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YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A STRATEGIC PATHWAY TO SUSTAINTABLE NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA THROUGH JOB CREATION

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ABSTRACT

The youth is the strength of any nation and any empowerment to ensure their socioeconomic development is not in vain. However, over the years, the youth of Nigeria have been facing untold hardship and unemployment, a situation which has pushed many youths into illegitimate activities for survival, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, ritualism, drug addiction and trafficking, alcoholism, and prostitution, among others, with a negative impact on the national development. Today, Nigeria is ranked one of the most insecure nations in the world following the escalating growth in poverty and youth unemployment that has snowballed into full insecurity. This paper examines youth empowerment as a strategic pathway to sustainable national security in Nigeria through job creation. As a fact-finding study, primary sources of data (questionnaire and interview) were explored to facilitate data collection from targeted respondents. The findings showed that the inability of the government to prioritise youth empowerment has reduced the impact of some empowerment programmes from achieving the desired results; most youth empowerment programmes are poorly designed to build technical skills for self-sustainability among the youth. Corruption and embezzlement of funds contribute to failures of most youth empowerment programmes, etc. In the recommendations, the study is invincible to recommend that the government should prioritize skill acquisition over cash transfer as an empowerment strategy. Also, the selection processes for most youth empowerment programmes should be made credible to target youth who really need such empowerment rather than politicizing the whole process.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment, Sustainable National Security, Job Creation

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a nation blessed with both human and natural resources. The country's population presently is exceeding 227 million people, with more than 70 percent under

the age 30 years and 42 percent under the age of 15 years (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; IOM UN Migration, 2023). Projections from the population show that the population could double within the next few decades if no adequate population control system is adopted. In other words, the unabated surge in the population has raised significant concerns about national security, bearing in mind the present security situation facing the country.

Today, Nigeria is plunged into security problems such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, internet fraud known as (yahoo yahoo), drug peddling such as cocaine, cannabis, and other forms of narcotics drug addiction, ritualism, among others, which are mainly carried out by the youth. On the other hand, prostitution and some eccentric or unconventional behaviour, such as hookups among women constitute a national menace and threat to national security. About 140 women and girls were killed between 2023 and 2025 from prostitution related cases in Nigeria (BBC, 2025).

Youth unemployment has been linked as one major contributor to the present insecurity in Nigeria. Youth unemployment rates as of 2022 were 33 percent due to limited job opportunities and inadequate skills matching for few available jobs. On the other hand, about 62.7 percent of the youth in the labour force participation are underemployment and underpaid (ILO, 2020; Nigeria Labour Force Report Statistics, 2023). Worried by the increasing youth unemployment and its implications on national security, governments at all levels (federal, state and local governments) have initiated different forms of youth empowerment programmes as ways to alleviate youth unemployment and take them out of activities that would lure them into crimes that endanger national security. For example, between 2000 and to date, many empowerment programmes such as Youth Employment in Agriculture Proogramme (YEAP), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), Nigerian Young Entrepreneurs (YEN), Nigerian Youth Economic Engagement and De-Radicalisation Programme (NIYEEDEP) launched and implemented by different administrations in Nigeria. Despite the implementation of these programmes, youth unemployment is on the increase and insecurity has persisted across all states in Nigeria. Different writers have argued that most of these empowerment programmes are designed without a comprehensive analysis of social and economic background of the people, misappropriation of funds due systemic corruption of the implementing agencies, lack

of collaborative policy-making framework between the provider (government) and the receiver (the youth), poor programmes impact due to lack of genuine interest of the youth to learn or acquire skills, inadequate funding, inadequate follow-up among others (Onah, 2008; Nwafor, 2024; Obah, 2025). In light of the above, this study intends to examine youth empowerment as a pathway to sustainable national security in Nigeria through job creation.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a. To ascertain the nexus between youth empowerment and sustainable national security.

b. To find out if youth empowerment programmes have made positive impacts in job creation and in the reduction of insecurity in Nigeria.

c. To find out if empowerment through skill acquisition is more sustainable than empowerment through cash transfer.

d. To suggest pragmatic measures towards addressing national security challenges through youth empowerment.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.3.1 Understanding the Concept of Youth Empowerment

Though; the concept of youth empowerment is broad, involving diverse definitions from different writers and practitioners. From its generic view, youth empowerment is concerned with all initiatives, projects and programmes targeted towards impacting positive values on the youth, such that would encourage, build technical skills and make them independent in their contributions to societal development. In the view of (Olowolagba, 2025), it implies a shift from dependency to active contribution, particularly in societies grappling with inequalities and systemic exclusion. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2026) sees youth empowerment as an activity that involves individual and collective psychological and social-relational processes. It requires young people to be able to implement and exercise those capacities. It is a time of great vitality and expansion, when decision-making and individual and collective experience have an important impact on the later stages of life. It is also a process that takes place in interaction with the environment in which youth grow. From the above statement, youth empowerment encompasses an integral process of reorientation of the psychological mindset of the youth and shaping their social behaviours in making decisions on things that are beneficial to their career growth.

Repositioning the minds of the youth in taking positive decisions demonstrates a practical step in psychological formation and reformation. In the explicit approach, (Wodons libra 2009) cited in (Ugwu, 2011) maintains that youth empowerment is both a goal and a practice that has intrinsic merit for the youth and the society at large. Youth empowerment according to him is a conventional practice in which the youth are safe, recognized and affirmed as full and vital participants in the life of other shared Unitarian Universalist faith. The conventional practice is based on the following set of principles.

1. Love and trust between youth and adults, between youth and youth and between adults and adults.
2. Mentoring relationships among children, youth and adults, which draw from direct experience and wisdom.
3. The development of youth confidence and self-identity through building community, learning to use one's voice effectively, and realising a more robust expression of themselves.
4. Encouragement for all to grow together in accountability.
5. Youth defining their issues and participating in the decisions that impact the youth community/environment and the larger multi-generation communities/environment.
6. Youth and adults having access to information through direct and honest communication expressed with grace, humility and respect.
7. Trust in the competence of youth and authenticity of their insight.
8. Appreciation of the prophetic wisdom and energy of the youth to be agents of social change, justice and service.
9. The recognition that Youth Ministry is an integral Unitarian Universal ministry and part of a collective past, present and future (Wodons libra 2009).

The advocacy for youth empowerment comes with the recognition that youth in any country is a priority population group, and recognising their potentials, creativity, capacity and innovation to impact positively in the society has attracted both national and global attention for youth empowerment through the initiation of policies and programmes geared towards their development.

Youth Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Youth empowerment programmes are articulated policies and programmes designed with the primary aims of improving the lives and careers of the youth. In Nigeria, as it is in other countries, governments at various levels have initiated and implemented different forms of empowerment programmes for the youth under the following categories:

- Capacity enhancement scheme
- Rural infrastructural development scheme
- Loan management and microcredict scheme
- Rural economic empowerment, and
- Neighbourhood watch

From the above categories, we shall discuss some government programmes on youth empowerment.

Capacity Enhancement Scheme: The capacity enhancement scheme fall under government-funded initiative programmes with a major target to improve and develop skills and abilities of the youth for employment opportunities. In other words, capacity enhancement programmes include educational/vocational training, skills acquisition, leadership development and other opportunities that help youth realize their potential and actively contribute to the national development. According to the Federal Ministry of Youth Development - (2026), the federal government under this present administration has initiated various programmes to empower young Nigerians through capacity enhancement, such as the Build Up Artisan Programme, NIYA StartUp programmes, among others.

Build Up Artisan Initiative/Programme: This is an initiative that targets non-graduates, mainly unskilled young Nigerians, to provide special skills to them and make them valuable within the labour market. On the other hand, the NiYA StartUp is a national innovation initiative that identifies and supports young entrepreneurs building solutions for Nigeria's future. The process of selection is through online registration, after which those selected are given mentorship training in different vocations and enterprise tools to startup. The pilot edition attracted over 14,000 applications, with 17 startups receiving ₦1 million seed funding and business support (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2026).

Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme: Under the rural infrastructural development scheme, attention is given to bridging the gap in infrastructural existence between the urban and rural communities. It involves provisions of rural infrastructural projects that can boost the rural economy and generate better economic and

employment opportunities for youth in the rural communities. For example, (Ugwu, 2011 and Aja, 2020) believe that certain rural infrastructural projects, such as rural feeder roads, rural electrification, motor parks, markets, etc can support youth economic lives by creating employment opportunities.

Loan Management and Micro-credit Scheme: Loan management and micro-credit scheme is another category of youth empowerment programme initiative by the government both previous and present administrations. Some initiatives of the government under this scheme are N-power programme, Youth Entrepreneur Support Programme (YES-P), Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), Nigerian Young Entrepreneurs (YEN), Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), among others, which usually empower participants with loans and other forms of micro-credits to support their businesses or vocations (Onakoya and Fabiyi, 2020). For example, for N-Power trainees in various skills such as tailoring, electrical and welding, furniture, hair dressing, catering services, phone/computer repairing etc., received N30, 000 stipend and non-graduates are on N10,000 stipend for a period of two years (Olawale and Adebayo, 2020).

Rural Economic Empowerment: As part of the government strategic initiative to address issues of youth unemployment in Nigeria, rural economic empowerment programmes were launched such as the Village Economic Development Solution (VEDS) under the general umbrella of NAPEP in 2007 (Ugwu, 2011). In recent times, the federal government introduced additional programmes such as Conditional Cash Transport (CCT), National Cash Transfer Programme, FarmerMoni, TraderMoni, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGFS), Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), etc., as part of the national initiatives to create opportunities for the youth (Ogbulu and Ukeje, 2024).

Report from African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ) 2021 showed the coverage and beneficiary figures of Tradermoni, Marketmoni, Farmermoni in the 36 states across Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory at 2,279,380, which included a good percentage of the youth. Under these programmes some selected youth receive stipends according to the categories of their placement, ranging from N30, 000 to N5,000 (Nweze, 2026; Olawale and Adebayoo, 2020). In Enugu state, for example, the pilot scheme accommodated ten (10) local government areas with 100 families in each local government. For the implementation, the state government budgeted over N144 million

as its monthly expenditure. Out of this sum, a fixed sum of N84million was being saved monthly for the families to be withdrawn in bulk after one year. Every family nominated one person, preferably a youth to learn a trade/vocation and should be given the saved N84,000 for the trade he learnt (NAPEP COPE, 2007) cited in (Ugwu, 2009).

Neighbourhood Watch: Neighbourhood watch security came into existence following the worsening state of insecurity in the country. Most states of states governments launched the neighbourhood watch scheme as a means of improving internal security by training and employing the youth as an empowerment strategy programme. Neighbourhood watch is a system of partnership involving the government and community members on how to achieve a safe and secure neighbourhood. Many writers have applauded the neighbourhood watch impact in proffering solutions at community levels (Daerego, et. al., 2019; Oluwa and Ojo, 2019).

Nexus Between Youth Empowerment and National Security

Stable security is a hallmark of national development in any country. The need for the protection of lives and properties of the citizens, a serene environment for businesses, both local and foreign investors, unabated increase in the number of unemployed, especially among the youth and heightened insecurity situation necessitated the efforts of the Nigerian government to pursue youth empowerment programmes. In recent years, the country has witnessed unprecedented security challenges, which have placed Nigeria on a global list of highly volatile nations. The Agora Policy Report in 2022 revealed that Nigeria is currently battling generalised insecurity. With hardly any of its six geopolitical zones spared from one form of insecurity or the other, Africa's most populous country, erstwhile bulwark of stability in West Africa, is now practically under the gun on all fronts.

Insecurity in Nigeria is mainly caused by many factors such as unemployment, poverty, unstable political atmosphere, ethnicity, and religious intolerance, among others. However, most findings have linked youth involvement to criminality and current insecurity in the country, which are poverty and unemployment (Kalagbor and Deinibitemi, 2018; Ojenike and Jolaosho, 2016; Aja, 2020). In truism, the country's poverty rate is alarming and has reduced the citizens' standard of living to the bare minimum. Most families can hardly afford the necessities of life. The situation has worsened with the high rate of unemployment, with many graduates frustrated and roaming the streets seeking job opportunities. To illustrate the situation, Olakitan (2015) stressed that hope by the Nigerian youth has withered by the day, and there is now a

feeling of frustration about their inability to be employed when he is capable, willing and qualified to work, and as a result, the majority of them are no longer able to meet their primary psychological needs. Faced by the above situation, some youths are left with no hope and are forced to follow the back door to seek survival, such as drug trafficking, armed robbery, cultism, yahoo-yahoo, prostitution, among others.

To ameliorate the situation, ensuring sustainable youth empowerment programmes have been advocated and projected as a strategic solution to national security problems. Youth empowerment intends to bring a holistic evaluation to problems facing the youth and how these problems could be addressed through public policies. Many past governments and the present administration have initiated various youth empowerment programmes to tackle one problem or another facing Nigerian youth. Addressing youth problems, government policies must be integral to accommodate youth educational needs, capacity building, skill acquisition, economic opportunities, and political inclusion as well as ensuring their sustainability. To achieve and make a sustainable national security, Badaru (2024) maintains that 'empowering youths through tailored government policies and programmes can unlock their potentials as agents of positive change'. Many writers have argued that well-implemented youth empowerment programmes can bring the desired development in national security by engaging the youths in more meaningful and productive activities. For instance, (Ugwu, 2011; Abubakar, et al., 2022; Badaru, 2024) are of the views that government programmes on youth empowerent such as Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (Sure-P), N-Power, Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), and National Directorate of Employment (NDE), etc have the capacity to provide economic and technological supports to the youths if the government is truly committed to their implementation success.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study aligned to the social protection theory to discuss the place of youth empowerment as a pathway in achieving national security in Nigeria through employment creation. The social protection security is a theoretical projection that emerged in the twentieth century to advocate general inclusiveness of the youth, vulnerable groups, the unemployed, the deprived and disabilities to the governmental policies and developmental plans (Midgley and Piachand, 2013). The proponents of the social protection theory strongly believe that with emergency of modern societies have

advanced different approaches in tackling social problems facing them. Therefore, the theory is seen as a framework employed to address problems of poverty and vulnerability (Armando, 2013). Similar to Armando's view, some specialists see social protection as any policy action or programme launched by the state in helping those who are poor and vulnerable, such as children, women, the displaced, the unemployed and the sick (Holmes and Slater, 2007). The other approach suggests a wider meaning of social protection, connecting it to not only the reduction of poverty and vulnerability but also emphasising its important role and influence in socio-economic security, social inclusion and cohesion (Bonilla and Gruat, 2003). Its impacts have also been seen as enhancing the economic and productive capacity of poor households to cope with, respond to and withstand natural and human - induced crises (UN, 2017).

1.5 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research approach to empirically survey the opinion of the government officials mainly from the Ministry of Youth Development, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and Ministry of Police Affairs, Federal Capital Territory Abuja as well as the opinion of some individual residents in Kaltungo Local Government, Gombe State. This is because choice of this methodology for this study considers the research topic and some government institutions that need to support our data collection.

Population of the Study

The population of this study covers two sections: namely government employees from the three ministries (Ministry of Youth Development, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and Ministry of Police Affairs) and the individuals mainly residents in Kaltungo Local Government Area of Gombe state who were majorly youth. In other words, the population drew a total of 450 people. For clarity purposes, 100 were selected from the three government ministries while 350 people were selected from Kaltungo Local Government Area Council.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted random sampling technique for easy selection of the respondent. These respondents were chosen based on the knowledge on youth empowerment programmes of the government and their impacts in achieving national security in Nigeria.

Method of Data of Collection

The questionnaire was a major instrument of data collection for this study. The questionnaire was designed to elicit important questions on the importance of youth empowerment, its nexus to national security bearing in mind the high rate of youth unemployment. The questionnaire contained three Likert scale questions (Yes), (No), and (Undecided) which allowed the respondents to give their desired opinion/answer.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The use of tables and pie charts was used to present the data, while simple percentage was adopted in analysing the data. In addition, a descriptive approach of analysis was used to translate the findings in more clear manner.

1.6 FINDINGS

Table 1: Respondents' Assessment on Youth Empowerment and Insecurity in Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Responses			
		Yes	**No**	**Undecided**	**Total**
1.	Do you think that there is a relationship between youth empowerment and national security	450 (100%)	0 (.0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
2.	Have youth empowerment programmes made positive impacts in solving Nigeria's security problems	185 (41.1%)	265 (58.9%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
3.	Do you think that youth empowerment has received adequate government attention	200 (44.4%)	250 (55.6%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
4	Rising youth unemployment in Nigeria has contributed tremendously to the current state of insecurity in Nigeria	355 (78.9%)	95 (21.1%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
5.	Do you think that youth empowerment programmes have solved issue of youth unemployment in Nigeria	176 (39.1%)	274 (60.8%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
6.	Do you think that the youth empowerment programmes have been beneficial to Nigerian youth in terms of economic opportunities	186 (41.3%)	264 (58.7%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
7.	Beneficiaries of youth empowerment programmes are the targeted unemployed youths	205 (45.6%)	245 (54.4%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
8.	Government commitment through funding youth empowerment is satisfactory	190 (42.2%)	260 (57.8%)	0 (0.0%)	100%

9.	Selection processes of participants for empowerment programmes are done on a merit principle	195 (43.3%)	255 (56.7%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
10.	Implementation processes of the youth empowerment programmes are effective	215 (47.8%)	235 (52.2%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
11.	Corruption of implementing agencies affects the success of empowerment programmes	295 (65.6%)	155 (34.4%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
12.	Inadequate funding limit empowerment programmes, implementation activities like provision of micro credit schemes for beneficiaries	280 (62.2%)	170 (37.8%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
13.	Lack of collaborative framework between youth and government affect sustainability of youth empowerment programmes	260 (57.8%)	190 (42.2%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
14.	Integrated approach is adopted in designing youth empowerment programmes	205 (45.6%)	245 (54.4%)	0 (0.0%)	100%
15.	Government should prioritize skill acquisition over cash transfer empowerment	278 (61.8%)	172 (38.2)	0 (0.0%)	100%
16.	Skill acquisition and entrepreneurial education should be mandatory at all levels of school curriculum	305 (67.8)	95 (21.1%)	0 (0.0%)	100%

Source: Fieldwork Data, 2026

1.7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings revealed that youth empowerment is an important strategy to tackle national security problems in Nigeria though the implementation of most youth empowerment programmes have effective to achieve sustainable national security. The fact remains that youth unemployment is increasing despite various youth empowerment programmes implemented by the government at various levels in Nigeria. The implementation of youth empowerment programmes like any other public programmes in Nigeria usually suffers from inadequate funding, corruption and embezzlement of public funds, especially by the implementing agencies, leakage of intended beneficiaries due to hijacking of programmes by politicians and staff of implementing agencies. For example, two former ministers of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs

and Poverty Alleviation, Hajia Farouq Sadiya Umar and Dr Betta Edu for alleged fraud and embezzlement of social intervention funds (Pope, 2024; Salako, 2026). It is therefore difficult to make any sustainable progress to empower the youths when public funds meant for empowerment programmes are diverted to private pockets.

Revisiting our findings from the literature, the percentage rate of youth unemployment by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2023 and 2024 remains at 33 percent which is evidence that not much has been achieved through the introduction of youth empowerment programmes. Introducing youth empowerment programmes without adequate commitment to addressing the root causes of youth unemployment has contributed to the galloping increase in the number in recent years. The projection in youth unemployment is at a galloping increase. Youth unemployment remains a major national problem and not giving adequate attention to it through government policies will further worsen the country's security challenges. Highlighting the potential risks of neglecting youth unemployment, many writers are of the view that Nigeria has become a global security flash point (Murtala and Ibrahim, 2022).

1.8 CONCLUSION

The significance of youth empowerment as a strategic measure in tackling insecurity in Nigeria cannot be quantified. The study is of the view that providing an enabling environment for proper engagement of the young Nigerians is a panacea for national security. With the current rates of criminal activities, armed robbery, fraudsters, cybercrimes (advance fee fraud, yahoo-yahoo), cultism, ritualism, banditry, etc, it is still difficult to accept that government initiatives through youth empowerment programmes have yielded desired results in achieving national security. Although; it is true that government both at federal and state levels have initiated various youth empowerment programmes, most have not been implemented to achieve their targeted objectives due to implementation problems. Most times, the actual funding of many youth empowerment programmes does not match the figures estimated in the pogramme outlines. Again, the implementing bodies usually see such programmes as an avenue to divert public funds, and most beneficiaries are people who are selected based on connection and not actually the youth who need such empowerment.

1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends as follow:

1. The government should initiate more programmes to fight poverty and youth unemployment in the country. Poverty and youth unemployment are two major

problems that fuel the inducement of the youth into criminal and other unlawful activities.

2. The government should prioritize agriculture as an empowerment strategy for the youth. Agricultural programmes such as poultry farming business, fish farming business, piggery, and other agro-based businesses. The adoption of this strategy will empower so many youths both in urban and rural communities.
3. The government should consider the need to introduce skill acquisitions and entrepreneurship as a mandatory school curriculum to inculcate business ideas as well as acquire skills that would help them earn a living.
4. Providing micro-credits for youths who have acquired skills and entrepreneurial training to start businesses. The provision of micro-credits should be prioritized over cash transfer.
5. Building a strong collaborative framework to ensure adequate monitoring of programme implementation activities to effectively track progress and challenges.

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