

Youth Empowerment and National Security in Nigeria: Issues and Prospects

Samuel B. Kalagbor (Ph.D) and Deinibiteim M. Harry (Ph.D)

Department of Public Administration, Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: *The study examined the relationship between youth empowerment/development and national security in Nigeria. Nigeria has embarked on different youth empowerment programmes and projects such as Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN), etc. The nation has also had its fair share of security challenges such as Boko Haram, armed robbery, kidnapping, etc., threatening the national peace and security of the country. Successive administrations have carried out various operations to achieve national security. Thus, the main objective of the paper is to show that youth empowerment programmes and projects by successive administrations over the years were not well designed to make the Nigerian youth gain control of his/her life as well as serve as agent of national security and development. The study revealed that the approach by government over the years have been that of physical security, i.e. deployment of security agencies across the country, rather than focus on the empowerment of the youths who are at the heart of acts that pose threats to national security. Consequently, the efforts of the government in the area of national security have not yielded the desired results. Indeed, threats to national security in Nigeria are from internal sources than the external, with the youths serving as the foot soldiers. To achieve real national security, the focus of the government should be genuine youth empowerment and development. Hence, the paper concluded that for the Nigerian state to enjoy or experience genuine peace and security, youth empowerment must be given the right attention it deserves. The study recommended, among other things, that youth empowerment programmes, projects and policies must be based on scientific studies and not by rule of the thumb and youths should be trained with various utilitarian and functional skills and other requirements so as to make them self-employed and employers of labour in the country*

KEYWORDS: National security, Youth, Empowerment, Lip-services, Criminality, Polices.

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of national security has been a major concern of countries all over the world especially since the end of World War II. The concern was heightened after the 9/11 attack in the United States of America. Threats to national security vary from country to country and are both internal and external in nature and character. Consequently, different countries have adopted different strategies to achieve peace and security for their citizens. Nigeria, like many other countries of the world, had had her fair share of security challenges since independence in 1960 (Osakwe, 2013). In whatever form the threats or challenges to national security manifest in a country the youths, no doubt, play pivotal and crucial roles in the process. Indeed, more than 70 percent of the foot-soldiers in every crisis situation are very often youths. In Nigeria, the figure could even be well above 70 percent. It is, perhaps, for this reason Kalagbor (2017) observed that youth empowerment and national security issues and challenges constitute critical concerns to governments the world over, including Nigeria. He contended that the more youths are empowered the less national security would be threatened.

Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria have embarked on various youth empowerment/development policies, projects and programmes aimed at empowering the youths in the country so as to make them contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. Some of the youth empowerment programmes include Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN), National Directorate of Employment (NDE) scheme and N-power.

Despite these programmes (and many others not mentioned in this work), there has been increasing issues and challenges with respect to youth empowerment, including youth unemployment, increasing crimes and criminality such as armed robbery, kidnapping, drug-abuse, oil theft, sea-piracy, Biafra agitation and Boko Haram menace, among others. No doubt, these issues and challenges have implications for national security in Nigeria.

Obviously, the above mentioned policies and programmes were not specifically targeted at achieving national security in the country; hence most of these policies and programmes wallow in paper-tigerism, as successive governments continue to pay lip-services in the implementation of youth empowerment schemes. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the different youth empowerment programmes and projects by successive administrations were not well designed to make the Nigerian youth gain control of his/her life as well as serve as agents of national security and development. The paper contends that the physical security approach of successive governments in the country have failed to deliver sustainable peace and security. To achieve real national security the focus should be genuine youth empowerment and development. Consequently, the paper seeks to examine the relationship between youth empowerment and national security in Nigeria and suggests a progressive way forward.

Who is a Youth?

There are different descriptions and definitions of who the youth is by different states, organizations and scholars that it is difficult to categorically assert the meaning of the concept youth. However, there is a consensus among scholars that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow and this belief propels countries across the world to pay serious attention to youth development programmes (Okolie, 2010, Mbachu and Alake, 2016 and Gonyok, 2016). For instance, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2016, asserted that the term youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as member of a community. In line with the view that youths are transmitting from the period of dependence to independence, the United Nations Organization (UNO), for statistical consistency across regions, defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and this view is without prejudice to other definitions by member states. Similarly, the National Population Commission officially defines a youth or young adult as persons between the ages of 18 and 24 years (NPC, 2002). The National Population Commission further describes the defining characteristics of the youth as follows:

these are persons who normally would have completed secondary education, and would either be in tertiary institutions such as the university, striving to secure employment, or be already employed. This group of persons would need post-secondary education, employment and reproductive health information and services.

Contrary to the above views, the African Youth Charter (2006) defines a youth as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. In the same token, the second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2009 describes youths as persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Akoda (2010), still using the transition from dependence to independence Schema in the definition of youth noted certain distinct features the youths possess as:

- (i) Leaving the parental home and establishing a new living arrangement;
- (ii) Completing full-time education;
- (iii) Forming close, stable personal relationships outside of the family, often resulting in marriage and children, and;
- (iv) Testing the labour market, finding work and possibly settling into a career, and achieving a more or less sustainable livelihood.

What this then indicates is that the youthful period is the age when the individual is most active in life, seeking education, functional skills and employment, etc. Indeed, at this age the young people are very energetic and are in search of where they would deploy such energy. Furthermore, during this period most of the youths are in anxiety not knowing what the future holds for them. Thus, a number of question agitate their minds such as: what does the future hold for me?; What are the roles/positions I can fit into in the society?; can I fulfill my dreams? And what are the institutional mechanisms to guarantee actualization of these dreams? Where the answers to these questions are not positive or clear, the youths may become frustrated. As Ofem and Ayayi (2008) have observed, frustrated youths are prime recruitment targets of militant protagonists and criminal gangs. They summarized the characteristics of the youths which move them to action to include their search for avenues to direct their energetic ways to be productive, receptiveness to new ideas, optimism for the future, boundless spirit, eagerness to learn, dynamism and youthfulness. Generally, “the age limit for youth has been increasing as people continue to seek higher education, with the prevalence of higher levels of unemployment, and the cost of setting up an independent family puts many youth people into a prolonged and period of dependency” (Gonyok, 2016).

Nigeria is made up of a sizeable youth population, using the 15 to 35 years bracket. The National Population Commission (NPC, 2013) asserts that about half of the population in Nigeria is made up of youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age. Similarly, Osakwe (2013) reported that, by the 2006 Census figure, the youth population in Nigeria was about 36.9 percent. A sizeable and qualitative youth population is a blessing to any nation since it indicates availability of future generation to whom leadership of the nation would be bequeathed. However, for proper discharge of roles and positions in the society, youths must be adequately developed and empowered. Huge youth population in a country may be used for good and bad. As Weeks (2008) puts it:

Social change is not engineered by youth, but it is most manifest in youth... The presence of a large contingent of young people in a population may make for a cumulative process of innovation and social and cultural growth; it may lead to elemental, directionless acting-out behaviour; it may destroy old institutions and elevate new elites to

power; and the unemployed energies of the young may be organized and directed by totalitarianism.

Youth Empowerment

Empowerment means the granting of political, social or economic power to an individual or group. It is also the process of supporting a person or persons to discover and claim personal power. According to Page and Czuba (1999), empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. Essentially, it is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, communities and society, by acting on issues they define as important. Mechanic (1991) asserts that empowerment may be seen as “a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes.” Furthermore, the Cornell Empowerment Group in 1989, adopting a “person-environment interaction” approach, defines empowerment as “an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community involving mutual respect critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources”.

What is evident from the above definitions is that for a person, persons or organizations to be said to have been empowered they must have the capacity to take charge of their day-to-day living. As Zimmerman (1995, 2000) and Rappaport (1981) put it “empowerment is both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one’s life, organizational functioning and the quality of community life”. To Zimmerman, the value orientation element of empowerment put in place or sets goals, aims, and plan of actions geared towards achieving change, while the theoretical element of empowerment presents the principles and framework for organizing individuals’ knowledge and understanding of empowerment processes. Indeed, for empowerment schemes to be successful, empowerment programmes and projects are expected to help the target groups gain access to resources and aid essentially in the understanding of the politico-socio-economic environment within which such programmes and projects are implemented. Without such access to resources and understanding of the politico-socio-economic milieu the target groups would not be able to contribute meaningfully to the overall development of the society. Zimmerman (2000) posits that an empowerment effort should go beyond ameliorating the negative aspects of a situation, but search for those that are positive, thereby achieving wellness of the situation rather than merely fixing problems. To him, an empowerment approach that would enhance wellness should identify strength instead of documenting risk factors, as well as seek for environmental influences instead of blaming victims; such is an attribute of a well-designed empowerment scheme.

To this end, youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives. As Kar, Pascual and Chickering (1999) have observed, this is done by addressing their situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitudes. Youth empowerment is aimed at improving the quality of life of the youths and is achieved through participation of the youths in such empowerment programmes and projects. According to Youth Empowered Solutions (YES) (2015), youth empowerment is the outcome by which youths, as change agents, gain relevant skills to impact their own lives and the lives of other individuals, organizations and communities.

In most developing countries, youth empowerment efforts rest on the shoulder of the state. The focus on the youth by policy-makers, states and international organizations is not unconnected with the pivotal roles youths play in the political, social and economic development of societies the world over. As earlier noted, the youths are generally described as “leaders of tomorrow”, thus they are the hope or future of every nation. Therefore, there is need to properly and adequately empower and equip them to play the roles expected of them and those assigned to them in societal quest for political, socio-economic stability and sustainable development.

National Security

Security of lives and property is the primary responsibility of any responsible and responsive government. As such, most governments take issues of security with all the seriousness it deserves. Security means the state of being free from danger or threat. It is the degree of resistance to or protection from harm. It applies to any vulnerable or valuable asset, such as a person, dwelling, community, etc.

There is no single universally accepted definition of what constitutes national security. The variety of definitions provides an overview of the many usages of the concept. The concept, national security, still remains seemingly ambiguous, having originated from simpler definitions which initially emphasized freedom from military threat and political coercion to later increase in sophistication and include other forms of non-military security as suited the circumstance of the time (Romm, 1993 and Paleri, 2008).

In its contemporary usage, national security refers to the protection of a nation from attack or other danger by holding adequate armed forces and guarding state secrets as well as developing the capacities of the citizenry so as to make them patriotic and hold true allegiance to a nation's course. More specifically, Iredia (2011) defined national security as the ability of a state to overcome any of its challenges no matter what the challenges are. While Dokubo in Asuquo (2013) sees it as the ability of nations to prevent all forms of threats to their survival, ranging from external aggression to threats of economic, political and environmental insecurities while grappling with the challenges of nation-building and good governance.

According to Holmes (2015), national security is the safe-keeping of the nation as a whole, which has as its highest business the protection of the nation and its people from attack and other external dangers by maintaining armed forces and guarding state secrets. In this regard, national security relates only to those activities which are directly concerned with the nation's safety, as distinguished from the general welfare. However, as the US Legal (2016) noted, the concept national security encompasses within it economic security, monetary security, military security, political security and security of energy and natural resources. Obviously, national security definitions have gone beyond military defense of a country against a military enemy (Thom-Otuya, 2016). Thom-Otuya, further posits that national security has also gone beyond the aggregation of the activities of security agencies, but rather it now involves issues of human welfare and national development. It is important to stress that in its broad consideration, it affects not only defense policy, but foreign and other policies as well. Essentially, national security policy is expected to be far reaching, covering a variety of policies and projections such as political, social, diplomatic, welfare, economic, military, etc. Hence, Thom-Otuya (2016) asserts that national security should integrate or focus on the security of the individual that is “human security”. Human security approach is concerned with the security of human beings from fear and want. Proponents of the human security approach agree that the individual

should be the focus of national security. To the Commission on Human Security (2003), Human security means:

using processes that build on people's strength and aspirations, creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity.

As Holmes (2015) noted, modern concepts of national security arose in the 17th century during the thirty years war in Europe and the civil war in England. In 1648, the peace of Westphalia established the idea that the nation-state had sovereign control not only of domestic affairs such as religion but also of external security. Thom-Otuya (2016) stressed that National security can also be seen as a condition in which citizens of a country enjoy the basic necessities of life. This, obviously, would guarantee some levels of political stability and to a large extent ensure national security in a polity.

Nature of Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

The Nigerian National Youth Policy (2009) defines youths as those between the ages of 18 and 35 years. The 2016 projected figure of population of the youths was put at 61,306,413, which represents 31.7 percent of the total population, which was put at 193,392,517 (NPC, 2017). As earlier noted, the youths are the most active segment of society. However, in Nigeria, there are no deliberate, empirically-based and systematically designed empowerment programmes and policies aimed at making the youths actively useful to themselves and contribute meaningfully to national security and development. Nigerian youths face tremendous challenges of poverty, diseases such as STDs and HIV/AIDs, unemployment, marginalization and exclusion in the political economy (Jega, 2017). Youth empowerment policies and programmes are haphazardly conceived, designed and implemented, most often, to the exclusion of the youths, the major beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Isa and Vambe (2013) observed that youths are not often involved in the collection of data, information and research on issues affecting them. Consequently, youth empowerment, policies, programmes and projects designed based on such data are usually products of unscientific research but rather based on unsubstantiated assumptions, commonly described as "the rule of the thumb" (Harry, 2017). The outcome is the failure of these schemes to sufficiently address the challenges of youths so as to make them useful to themselves and the nation at large. Commenting on the disarticulated character of youth empowerment in Nigeria, especially as it relates to the educational system and its effect on youths, Akande (2016), observed that deficient school curricula and poor teacher training have contributed to the failure of educational institutions to provide their students with the appropriate skills and knowledge to make them employable. The deficiency noted is not only in the curricula and teaching, but in infrastructure, teaching facilities and teacher quality, particularly in schools in the rural areas. As Isa and Vambe (2013) have argued, the lack of commitment from teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education, which is the formative stage of young persons further compounded the youth development/empowerment processes. They stressed that the provision of qualitative education to the teeming youth population has remained a principal challenge in Nigeria. Worst still, the poor quality of the educational system in the country was decried by the Vision 20:2020 Economic Blueprint this way:

The deficit in educational quality has grossly undermined the competitiveness of the Nigerian Labour Force in national and global markets... Nigeria finds itself faced with the paradox of the simultaneous existence of surplus labour and scarcity of skills, due to a persistent skills mismatch, which further compounds unemployment.

Ofem and Ajayi (2008) observed that, in Nigeria governments at different levels of governance had embarked on various uncoordinated youth empowerment schemes over the years that amounted to little or nothing in real terms. They identified ten (10) youth empowerment strategies in Nigeria to include (i) development of youth skills, (ii) opportunities for physical, social and mental development, (iii) provision of better working opportunities; (iv) active participation in community service, (v) provision of recreational facilities, (vi) involvement of leadership training, (vii) provision of micro- credit facilities, (viii) scholarships/bursaries, (ix) formation of organizations, and (x) involvement in decision making processes.

For instance, Osakwe (2013) posits that, in 1987, the General Ibrahim Babangida government set up the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to training youths in functional utilitarian skills, establish them to make them self-reliant as well as become possible employers of labour. He noted with regret that while the NDE scheme is still operational (1987 – 2017) it would be ridiculous and whimsically amusing to gauge its performance in the area of job created or employment generated. As earlier noted, some of the other youth empowerment policies, programmes and projects successive regimes had formulated and implemented in the country are National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), and Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN).

All these programmes/strategies have not yielded the desired outcomes in making the youths agents of change in their communities and the nation at large because of the poor and uncoordinated efforts in implementation. Akande (2016), posits that the major reason for the failure of these efforts is faulty selection of beneficiaries and trainees for the programmes. According to him, youths are usually “lumped together as if they are homogenous in terms of education, skills, capabilities, etc;” when in actual fact, they are very different in their education, skills, capabilities, experience and willingness to learn. He added that finance, poor governance and policy implementation, inconsistent policies, unimpressive responses from would-be trainees and unqualified resource persons handling the training programmes all contribute to the failure of government youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. However, Akande (2016), asserts that the most successful youth empowerment scheme in the country is the GIS, which offers unemployed graduates the opportunity to undergo a one-year internship in firms, banks, government agencies, etc relevant to their disciplines. Attesting to the success of the scheme, he asserts that there are overwhelming evidence that the GIS has enhanced participants’ job skills, provided them with practical knowledge and improved their chances of employability. Nonetheless, it is important to state that government empowerment programmes in Nigeria have not been able to empower or engage a critical mass of the youths in the country, who are available and ready to be empowered and engaged in some productive ventures.

The YES Youth Empowerment Model

The Youth Empowered Solutions (YES) proposed a model to be adopted in any youth empowerment programme, project or policy that would produce that desired result. In other

words, the proponents of the model believe very strongly that if the approach is adopted, the youths in such society would be well prepared to contribute meaningfully to their well-being and help their community/society survive or overcome what challenges that might arise in it. The adoption of the YES model of youth empowerment in this work is aimed at presenting what real youth empowerment scheme should be and should achieve for it to be considered to be successful.

YES (2015) identified two levels of youth empowerment at the individual and the organizational levels. At the individual level youth empowerment programmes should be such that endow the person with abilities to exercise power over one's life by being skilled, critically aware and active in creating change in the community. At the organizational level youth empowerment programmes should be carried out through well-established structures that guarantee the implementation of a culture, vision and system that supports youth empowerment at the individual level.

The YES Model is a three dimensional approach that has the power to engage youths in functions that instigate/propel them to develop skills; gain critical awareness and participate in opportunities "that are needed for creating change in the community". These approaches are:

- (i) **Skill Development:** The process of improving the skills of young people to enable them to effectively make decisions, positively relate with their peers and act as community advocates.
- (ii) **Critical awareness:** The process of providing youths with the information, capacities and wherewithal needed for analyzing issues that touch their lives and environments as well as devise means on how to make thing work as agents of change in their communities.
- (iii) **Opportunities:** The process of making available for youths avenues for decision-making and strengthening them to actively participate in creating change in their communities.

Issues of National Security in Nigeria

Nigeria has been exposed to so many issues that threaten her national security. These issues cut across different facets of the nation's life and the different regions or states of the federation. Most of the threats to national security come from internal rather than external sources. Consequently, there is usually huge military presence across the country carrying out one operation or the other, such as "Operation Lafiya Dole", "Operation Pulo Shield," "Operation Python Dance", "Operation Crocodile Smile", "Operation Kunama", etc. Some of the national security issues in the country are the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, Niger Delta Militancy, Piracy and Oil bunkering in the South-South region. Others include the Biafra secessionist agitation in the South East, kidnapping across the country, armed robbery, violent crimes, ethno-religious crises, election-induced violence in different parts of the country and the recent widespread herdsmen rampage in the Middle Belt, North Central, South East and some North Eastern states.

All of these (and others not mentioned here) have continued to pose serious security threats to the social, economic and political stability of the Nigeria state. Most often those who are actively involved in these acts of national security threats are the youths who have not been properly empowered. Many observers, like, Emordi (2012) and Osakwe (2013) have argued

that the prolonged period of misrule and bad governance, which encouraged corruption, human rights abuses, impunity, etc, necessarily induced the violence witnessed in the country today. As a result of the misrule and bad governance, some citizens began to indulge in self-help, thereby promoting the culture of violence. To support this, Emordi (2012) asserts that:

... the current security situation in the country is one result of the structural, systemic and value decay thrown up by long years of mass neglect and political impunity inimical to the well-being of the masses of the people of Nigeria.

In all these talked about issues of mass neglect in the country over the years the youths are the most and worst affected. Therefore, any national security policy must necessarily take into account the well-being of the youths by creating an environment in which young people can seamlessly access training, resources and opportunities that empower them as critical stakeholders in the security architecture of the Nigerian state.

Youth Empowerment and National Security

Globally, there is a general belief that youth empowerment is a necessary tool for achieving real national security. This is particularly true for Nigeria where most of the threats to national security are internally generated and propelled. To empower the youths means primarily that an enabling environment must be created for their development and self-actualization as articulated by the YES model and canvassed by some scholars. The approaches of the government to youth empowerment and national security are mutually exclusive rather than being mutually inclusive. In the real sense of it, youth empowerment and national security policy and programmes should be mutually reinforcing to achieve the desired national security outcomes.

Essentially, the government's approach to the national security challenges, which is the militarization of the entire country with various military operations mentioned earlier has not substantially yielded the desired result and in some cases, worsens the already bad situation. These operations have continued to gulp huge chunk of the national budget that would have been deployed to real youth empowerment and development and other critical areas of need. For instance, Osakwe (2013) disclosed that in the 2012 budget of the Federal Government of Nigeria a little less than one trillion Naira was budgeted for security. Similarly, the pattern of budgetary allocation to youth empowerment, development and physical security did not change much in the 2016 national budget as demonstrated in the table below:

Table 1: Selected items of 2016 Budget: Part D – Capital Expenditure Proposal for the Executive (Head, Ministries, Departments and Agencies)

Items related to youth Empowerment/ Development		Items related to security	
Provision for Sustainable Development Goals Programmes	5,378,044,922	Police Formations and Command	17,009,090,000
National Job Creation Scheme/Graduate internship	4,000,000,000	National Security Adviser	32,620,000,000
Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment	5,580,000,000	Federal Ministry of Defence	134,577,387,040
Federal Ministry of Health	35,670,000,000	NIA	3,709,146,567
Federal Ministry of Education	37,000,000,000	DSS	7,643,405,446
Federal Ministry of Science and Technology	27,890,000,000		
Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development	4,660,000,000		
Total	120,178,044,922		195,559,029,053

Source: Odunsi W. (2015), 2016 Budget: Breakdown of sums allocated to Presidency,

MDAs, others, Daily Post Newspaper December 26th 2015 (outline)

As seen in the table above, whereas the government allocated ₦32.6 billion naira to the National Security Adviser, it allocated ₦4 billion naira for national job creation scheme and graduate internship and ₦4.6 billion to youth and sports development. In the same vein, ₦134.5 billion naira was allocated to Ministry of Defence as against ₦35.6 billion naira to Ministry of Health, ₦37 billion naira to Ministry of Education and ₦5.5 billion naira to Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The implication of the above pattern of budgetary allocation is that the government is focused on the physical approach to national security, rather than social and human security for which youth empowerment and development is a critical element. Indeed, while it is true that Chapters Two, Three and Four of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) captured a wide ray of elements in the national security basket, which the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report, 1994, described as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security, successive governments in Nigeria had focused mainly on physical aspect of national security to the seeming neglect of the aforementioned aspects. Obviously, if the government had made substantial budgetary provisions to empower the youths, the increasing threats to national security witnessed in the whole country would have been reduced drastically and also decreased the physical deployment of law enforcement agents across the country.

Commenting on youth empowerment and national security in Nigeria, Gonyok (2016) disclosed that although successive governments and non-governmental organizations have initiated policies and programmes in this regard, a lot more still has to be done in the area of youth empowerment to give the youths a bright future to guarantee a safer and secured society.

The author added that “when the youths are empowered with skills, education and jobs, the rate of poverty in our country would be reduced likewise the level of criminality”.

Many observers have argued that the high rate of crime in Nigeria is largely attributable to the poor level of youth empowerment/development and high rate of youth unemployment. This goes to reaffirm the saying that “an idle mind is the devils workshop”. It follows, therefore, that if the youths are gainfully employed and engaged in productive ventures, the level of crime will drop drastically. Considering the seriousness of unemployment in relation to the teeming youth population in the country, the former Minister for Youth Development, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi disclosed that 67 million youths were unemployed as at 2012, when the total national population was about 140 million people (Osakwe, 2013). The youth population increased to about 80 million in 2016 and over 70 percent of this population is unemployed (Gonyok, 2016). This, no doubt, poses serious threat/danger to national security, as about 80 percent of the unemployed youths do not possess a university degree (Abdullahi in Osakwe, 2013). Osakwe (2013), further asserts that there is a strong relationship between youth employment and national security in Nigeria. As Gonyok (2016) puts it:

A situation where youths after several years of acquiring education could not get jobs, necessitate some of the negative vices the country has continued to witness in recent times like armed robberies, cultism, prostitution, drug addiction, hostage taking, gangsterism and lawlessness.

Falusi (2014) noted that formulating and implementing policies and programmes that have worked in addressing unemployment in Nigeria is very difficult, because of the ever increasing unemployment rate, where over 1.8 million youths are entering the labour market every year. For proper youth empowerment to take place and address the security challenges in the country, as well as guarantee entrepreneurship and self-reliance of the citizenry, the state must embark on industrial expansion policy that encourages the use of local raw materials/resources and also substantially address the infrastructural decay in country (Akande, 2016).

At the “Buharimetre” town hall meeting on Nigeria’s economy, Prof. Nuhu Yaqub, a renowned political scientist and former Vice Chancellor, University of Abuja, observed that unemployment, lack of access to education and health care, despair, hunger, poverty, etc; of the youths, to a large extent, account for the threat to national security (AIT, 2017). The educational situation is such that over 12 million school-age children are out of school, he added. This further deepens the woes of the youths in the country. Obviously, the challenge of youth empowerment in Nigeria is exacerbated by the poor and defective education curricula, which make most graduates from our institutions lacking in the required skill sets and qualities for global competitiveness. As earlier noted, this makes many youth unemployable and the end result is that such youths will take to one form of criminal activity or the other. Poorly educated youth would be unable to reason critically and analyze information provided to him/her on religious, social/political, tribal, cultural issues and matters etc; to make rational decision. Most often, such youths will depend on others for decision to act. Osakwe (2013), presenting the views of the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), considers the right type of education as the best conflict prevention strategy available to any society. All these, and many other situations that deprive the youth of the much needed empowerment, serve as threats to national security.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is clear that youth empowerment is central or critically linked to national peace and security. The youths are the most energetic and active members of the entire society, so their contributions and role in national development and security need not be over-emphasized. However, it is evident that successive governments at the federal, state and local governments have not given youth empowerment the proper attention it deserves, hence the high levels of threat to national security in the country from internal sources. The conclusion of this paper is that for the Nigerian state to enjoy or experience genuine peace and security, youth empowerment must be given the right attention it deserves. Youths must engage in works that challenge them to develop functional skills, gain critical awareness, reasoning and participate in opportunities that enable the creation of the required changes in their communities and the nation at large. All these would help encourage activities which are directly concerned with the nation's safety and enhance economic, social and political stability in the country. Without more and above all, a visionary, purpose driven and transformational political leadership coupled with a properly developed education system and highly educated citizenry (especially the youths) constitute the foundation to address the issues and challenges plaguing youth empowerment and national security in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following nuggets (recommendations) are considered apposite:

1. Government, at the various levels (federal, state and local) should give priority to youth empowerment and stop paying lip service to youth empowerment;
2. Youth empowerment programmes, projects and policies must be based on scientific studies and not by rule of thumb. This will enable the schemes to have predetermined and measuring goals as outcomes;
3. There is need to urgently review the educational sector/system to enhance the national and global competitiveness of our youths who are products of the educational system of the country;
4. Youths should be empowerment to the level that they will be able to take responsibilities in their communities and the nation at large; youths should be trained with utilitarian and functional skills and other requirements so as to make them self-employed and employers of labour in the country;
5. There is the need for the reorientation, sustained enlightenment, education and conscientization of the youths on core national policies, especially unity in diversity and cultural integration;
6. Others are National Ethics as provided in S.23 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) (As Amended), namely: discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism. The youth should equally be made to understand and appreciate the duties of the citizens as enshrined in S.24 of the Constitution. Such duties include but are not limited to abide by the Constitution, respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag, National Anthem,

National Pledge and legitimate authorities; and,

7. Local Government is the closest tier of government to the people and is most strategically located to play effective and enduring roles in youth empowerment programmes, given the appropriate political leadership. Thus, youths should be encouraged to actively participate in Local Government administration and development.

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