

Rural-Urban Migration And Urban Youth Unemployment In Nigeria: Implications And Suggestions

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian youth are the most affected by the current phenomena of rural-urban migration in the country. As the youth population in Nigeria urban centers grow, so does the unemployment rate. The paper analysed the situation of unemployed youth in urban Nigeria and also provides some thoughts on improving urban youth employment opportunities. Programmes designed to help include them in the labour market and/or make them entrepreneurs are examined. The paper argued that programmes that are customized to give entrepreneurship training to the youth in cities have the potential to help turn the tide. Entrepreneurship training programmes will afford urban youths the opportunity to be employed and also become employers. Yet, such training programmes tend to receive inadequate support and reach relatively few youth. Integrating youth into urban economies through self-employment is vital to the sustainability of urban areas and the welfare of the urban youth. The paper also suggests the urgent need to address the various facts that lead youth from the rural areas to choose life in urban areas.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, youth, unemployment, urban areas, capacity building, Migration

INTRODUCTION

The complexities of rural-urban migration, rapid urbanization and urban youth unemployment pose a lot of challenges to policy makers in Nigeria. The Nigeria economy is today experiencing rapid labour growth, increased rate of rural-urban migration and incredibly high and rising rate of unemployment. The unemployment situation gets worsened by the fact that urban centers are the chosen destinations for Nigeria labour force. Consequently, there is presently significant population explosion in urban areas in Nigeria. There has been a tremendous expansion of urban areas consequent to the rapid rural-urban migration. Cities in Nigeria have transformed into magnets for those seeking a promise of a better life. With over 200 million people expected to live and work in its cities in the next 40 years, more than triple the size of its current urban population, Nigerian cities (particularly, Lagos,) are no doubt among the fastest growing in the world. Many Nigeria cities are expanding and growing in leaps and bound. Nigeria is now generally acknowledged as a country in the forefront of urbanization. Only China and India surpass this rapid rate of urbanization.

Lagos with a population of 13.1 million people in 2015 (UN: 2014), is projected to have a population of 88.3 million in 2100 (Hoorweg, Daniel and Kevin Pope, 2017).

Nigerian youth are the most affected by the current phenomena of rural-urban migration and the resultant urban transformation in the country. As reported by the National Bureau of Statistics, about half of the Nigeria population of about 167 million people in 2012 (National Population Commission (NPoC), 2013) is made up of youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age. As the youth population in the urban centers grows, so also is the unemployment rate growing. Available statistics show that at least, 1.8 million youth are entering the Nigeria labor market every year (Falusi, 2014).

Although, youth unemployment is also a common feature in rural Nigeria and rapidly growing; the focus of this presentation is however, on the youth in urban Nigeria. This is because the rate of a nation's development can be gauged from its urban centers. The cultural, social, political and economic viability of a nation is commonly seen in her urban centers; which are by nature generative of economic and social development. The urban environment provides a space that can promote development and improve livelihoods, but it can also aggravate despair. Investing in urban youth in Nigeria is no longer a question of human rights and social justice but also about potential economic benefits and increasing citizen security, requiring the government to arrive at policies that will ensure youth are encouraged to become integrated members of the society instead of contributing to the soaring urban crime and poverty rate.

The paper addresses the impact of rural-urban migration on rapid urbanization and urban youth unemployment in Nigeria. The various facts that lead youth from the rural areas to choose life in the urban centers are discussed. The role of entrepreneurship training is assessed against the avalanche of other reforms, policies and institutional frameworks that have been harnessed and delivered to deal with the challenge of urban youth unemployment in Nigeria.

The major drawback of the analysis carried in this work is that all categories of unemployed urban youth are lumped together as if they are homogeneous when in fact, there ought to be distinctions on the basis of education, skill, capabilities, gender, experience, and willingness to learn. The lumping together was however, for ease of analysis. There might be future need to distinguish for example among graduates of primary school and those coming out of secondary schools and/or tertiary institutions.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS:

Rural – urban migration

Migration generally is considered as the movement of people from one geographical region to another. Rural – urban migration specifically refers to the act of moving from rural areas to the cities. (Damachi 1972; Long 1982).

Urban area and Urbanization

An urban area is a heterogeneous settlement with a population of 20,000 or more inhabitants and characterised by predominantly non- agricultural activities and the presence of sizeable modern social infrastructure.(Ezeani,2001). By mid1990,approximately 2.3 billion people lived in urban areas, with 61% of them in less developed regions. According to the projected figure for the year 2025, urban population will be 5.2 billion out of which 77% will live in the less developed regions of the world.

Urbanization refers to the concentration of large percentage of people in a particular area that might be relatively small initially, but later progressed to form cities owing to the provision of social infrastructure that are largely absent in the rural areas.In this work therefore, the term urban refers to towns and cities rather than rural areas of the country.

Entrepreneur

In this work we seek like Schumpeter (1934) to separate the status of the entrepreneur from that of the capitalist that usually bears the burden of loss in a business. The entrepreneur,as an innovator, exploit business opportunities in his environment and utilize resources effectively to develop new technologies, products and services to maximize his profits thereby contributing significantly to society's development through employment generation.They supply new products; make new techniques of production; discover new markets; and develop new sources of raw materials.An entrepreneur is the one who undertakes innovations with finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods by turning “problems” into “opportunities,” and then taking action to identify the solutions to those problems and the customers who will pay for those problems solved(Anyadike et al, 2012). The entrepreneur is a catalyst for economic change and development (Say 1824).

Entrepreneurship training

Entrepreneurship training refers to the acquisition of knowledge that makes it easier to start or run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men.Entrepreneurship training encourages youth to undertake activities, which can make them create employment for themselves, and also become employers of labor.

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND URBAN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

Urbanization is not a recent phenomenon in Nigeria. Some Nigerian towns are as old as some of the ancient cities in Europe. In northern part of Nigeria for example, cities such as Kano, Katsina and Sokoto, participated vigorously in the world-wide commercial activities that characterized the medieval period. Similarly, large settlements emerged in the South-Western part of the country where pre-colonial towns such as Ibadan, Oyo, Iwo, Ogbomosho, Ado-Ekiti and Benin City are located.

The colonial era influenced the growth and pattern of urbanization in many ways, which include the creation of new towns principally among the transportation routes and to ports and mining camps, modernization of the

towns, introduction of modern utilities and changes in the economic base, that led to the emergence of modern commercial-industrial centers outside the traditional town and cities. The recently created states level of government has had the most significant impact bringing along with it poles of political and economic growth (Akpovi, 2012).

To arrive at programmes to deal with urban youth unemployment, it is very important to address some of the disparate reasons why Nigerian youth migrate to urban centers. Hope (1998:355) has argued that “the urban bias in African development policy has resulted in the rural areas lagging behind the urban areas in access to basic services and thereby reinforcing the concentration of poverty in those rural areas.” As a result, he contends that shifting more development resources away from cities towards rural areas “would contain the rural population, diminish their desire to migrate to urban areas, and thereby reduce both the rate and negative consequences of urbanization” (Hope 1998:356).

There is indeed, an urban bias in Nigerian government outlays that must be reversed. Nigeria rural areas have been abandoned. Public utilities and social services are largely unavailable. Where they are available they are inefficient, shoddy and collapsing. Most villages lack functional amenities: schools, housing, hospitals etc. The non-oil sector, particularly agriculture which is the main stay of rural economy has suffered a huge decline. Poverty has deepened and living conditions and material wellbeing have declined steeply. Staying in a rural home under these conditions is practically unthinkable, because it would signal a failure to succeed in life. The consequence of the lack of amenities and functioning institutions in the rural areas in Nigeria is that urban centers became more attractive which resulted to rise in rural-urban migration. A remedy for the current intense urbanization is to intensify investment in rural Nigeria and thus draw people away from cities.

Urban migration, for youth in Nigeria has become a kind of rite of passage into manhood. Migrating to and survival in the city has become a challenge that must be surmounted, regardless of the cost. “It is youths...who travel to distant places to work and see the world; indeed it is expected of them” (Last 1991:10) For many youth in Lagos, Nigeria, for example, success may simply mean the ability to “survive”, to stay afloat in an urban world teeming with competition and danger. Many are neither fully employed nor entirely unemployed. Much of what they do to make ends meet may be illegal but many are water vendors, petty traders (sellers of plastic bags, scrap metal set). Washing cars, polishing shoes and prostitution are also common. There is also the criminal dimension, which may range from simple thieving and vandalism to outright gang violence (kidnapping, ritual killings, trafficking in persons, pipeline vandals etc).

Desperation and a lack of viable options are the major reasons why rural Nigerians contemplate urban migration. Nigeria is suffering from crushing and over-burdened external debt, fragile or unstable democracy, corrupt leadership and unstable political climate characterized by civil unrest and strife. Prior to the 1980s, millions of Nigeria workers migrated for work in the cities, largely in response to the demand for labour in the private sector. Nigeria today lacks vibrant industries to absorb competent graduates. The frequent collapse of oil prices and protracted reform programmes affects the emergence of dynamic private sector needed to provide the

engine for job creation and economic growth. In particular, the country is yet to fully recover from the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) implemented by Nigeria in the 1980s. The SAP led to the closure of many industries. The non-oil sector, particularly agricultural and solid mineral production and exports, suffered a huge decline. Industrial capacity utilisation is less than 30 percent and the country remains very import dependent. For example, the petroleum industry that has dominated Nigeria's external trade since the 1970s, given the technical knowhow required in the industry has failed to provide employment opportunities for the people, and so has not been helpful in solving the problem of urban youth unemployment.

Governments in Nigeria have historically maintained privileged position within the labour market, employing significant segments of the population in the civil service and public-sector enterprises. Unfortunately, government ability to employ is highly limited. Consequently unemployment is on the increase in Nigeria urban centers. Many young people who migrated to the urban centres are rarely engaged by both the government and private establishments thus leaving several youth in the urban areas unemployed.

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND URBAN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS

One of the problems associated with rural-urban migration in Nigeria is the phenomena of urban youth unemployment. The inability of government, at both state and national levels to come up with policies to engage the teeming youth population in Nigeria urban centres has manifested in several social problems.

Policy analysts and academics have long recognised the links between the economic prospects of youth and social unrest, especially violence and political instability. (Hsieh and Pugh, 1993; Perotti, 1996). The mixture of population growth, rapid urbanization and urban youth unemployment is a sure bet for social unrest. Unemployment contributes to poverty and inequalities. Inequality contributes to instability by heightening discontent and fuelling unrest. Expectedly, rapid concentration of unemployed youth in Nigerian cities, raise the specter of discord and unrest. Consequently, assessments of youth unemployment in general and urban youth in particular have always shown concerns to issues of social unrest: violence and instability. In this regard high unemployment, especially among educated youth serves as a strong indicator of the potential for social grievances. As the young struggle to find jobs, they fail to take on the responsibilities of adulthood and to secure their desired goals of employment, marriage and social standing. With the built up of grievances, youth lose faith in the system of governance that has failed their aspirations. It is this combination of social grievance and explosion in urban youth population that provide the real basis for conflict. It is therefore no accident that the country is facing several kinds of social challenges ranging from kidnapping, ritual killings, migration and trafficking in persons, etc.

Youths have been the dominant base of recruitment and participation in Armed Non-State Groups (ANSGs). Nigerian youths, many whom are unemployed or underemployed, poorly educated, school drop outs, or drug addicts, exhibit antisocial behaviour, disaffection and rebelliousness. Prevailing hostile conditions have turned them on society in outrage, defiance, subversion and resistance and created a youth culture with elements of

nihilism, fatalism, deviance, populism, resentment, impunity and violence. (Ikelegbe: 2010). It is not difficult to understand the youth dominance in conflicts and ANSG activities. This is actually a question of social vulnerability. Economically diminished employment opportunities and rising impoverishment create disaffection, alienation and unruliness, which fuel crime, violence and rebellion.

Economic dislocation and political exclusion present fertile ground for identity groups such as large young cohorts seeking change through violent means (Richards 1995). To the youth, participation in conflicts and violence represents an ‘expression of power and search for recognition and identity’, a means of registering dissent and frustration, and of challenging the practices and conduct of state officials and local elites. (Ikelegbe: 2010)

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND URBAN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: PAST POLICIES AND PRESENT SOLUTIONS

A review of the literature shows that policies and institutional frameworks to deal with the challenge of (urban) youth unemployment in Nigeria have been dominated by four principles

- (i) **Employability:** Invest in education and vocational training for young people, and improve the impact of those investments.
- (ii) **Equal Opportunities:** Give young women the same opportunities as young men.
- (iii) **Employment Creation:** Place employment creation at the center of macroeconomic policy.
- (iv) **Entrepreneurship:** make it easier to start or run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men.

Most of the past policies and structures to deal with the challenges of unemployment such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Alleviation Programme ((NAPEP), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), and the Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN), among others, unfortunately, did not concentrate on the promotion of entrepreneurship. Most of them focused on the need to close skills gap so that workers will be more productive and more employable. Unemployment was explained as skills mismatch between the demand and supply of labour. This is what needs to change. There is no doubt that a skills gap exists in Nigeria, yet the impact of skills training to close this gap is much more difficult to assess. The enormous parade of unemployed youth in urban areas, in the face of the myriad of training policies and programs to support skills acquisition: informal education and training, technical education and training and workplace education calls for the need to argue for a new framework to tackle the challenge. To be sure, public policy programmes in Nigeria have had a mixed impact on youth unemployment. While a number of intervention programmes did address critical needs, others failed to address the needs of urban youth as a specific group. The management and administrative oversight of the programmes have been weak and sometimes problematic, perhaps because of multiple authorities (federal, state and local government agencies) managing the programmes. Most of them failed to justify the amount of public money devoted to them.

Expectedly, successive civilian administrations since 1999 including the current leadership have tried to refocus unemployment programmes, discontinuing many of the old programmes, restructuring some of them and creating new ones. This new emphasis on unemployment has made youth the primary constituency of concern. Public policy has shifted to how to encourage youth to undertake entrepreneurship, which can make them create employment for themselves, and also become employers of labor. Entrepreneurship has the highest capacity to trigger self-employment, equal opportunities, employment creation and sustainable development.

Two of the current and most prominent programmes and/or institutional arrangements and agencies that have been established to promote employment among Nigeria youth are the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), and the Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN). (Tunji, 2014).

The SURE-P is more or less a whole range of activities and programmatic schemes, including the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Community Services Scheme (CSS), Vocational Training Scheme (VTS), and Community Services, Women and Youth Empowerment (CSWYE), among others, seeks to provide job opportunities to graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Introduced in February 2012, SURE-P main focus is on the management and investment of federal government savings derived from proceeds accruing from the partial removal of the subsidy on petroleum products. The GIS, scheme of the SURE-P offers unemployed graduates the opportunity to undergo a one-year internship in firms, banks, ministries, government departments and agencies, as well as in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), relevant to beneficiaries' disciplines. The purpose of GIS is to help beneficiaries acquire the appropriate skills and practical knowledge that will make them more suitable for the job market. About 50,000 graduates were selected for the first phase of the scheme out of some 85,000 applicants. The number of participants for the 2014/2015 period of the programmes increased to 100,000. The scheme is expected to provide participants with practical knowledge, enhanced job skills that will improve their chances of employment by the firms that provided them training, and by other private companies, and government institutions.

The YOU-WIN program which in our view is the most successful so far as designed to create job opportunities specifically, again, for graduates of tertiary institutions that elect to go into business as entrepreneurs. Simply put, participants are required to develop and execute their own business ideas that will provide jobs for themselves and other unemployed youths who may or not be graduates. Participants are assisted to establish their own businesses through an initial capital provided by the government. The program is expected to provide new jobs, encourage expansion, specialization and job spinoffs of existing businesses, and enable young entrepreneurs to have a broad professional and business network (NPC, 2013).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventive programmes need to be developed to address some of the disparate reasons why youth migrate to the urban centers. To contain the rural population and diminish their desire to migrate to urban areas will require special policy directed at shifting more development resources away from cities towards rural areas and thereby

reduce both the rate and negative consequences of rapid urbanization such as urban youth unemployment in Nigeria.

However, for those youth that have migrated to the cities a window of opportunity exists at the present moment for policy makers to integrate them into urban economies. Many of the current unemployed youth can be turned into small entrepreneurs in the informal sector through business-skills programmes that may include microenterprise business skills training, training about specific vocations, apprenticeships and mentoring. This strategy though superior to the others has not yielded the desired results because the training is often not accompanied by soft loans, which graduating trainees could use as start-up capital. The primary support that may be required is improving their access to capital. Unfortunately, microcredit programs for young entrepreneurs are currently lacking. When available it would have the added benefit of also constituting an expression of trust in them, a critical concern for many young people in Nigeria who are currently feeling alienated from mainstream society. Once they have made a market assessment and identified a niche where they might have a chance to succeed they should be assisted. The need to address problems such as how youth can be assured to grow and develop without the threat of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse and what can be done to allow greater social and economic mobility opportunities for Nigerian youth have become very important.

To be sure, there is high evidence of rising poverty and inequality among Nigerians, but what appears to matter for the well-being of the youth is not inequality and poverty per se, but the lack of opportunities and access to resources in a system controlled by entrenched elites and interest groups. The leadership has been extremely self-interested and self-seeking, uncommitted, exploitative, corrupt and oppressive. State officials are some of the best paid in the world, and yet loot the treasury (Abutudu, and Aghedo;2015). With a population of about 150 million and vast human and natural resources in arable land, minerals and particularly oil and gas; Nigeria is no doubt a very rich country. Nigeria is about the seventh largest producer of crude oil in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the largest in Africa. It has earned over US\$400 billion from oil exports. Yet, most Nigerians are poor. This has resulted in the country to be regarded variously as a sleeping, crippled, prostrated and dying African Giant (Osaghae, 2002). As oil and gas revenues increased, agriculture and the production of and export of other minerals declined, leaving the country with an economy, in which oil and gas account for more than 95 per cent of export earnings and 80 per cent of federal government revenues. Nigeria now occupies the unenviable position as one of the poorest and most fragile states of the world. Public utilities and social services are inadequate, inefficient and shoddy while public infrastructure is collapsing. The currency has been falling against major world currencies since the late 1980s. Poverty has deepened and living conditions and material wellbeing have declined steeply. The poverty rate has increased from about 46 percent in 1976 to about 64 percent in 2016 (NBoS). Infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world.

As correctly observed by Miller (2003), the first major step in dealing with the challenge of youth population explosion and the resultant youth unemployment in the developing world's cities should be in the direction of a conceptual transformation: Youth need to be considered as asset, not a problem. There is urgent need to transform them from defiant outcasts to becoming contributors to urban economies, cultures, and civil societies.

This can be achieved if we are able to engage them meaningfully. Forced to migrate from their hugely neglected rural abodes, youth in Nigeria cities are generally perceived as carriers of diseases and crime; making them to be unpopular with other members of urban society, including government officials. Though some urban youth may indeed be criminals or ill with disease, it is also true that limited institutional efforts are usually made either to understand and accept urban youth or view them as a kind of untapped cultural and labour resources.

Governments at all levels can play a critical role in facilitating a favourable regulatory environment, improving youth prospects for work in informal economy by encouraging infrastructure investments. The development of infrastructure, particularly electricity, will provide the necessary boost to any meaningful approach towards expanding industrial production space and creating employment for millions of Nigerian youth and other categories of job seekers. There is also an urgent need to review, rethink, and reorient the legal and institutional framework to make it easier to start and run a business in Nigeria. There is a strong case for a review of the many cumbersome regulations that keep young people from starting their own businesses in contemporary Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The poor performance of government in meeting the socio economic needs of citizens in the rural areas has been identified as one of the major reasons behind rural urban migration. Special programmes directed at shifting more development resources away from cities towards rural areas and thereby reduce both the rate and negative consequences of rapid urbanization in Nigeria are therefore required to contain the rural population and diminish their desire to migrate to urban areas.

Urban youth unemployment situation in Nigeria has been aggravated by flawed and inconsistent public policies on employment. Past policies and structures to deal with the challenge of youth unemployment in Nigeria failed to address the needs of urban youth as a specific group. This is what needs to change. Unemployed urban youth should be treated as a special category for the sake of solutions. The promotion of entrepreneurship training for us is the way to go. Many of the current unemployed urban youth can be turned into small entrepreneurs in the informal sector through business-skills programmes that may include microenterprise business skills training, training about specific vocations, apprenticeships and mentoring. Entrepreneurship training programmes will afford urban youths the opportunity to be employed and also become employers.

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