

Youth Unemployment and Violent Crime in the Niger Delta Region: Policy Implications and Prospects for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This study investigates youth unemployment and violent crime in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Unemployed youths in the region have not only been neglected and left unattended to but have been faced with high rate of unemployment and violent crime. The youth population of any nation represents the driving force for development in such a nation. They are also the most volatile when their energies are misdirected to wrong endeavours. Available data show that youth unemployment is rampant in the Niger Delta Region and this has contributed immensely to their involvement in violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery, military and other social vices. The paper concludes that increasing rural-urban migration, poorly designed school curricula, proliferation of educational institutions, population growth and the declining manufacturing sector are some of the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Violent crimes found among the unemployed and jobless youths have contributed greatly to slowing down the prospects for sustainable development of the Niger Delta Region. The paper recommends among others that government economic and educational policies should be reviewed to reflect the incorporation of entrepreneurship and skills acquisition in the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria as a way of addressing youth unemployment and violent crime.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment, Violent Crime, Sustainable Development, Niger Delta

Introduction

Nigeria like every other society across the globe faces her own share of the social, political, economic and cultural challenges which has in no small measure affected the well-being of the populace. One of such problems bedeviling the country include youth unemployment and the rising wave of violent crimes, which also have serious implications for sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Niger Delta is one of the regions that make up Nigeria and therefore cannot be exempted from the numerous challenges and problems of youth unemployment facing the well-being of the populace. The youth population of any nation represents the driving force for development (Adebayo, 2013). But for the youths to become useful resources, they must be gainfully employed. The youths are possibly and essentially the utmost asset for a country's development (United Nations, 2002). This implies that any society or country that plays with the welfare and development of its youths could be said to be playing with its future and survival (Alanana, 2003).

Youths are regarded as the future leaders and are usually acknowledged as the bedrock on which the society is anchored. Unfortunately, in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general, the youths have not only been ignored and left to their fate, but have been inflicted with pains by so many ills among which are unemployment and violent crimes. Infact, to say that the Nigerian youths have no future today, is an understatement, as there is no serious social programmes or economic policies to cater for the employment needs of the youths.

Unemployment breeds social alienation and frustration among youths which can become a catalyst for criminality and violence (Surajo & Karim, 2016). The current situation of Nigerian youths is attributed to the failure of the past and present government policies which are directed towards rackling the problems of youths (Ahonsi-Yakubu 2009). Unemployment rate in Nigeria has continued to be on the increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available. According to Neill (2022) unemployment rate in Nigeria saw no significant changes in 2021 in comparison to the previous year 2020 which remained at around 9.71%. Nevertheless, 2021 still represents a peak in the unemployment rate in Nigeria with 9.79%. Moreover, chronic youth unemployment is evident everywhere in Nigeria including the Niger Delta region. Corroborating this, Omilana(2020) posits that unemployment rate in the Niger Delta region grew from 32% in the third quarter of 2018 to 37% in 2020. We have on yearly basis thousands of graduates churned out from our universities without corresponding jobs for majority of them. Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers who ordinarily would have been gainfully employed in some enterprises (Okafor, 2011).

The population of the youths in Nigeria is about 46.4 million especially between the age groups of 15-39 years (NPC, 2009). As the youth population is growing government is expected to be providing jobs and other incentives to the teeming unemployed youths and graduates but unfortunately, the unemployment situation in the country, especially youth unemployment has been on the increase.

Moreover, violent crime on the is perceived to be a threatening ill to the fabric of society or as a symptom of a breakdown of the social order. Crime is dysfunctional as it threatens the

stability of society and therefore constitute a social problem that requires a collective effort to find a solution to it. According to Onoge (1988) in Adebayo (2013) crime undermines the social fabric by eroding the sense of safety and security. In the Nigerian media, both the print and electronic is awash daily with news of crimes committed and the seeming helplessness of the law enforcement agents like the police, the civil defence corps in curbing the disturbing trend which has become more worrisome today. Insecurity and crime have been deeply noted in the political history of the country particularly in recent time, which has emerged as a key concept in Nigeria's struggle for good governance and sustainable democracy.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following set objectives:

- i. to investigate the strength of relationship between youth unemployment and violent crime in the Niger Delta Region.
- ii. to examine government policy implications on youth unemployment rate in the Niger Delta Region.
- iii. to assess the causes of youth unemployment and the challenges of sustainable development in the Niger Delta Region.
- iv. to proffer solutions to youth unemployment in the Niger Delta.

To fulfill the study objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- v. Does youth unemployment contribute significantly to violent crimes in the Niger Delta Region?
- vi. To what extent does government policy impact negatively on the rate of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta Region?
- vii. What are the challenges of youth unemployment for sustainable development in the Niger Delta Region?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study in the null form.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between youth unemployment and violent crime in the Niger Delta Region.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between government policy and the rate of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta Region.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Review

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as the number of all economically active population who are without work but are available for and seeking work, including people who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998) as cited in Onwuka, Ugwu & Chukwuma (2015). But for Fajana (2009), unemployment refers to a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment. This is one of the macro-economic problems that every responsive and sensitive government is expected to be observing and regulating. Furthermore, the higher the unemployment rate in an economy, the higher the poverty level and associated welfare challenges.

According to Awogbenle & Iwuamadi (2010) and Okafor (2011) showed that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing over 60% of the total population of the country. The statistics showed that 64 million are unemployed, while 1.6 million are under-employed. Corroborating this, Adebayo (2013) posit that between 1990-2000 data on youth unemployment showed that the largest groups of the unemployed is the secondary school leavers, also 40% of the unemployment rate is among the urban youth aged between 20-24 and 31% of the rate is among those aged 15-19. Two third of the urban unemployed according to the statistics range from 14-24 years.

However, five types of unemployment have been identified by Alao (2005) and Fajana (2000). These include seasonal, residual, structural and open unemployment. Seasonal unemployment is that type experienced as a result of seasonal variation in the activities of particular industries caused by the nature of such industries. Seasonal oriented industries are bound to give rise to seasonal unemployment. The residual unemployment is caused by personal factors such as old age, physical or mental disability, poor work attitudes and inadequate training. Frictional unemployment is caused by industrial friction in which job may exist but the workers may not possess the needed skill for the job or because they are not aware of the existence of the jobs. Such workers include the farmers who use hoes and machetes and are displaced by the introduction of modern equipment. Structural unemployment is that type of unemployment which occurs when there is a change in the industry's structure or the economic activities of the country. This happens due to the deficiency of capital resources in relation to demand. The last is the open unemployment and is the type where there are categories of young men and women who are roaming the streets looking for jobs, but there is no job for them to do and they refused to do the job they see because of certain reasons best known to them (Alao, 2005; Fajana, 2000).

Youth unemployment and Violent Crime

Unemployment is believed to account for most of the social crimes perpetrated by youths in Nigeria today (Onwuka, Ugwu & Chukwuma, 2015). Also attributed to the incidence of unemployment is the accelerated level of armed robbery, rape, prostitution and all facets of violent crime (Eze, 2012). The examination of most of the apprehended criminals show that a large number of youths who engage in the criminal activities are those who are unemployed, unemployment can be seen as one of the core causes of the rising social disorder and insecurity in Nigeria.

It is also noted that the rise in violent crime such as robbery, kidnapping, thuggery, terrorism committed by the youth is a sign of "gap" in the society (Ajaegbu, 2012). The society already has expectation for individuals and also established means of achieving them. But when the means are limited, people are forced to achieve the goals through illegal means to fulfill societal expectations. The unemployed youths are readily available tools for recruitment into gangs including thuggery and other violent gangs in Nigeria.

However, the desperation as a result of unemployment can drive many people into living outside the law in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction for the apparent neglect of their very existence. These challenges of youth unemployment have posed greater threats to sustainable development in Nigeria. Umanah & Willie (2022) posit

that sustainable development advocates design development that meet the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of unborn generations meeting their needs. This explains the multiplier effects of youth unemployment and violent crime on meeting the socio-economic and political needs of this generation and generations yet unborn. The negative consequences of unemployment include poverty, psychological problems, and all manner of criminal behaviours causing general insecurity of life and business across the nation. (Onwuka, Ugwu & Chukwuma, 2015). The issue of youth unemployment in Nigeria is compounded by the phenomena of graduate unemployment and an informal sector harbouring substantial portion of under-employed. Graduate with connections find it easier to secure jobs after graduation, whereas, those without connections spend years unemployed and worst still, youths in employment are underpaid (Giwa, 2008).

Table 1: Unemployment in Nigeria from 2006-2010

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

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2010)

From the table above, it shows that 2006 recorded 35% rate of unemployment, then 2007 recorded 45.7% rate, 2008 had 34.9% rate of unemployment, 2009 recorded 34.5% rate of unemployment while the rate of unemployment stood at 34.3% in 2010.

Causes of Youths Unemployment

There are several factors that promote youth unemployment in Nigeria. Such factors include but not limited to the following:

Increasing Rural-Urban Migration

The youths are seen to move from the rural to urban areas in Nigeria in search of employment opportunities at an alarming proportion. These youths are fleeing from poverty in the rural areas. This can be explained in the light of the push-pull factors. The push factors could be the pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural villages and the existence of serious underemployment existing from seasonal cycle of climate and the lack of infrastructural facilities in the rural areas which make the living standard in the rural unattractive (Okafor, 2011). According to Sarr (2000) as cited in Adebayo (2013) youth migrants in Africa are three times more than other migrants in number.

Poorly designed school curricula

Some scholars have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigerian graduate is unemployable, because of lack of necessary skills needed by the employers of labour for a formal sector employment. The situation is traceable to the poorly designed course content of most universities in Nigeria which lack entrepreneurial contents. This content will ensure that graduates become job creators rather than job seekers after graduation. According to Akere & Oladunjoye (2011), as cited in Onwuka, Ugwu & Chukwuma (2015), many graduates in Nigeria lack skills to facilitate self-employment. It is the perception of policy makers and the youth themselves that employment means a job with salary and working for someone else and it has influenced continuously, the educational institutions in Nigeria which provide skills and training (Adebayo, 2013).

Proliferation of Educational Institutions in Nigeria

The deregulation of education in Nigeria has led to government's encouragement of the opening of private schools and universities. However, the aggressive creation of more private and public funded institutions has not been matched with a commensurate job absorption strategy for the many graduates from these educational institutions. Tertiary institutions have grown at multiple progression whereas jobs and employers have grown in arithmetical progression (Ajufu, 2013). This has led to the increase in the supply of educated man-powers which outstrips the corresponding demand for them (Adebayo, 2013) and as it were contributed greatly to the problem of youth unemployment in the country. According to Musari (2009) about 4.5 million youths enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for sustainability.

Population Growth

Nigeria continues to experience high rate of population growth. The high rate of population growth has provided an overwhelming increase in the youth population, thereby also increasing the size of the working age population. This factor has also caused youth unemployment in Nigeria.

The Declining Manufacturing Sector

Scholars have argued that the lack of capacity of the manufacturing sector to absorb youths into its workforce has been hindered by the continuous decline in the sector. Over 837 factories have collapsed and close shops in 2009 (Adebayo, 2013). According to Okafor (2011), about half of the remaining operating firms have been classified as ailing "and the situation poses a serious threat to survival of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria in the years to come.

In a survey carried out as part of the membership operational audit by Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN) in January 2010, showed that 837 figure represents the cumulative aggregate of firms that have shutdown operations in 2009 across Nigeria. The country is divided into five manufacturing enclaves which include the Lagos, Northern, Southeast, South West, and South South areas. The northern enclave comprises Kano and Katsina manufacturing axis, the South East areas has Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Abia states, whereas, the South South enclave has Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, while the Lagos area covers Ikeja, Apapa, Ikorodu and other industrial divisions in the state. We have the South West covering Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kogi and Kwara States.

The current youth unemployment condition in Nigeria according to Surajo & Karim (2016) originated from the country's economic development policies and performance since Nigeria's independence in 1960. This observation explains the source of the youth unemployment problem in the country. The trend continued with subsequent policies of government. The pattern of unemployment and the status of unemployment shifted very significantly between 1960 and 2000. In the 1960's and 1980's the unemployed were majorly secondary school leavers who constituted the nation's educated people as the university graduates were sure of getting jobs on graduation. From 1990's to 2000's the problem of unemployment expanded to include those in tertiary level of education and became the most important problem plaguing the nation. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 eventually degenerated the problem into a free for all situation as it began to affect even those who had jobs, and the rural and urban informal sectors, hence

triggering retrenchment in both the public and private sectors (Ikebude, 2008) as cited in Surajo & Karim (2016).

The Nigerian government has put in place several policies to curb the growing rate of unemployment in the country. The government in 1995 invited the International Labour Organization (ILO) to assist in the formulation of comprehensive national employment policy that would aim at accelerating employment generation to reduce the high rate of unemployment and ultimately attain full productive and freely chosen employment (Surajo & Karim, 2016).

The government of Mohammadu Buhari under the current democratic dispensation has also brought several social investment schemes like the NPower which is a job programme for unemployed graduates which was said to have received 26.418 billion being the single largest spending item out of the four social investment programmes under 2016 Appropriation. Other social investment programmes are the Government Enterprises Empowerment Programme (GEEP) and the School Feeding Programme (SFP) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

However, despite all these efforts by governments unemployment and underemployment are major challenges to national development with consequences manifesting in the economic welfare, social stability and human dignity. The population of Nigeria has continued to increase from 15.9 million people in 1911 to 163 million people in 2010 as shown below:

Table II: Population of Nigeria from 1911-2010

Year	Population
1911	15.9 million
1921	18.7 million
1931	20.0 million
1941	30.3 million
1952	45.2 million
1962	55.7 million
1963	55.7 million
1973	79.8 million
1991	88.9 million
2006	140 million
2010	163 million

Source: Nigeria Poverty Profile, 2010 adapted from Surajo & Karim (2016)

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories which are relevant to this study. The deprivation theory of Ted Gur propounded in 1970 is adopted by this study as its theoretical anchorage. The reason being that this theory explains why the youth engage in violent crime like armed robbery, kidnapping, riots, and rebellion. It examines the psychological causes involving frustration and aggression as the primary source of human capacity and desire for violence. Though, frustration is neither necessary nor enough reason for violence, but when frustration is combined with aggressiveness the drive for violence becomes greater. Relative Deprivation shows the discrepancy between what the youth think they deserve and what they actually

think they can get. Gurr (1970) asserts that if there is a significant discrepancy between what people think they deserve and what they think they will get, there is that likelihood of rebellion. In this case the unemployed youths feel that their expectations cannot be met if the current rate of youth unemployment is maintained. Therefore, frustration produces aggressiveness at the individual, group and societal levels.

Deprivation theory is quite apt in explaining the relationship between violent crime and youth unemployment in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. A nation that produces thousands of graduates yearly without corresponding job opportunities may be creating a fertile ground for feelings of frustration among the unemployed youth graduates in the society. As frustration prolongs the youth begin to have a feeling of deprivation thereby increasing the possibility of resorting to illegitimate activities in order to actualize their expectation in the society.

Research Methods

The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research approach. The population of study involved residents and indigenes of the five (5) randomly selected states of the Niger Delta Region which includes; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Rivers out of the nine states that make up the Niger Delta Region.

Table III: The Five Niger Delta States and their Population

State	Population
Akwa Ibom	3,920,208
Bayelsa	1,703,358
Cross River	2,888,966
Delta	4,098,391
Rivers	5,125,420
Total	17,796,343

Source: National Population Commission (NPC), 2006

The entire Niger Delta population according to National Population Commission (2006) is put at 31,224,587. Participants in the study were basically civil servants, the unemployed graduates, youth council members and entrepreneurs. Using the population figure of the select states put at 17,796,343, the sample size was determined through the Taro Yemane (1964) statistical formula. Thus, the formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size,

N = Population,

e = level of significance (or margin of tolerance error) 0.05,

I = constant value

$$n = \frac{17,796,343}{1+17,796,343 \times (0.05)^2}$$
$$= 399.99 \text{ or } 400$$

From the population, 400 respondents were randomly selected and they represented civil servants, 90 public servants, 70 members of your council, 110 unemployed graduates, 80 entrepreneurs 50 including males and females.

Method of Data Collection

The study used both primary and secondary methods of data analysis. Primary data comprises of data obtained by administering questionnaires. The secondary data were sourced from publications from academic and professional journals, books, and internet sources. The questionnaire was structured with closed ended questions.

Data Analysis Method

The data used for the study was analysed using simple percentages in order to determine the relationship between variables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table IV: Percentage of Research Participants

Respondent Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Received	370	92.5
Not Received	30	7.5
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The above table shows that three hundred and seventy (370) out of four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire administered on the respondents were received and thirty (30) copies were not returned. The percentage responses can be represented as 92.5% and 7.5% respectively. It is assumed that the objective of the questionnaire administration can be achieved with 92.5% response rate.

Table V: Determining if youth unemployment has a significant relationship with violent crime in the Niger Delta Region.

Option	Responses		Total	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Yes	180	80	260	70.3
No	70	40	110	29.7
Total	250	120	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The table above shows that 260 respondents or 70.3% said there is a significant relationship between youth unemployment and violent crime in the Niger Delta Region and 110 respondents or 29.7% said that there is no significant relationship between youth unemployment and crime in the Niger Delta Region.

This result is an affirmation of existing literature (Onwuka, Ugwu & Chkuwuma, 2015) who assert that unemployment accounts for most of the social crimes perpetrated by youth in the Nigeria society, Eze (2012) also posits that the accelerating level of prostitution, armed robbery, rape and all facets of violence can largely be attributed to incidence of unemployment.

Table VI: Ascertaining if there is a significant relationship between government policy and the rate of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta Region

Option	Responses		Total	Percentage (%)
	Male	Female		
Yes	200	80	280	76
No	50	40	90	24
Total	250	120	370	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table above explains that two hundred and eighty (280) respondents or 76% said that there is a significant relationship between government policy and the rate of youth unemployment in the Niger Delta Region, while ninety (90) respondents or 24% said that there is no significant relationship between government policy and the rate of youth employment in the Niger Delta Region. This result gives support to existing literature (Ahonsi-Yakubu, 2001) who posits that the current situation of Nigerian youths is as a result of the failure of the past and present government policies which aimed at tackling the problems of the youth. Surajo & Karim (2016) observed that the current youth unemployment condition in Nigeria originated in the country's economic development policies and performance.

Conclusion

The study attempts to point out that youth unemployment and its relationship with violent crime are part of the major social problems affecting sustainable growth and development of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Many youths in the area cannot meet their basic needs of life because they have not been gainfully employed and therefore become frustrated and aggressive. Major causes of youth unemployment include increasing rural-urban migration, poorly designed school curricular, proliferation of educational institutions, population growth and the declining manufacturing sector. Government economic and educational policies since independence have had serious implications on youth unemployment rate in the Niger Delta Region, hindering the prospects for sustainable development.

Recommendations

To curb youth unemployment and its relationship with attendant violent crimes in the Niger Delta region, the following recommendations are fostered:

Government should as a matter of expediency create an enabling economic environment for industries to thrive as a situation where companies that are supposed to employ are closing down for reason of insecurity and harsh economic condition is not good for the country.

Government's economic and educational policies should be reviewed to reflect the incorporation of entrepreneurship and skill acquisition into the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions.

Mechanisms should be put in place for financial institutions to grant soft loans to intending youth entrepreneurs to start small scale businesses to sustain them and prevent them from involving in criminal activities.

Government should embark on mass sensitization of the public on the dangers of population explosion and the adverse effect on national development and this will bring about population control.

The agricultural sector of our national economy should be re-invented through massive investment by government so as to encourage the youths to channel their energies toward that direction and shun criminal tendencies.

The youths themselves should be creative and learn different vocational skills and by doing so they will become providers of jobs rather than job seekers. From the study, the reduction of youth unemployment will translate into a reduction in violent crimes and an engendered sustainable national development.

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