum products on our road sides; youths engaged in street begging; youths serving as political vanguard; legion of young ladies eking out a living through prostitution; young boys and girls selling GSM recharge cards, pure water and other consumables on the streets; gangs of miscreants such as 'Area boys', Bakassi boys, 'Yan daba', 'Yan sara-suka' etc, who are brandishing dangerous weapons at any slightest touch of provocation and group of militants such as Niger Delta Avengers, MASSOB, MEND Cattle Rustlers, Herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorists etc., in every corner of the country, to mention but a few, could serve if not better than official statistics in unraveling the extent of youth underdevelopment or disempowerment arising from pervasive unemployment and poverty in Nigeria (Freedom 2008).

## 7. Problems Associated with Youth Unemployment and Poverty in Nigeria:

The problems associated with youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria are numerous. The major ones are stated below:

► The high rate of crime in Nigeria is associated with youth unemployment and poverty because the majority of suspected criminals caught by the security agents are youths. For instance, according to the commander special anti-robbery squad of FCT Abuja, over 90% of crime suspects arrested in Abuja are youths between the ages of 15-25 years. He remarked that increasing criminal activities of these youths pose threat to the security of life and properties as well as the economy (The Punch Newspaper 2007).

► The rapid growth of ethnic militias, vigilantes and criminal gangs in Nigeria is associated with youth unemployment and poverty. This threatens the public order, peace and security in Nigeria (Nwankwo and Udeh 2005). Unemployed youths joined ethnic armies and militias who have been in many ethno-communal conflicts that erupted in recent years. Examples of these militias are Niger Delta Avengers, Odua People Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Cattle Rustlers, and Boko Haram terrorist etc.

► The violent conflicts in the Niger-Delta region of southern Nigeria are associated with youth unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment. (Peters 2006). Youths militias in the area have been involved in violent agitations which include hostage taking, kidnapping, vandalization of oil pipelines and the bombing of strategic oil installations so as to draw the attention of the government and the international community to the predicament of the area. An example of these youth's armies in the region includes Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) etc. Currently, the area is producing new criminals whose movements are menacing not only the communal existence of the country but also challenges the economy, sustainable growth and development.

► The youth's involvement in political violence in Nigeria is associated with youth unemployment and poverty. Many youths became political thugs who are used by the politicians to foment electoral violence, such as attacking, maiming, and assassinating political opponents. They are also used to commit all sorts of electoral fraud and malpractices such as ballot snatching and stuffing. This poses a threat to smooth democratic dispensation, sustainable growth and development.

► The youths involved in drug trafficking and prostitutions are associated with unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. Many youths are involved in trafficking of hard drugs such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana etc., for money from Nigeria to foreign countries or from one foreign country to another. Also young and productive Nigerians especially young girls allow themselves to be trafficked to foreign countries such as European countries as prostitutes for money. This undermines Nigeria's sustainable growth and development.

► The problem of youths street begging especially in the northern part of Nigeria is associated with youth unemployment and poverty. Youths prefer to roam about or sit by the roadsides or junction to beg for help in the form of money, food or clothes in order to sustain a living instead of attending school. This clearly indicates a threat to sustainable growth and development.

### **8. Solutions to the Problem of Youth Unemployment and Poverty:**

In order to tackle youth unemployment and poverty problems in Nigeria, suggestions are put forward on how to solve the problem as follows:

#### **► Initiate micro credit scheme to empower youths**

The Nigerian government must play its constitutional role in combating unemployment and poverty among youths. It is absolutely essential for the government to have a link with financial institutions such as micro finance bank, in order to establish functional and efficient microcredit scheme for the youths. The banks may be authorized to allocate a certain percentage of their loan facilities for the unemployed youths to start a business. Therefore, this will significantly reduce youth unemployment and poverty and also assist in minimizing rural-urban migration among youths. Such a microcredit scheme should be strongly planned to improve transparency and accountability in its management, and organized in a flexible way to avoid unnecessary protocol and measures that prevent youths from retrieving such credit facility.

### ► **Establish vocational and entrepreneurial skill acquisition centres**

The three tiers of government in Nigeria that is local, state and federal government need to have partnerships with some development agencies worldwide to build and fund entrepreneurial skill acquisition and vocational education centres. A deliberate effort must be made by the policy makers to establish more technical schools and technological village in all the six geopolitical zones, to engross the youths that are graduated from tertiary institutions of learning without employment. In addition, the National Directorate of Employment (N.D.E) must be empowered to increase its capacity in providing vocational skills to unemployed youths. In the same direction, the government should make a comprehensive overhaul of our educational curriculum to make sure that entrepreneurial skills and vocational training are integrated into the programmes of tertiary institutions in order to enable graduates to sustain a living by self-engagement.

### ► **Embark on creation of employment**

The increasing rate of unemployed youths in Nigeria necessitates the creation of more employment opportunities. Therefore, there is the need for the government to have a comprehensive list of all unemployed youths in the country, with different educational background and skills. The data obtained in all the states and local government areas could be used by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and employment creation agencies to place appropriately each and every applicant in the jobs, where they are capable. This will definitely reduce youth poverty.

Moreover, the Nigerian government should allow for the establishment of private sectors. This could be through the provision of socioeconomic infrastructures particularly in the rural areas such as housing, electricity, roads and telephone. Another way to create youth employment is by means of agriculture. The youths should be reinvigorated to take part in agriculture with recent equipment and improved yield crops. The government should establish agricultural centres in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria that could employ thousands of youths. These agricultural centres could be serviced and supported by small scale industries. For example, setting up of canned tomato industry in a centre where there is large-scale irrigation of vegetables like Kura irrigation centre in Kano state. This will stimulate the production of tomatoes and also influence non-farm related jobs.

### ► **Reinforce responsibility and transparency in the administration of national wealth**

Although the problem of youth unemployment and poverty is not unique to Nigeria, the situation is due to the colossal mishandling of national resources instead of shortages of national wealth needed to address the societal problem. There is also the need to strengthen all institutions that encourage efficacy, responsibility and transparency in the supervision of national wealth, by giving them all the necessary support to fight against money laundering, bribery and embezzlement of public funds in the country. For instance, institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as well as the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC), etc.

### ► **Establish well-articulated policies on youth employment**

The absence of well-articulated policies that guide employment strategies and programmes compounded the problem of youth unemployment and their absolute poverty. Unreliable and inaccessible data is one of the major reasons for the failure of policies in Nigeria. To initiate economic development and youth employment through expanded job creation, there is a need for the government to put in place a reliable and accessible database. This will enable the policy makers to know the number and distribution of youths that need jobs and the quantity and type of infrastructures that are needed. Since no government can adequately provide jobs for all its citizens, governments should create infrastructures that boost and withstand self-employment and entrepreneurship.

### ► **Propagate moral reorientation**

The youths in Nigeria urgently need moral reorientation. The country must do everything possible to help the youths in this regard. The moral decadence of the society, where the ethos of fairness, impeccable character and other standards of good behaviour have been abandoned for greed and loose morals is deplorable. The youths who are the leaders of tomorrow are the first casualty of this degeneration. Moral

reorientation for the youths is needed to reduce the attitude of becoming rich in any way possible, which lures many of them into crime and other deviant behaviours. The display of affluence by many elites in the society who drive in cars bought with fraudulent wealth is corroding the principles of hard work and endurance in the youths of today. There is, therefore, the need for religious organizations, civil society, traditional institutions and non-governmental organisations to engage the youths in moral reorientation that preaches sincerity, honesty, justice and fairness as well as believing in fate. Similarly, the same organizations should preach against corruption, get-rich, quick and occultism in order to put youths in the right direction.

► **Provide sporting and recreational services**

There is the need to make available adequate sporting and recreational services for the youths in order to allow them to give expression to their talents. The provision of sporting facilities in urban and rural areas will assist the youths to discover themselves in the field of sports such as football, volleyball, basketball, Lawn tennis and golf among others. These facilities will engage these youths and eliminate them from trouble. Numerous youths could engage in profitable careers in sports. To this end, government and other stakeholders should strive to put in place adequate sporting facilities for the youths.

► **Review the National Youth Policy**

The National Youth Development Policy was enacted in 2001 as an authorized statement of the prominence of the youth in National development. There is the need to review this policy in order to fill the existing gaps. There are agencies that are supposed to be established for the youths, which have not been done. A review of this policy will seek to address these lapses. To review the policy, this would require the active participation of youths from all over the country and should take into consideration the contemporary issues impinging on youth empowerment in Nigeria such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and youth restiveness, which were not as prominent when the policy was adopted. There is the need to initiate the process of policy review after certain years, with serious inputs from youths and all stakeholders.

► **Train youths the philosophy of tolerance and hard working**

Unemployed youths themselves have a greater role to play in eradicating unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, because government alone cannot successfully deal with the problem. In order to solve unemployment and poverty, their support and cooperation are required toward this direction. Unemployed youths should be trained to be tolerant and hardworking in their quest for employments by engaging in activities that will make them earn a living in order to remove them out of poverty. Therefore, employment cannot be possible if youths are lazy and unable to put any meaningful effort into making themselves self-employed.

► **Draw youths' attention to exercise patience and self-satisfaction**

The attention of the youths should be drawn in order to exercise patience and be self-contentment. They should learn to endure and be self-satisfied with the little jobs they are doing in order to make themselves self-reliant. The idea of self-reliance is an important step in fighting unemployment and poverty in the country through confidence building by providing them with moral and financial support. And also to let them realize that government jobs are not forthcoming. They have to engage themselves in small scale business so that they can earn a living.

► **Apply the skills acquired into practice**

In order to address the problem, youths should try as much as possible to apply the skills learned into practice; so as to assist them sustain a living and fight poverty. The majority of educated youths who acquired vocational training do not want to apply the skills obtained during their studies, but they preferred lucrative administrative work in the offices either by the government or private organizations where they would be paid higher salaries. This situation would not assist youths in contributing to national development.



## 9. Conclusion:

Youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria seriously undermine peace and national security. In order to achieve sustainable growth and development, empowerment of Nigerian youths is essential for their survival as future leaders of tomorrow. It is argued that the increasing number of youths trapped in the web of unemployment and poverty has now creatively engaged them in armed robbery, prostitution, drug trafficking, advance fee fraud, hostage taking, and vandalization of oil pipelines among other criminal activities which constitute strains on our national economy. The paper tries to bring the linkage between unemployment and poverty by highlighting the implication of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. Indeed, the need and urgency of engaging our youths positively so as to empower them cannot be over-emphasized.

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