

## **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STABILITY OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Democracy as a system of government has been restored in Nigeria for over a decade now, and for it to be stabilized and entrenched, all the stakeholders must be involved. Youths represent a very important stakeholder in any society. They are not only the future of Nigeria, but also a major stakeholder and useful resource in the nation building. For the youths to become useful resource in the Nigerian project, they must be gainful employed. However, available data show that youth unemployment is very prevalent in Nigeria with far reaching implications for stability of democracy. This paper identifies the main causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Anchoring the explanation of youth unemployment in Nigeria on neo-liberalism that created economic and social dislocations, the paper argues that many anti-social activities such political thuggery, militancy, restiveness and other social vices evident among the unemployed and joblessness youths are real dangers to the stability of democracy in Nigeria. The paper concludes that addressing the problem of youth unemployment must involve all the stakeholders. This is a major step towards stabilizing and entrenching democracy in Nigeria.

**KEYWORDS:** Democracy; Neo-Liberalism; Nigeria, Unemployment; Youths

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, democracy has been restored for over a decades ago, which so much hopes and expectations by the people. For instance, it is assumed that with democracy, people would be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the overall objective of fast tracking development and improving the general living conditions of the masses. This expectation is not misplaced considering that Nigeria has abundant human and natural resources. However, the reality on ground has shown that this expectation is yet to be realized. Hence, the growing sense of despondency among the masses. In other countries in North African like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where dictators have held sway for over three decades, people have revolted against the system. Though these countries can say to be less democratic than Nigeria, yet the living condition of the people in real economic terms is better (Abati, 2011a; Abati, 2011b; Adejumbi, 2011) Furthermore, the unemployment rates in these countries are more or less like that of Nigeria (Ojenagbo, 2011). The major concern here therefore is, given the kind of violent agitations that pervaded the above mentioned countries with relatively better living conditions than

Nigeria, what is the guaranteed that large army of unemployed youths will not engage in activities that would undermine the stability of democracy in Nigeria?

The problem of chronic youth unemployment is very evident in Nigeria. Every year thousands of graduates are turn out for whom there are no jobs. Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers who ordinarily would have found gainful employment in some enterprise. The self employed are in quandary as scant infrastructure makes it impossible for them to ply their trade. The large number of youths who are unemployment is capable of undermining democratic practice as they constitute a serious threat if engaged by the political class for clandestine activities (Adepegba, 2011; Ibrahim, 2011; Lartey, 2011; Olatunji & Abioye, 2011).

Although youth unemployment is often considered as a social problem, but it is also an industrial sociology issue especially as it relates to the supply of, and the demand for labor. Therefore, industrial sociology is not only concerned with what goes on in an industrial setting, but also how the external socio-economic and political environment shape and reshape behavior and conduct of workers both within and outside their places of work on one hand, and on the other, how industries evaluate and react to external environment as either to continue to operate in such an environment or to relocate to a more favorable one. For instance, no matter the relative economic benefits or gains workers may be enjoying or are making in their places of work, if the labor market is saturated thus giving rise to youth unemployment, this will make socio-economic and political environment hostile, unstable, insecure, unsafe and rancorous, and such benefits or gains enjoyed by the workers will be eroded. Thus this author, being an industrial sociologist, is interested in examining the implications of youth unemployment for stability of democracy in Nigeria where workers live and where industries operate.

### **THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

Different definitions of democracy have been advanced by several scholars. In its simplest term, democracy is a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. The people decide who will represent them in parliament, and who will head the government at the national and local levels. They do so by choosing between competing parties in regular, free and fair elections. Government is based on the consent of the governed. In a democracy, the people are sovereign, that is, they are the highest form of political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily. Laws and policies require majority support in parliament, but the rights of minorities are protected in various ways. The people are free to criticize their elected leaders and representatives, and to observe how they conduct the business of government. Elected representatives at the national and local levels are expected to listen to the people and respond to their needs and suggestions (Gilley, 2009; Plattner, 2010).

In democracy, elections have to occur at regular intervals, as prescribed by law. Those in power cannot extend their terms in office without asking for the consent of the people again in an election. For elections to be free, fair, transparent and credible, they have to be conducted by a neutral, fair, and independent body that treats all political

parties and candidates equally. All parties and candidates must have the right to campaign freely, to present their manifestoes to the voters both directly and through the mass media. Voters must be able to vote in secret, free of intimidation and violence. Independent observers should be able to observe the voting and the vote counting to ensure that the process is free of corruption, intimidation, and fraud. Also, there needs to be some impartial and independent tribunal to resolve any disputes about the election results. In democracy, any country can hold an election, but for an election to be free and fair requires a lot of organization, preparation, and training of political parties, electoral officials, and civil society organizations that monitor the process (Rose & Munro, 2003; Lipset, 2011).

Moreover, in democracy, people have an obligation to become informed about public issues, to watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. Voting in elections is another important civic duty of all citizens. But to vote wisely, each citizen should listen to the views of the different parties and candidates, and then make his or her own decision on whom to support. Participation can also involve campaigning for a political party or candidate, standing as a candidate for political office, debating public issues, reaching out to community members, petitioning the government, and even engaging peaceful protests (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Ogundiya, 2010).

Furthermore, another vital form of participation comes through active membership in independent, non-governmental organizations, called “civil society.” These organizations may represent a variety of interests and beliefs including but not limited to farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious bodies, women, students, human rights activists. It is important that women participate fully both in politics and in civil society. Most civil society organizations educate people about their democratic rights and responsibilities, and how to improve their political skills, represent their common interests, and involve them in political life. In a democracy, participation in civic groups is voluntary. Nobody is forced to join an organization against his or her will. Also, political parties are vital organizations in a democracy, and democracy is stronger when citizens become active members of political parties. However, nobody is pressured or threatened to join or support any political party. Therefore people are free to choose which party to support. Democracy depends largely on people’s participation. But participation must be peaceful, respectful of the law, and tolerant of the different views of other groups and individuals (Ake, 1996; Toyo, 1994; Ukpong, 2011).

One of the cardinal elements of democracy is the rule of law. By extension therefore, democracy is a system of rule by laws, not by individuals. In a democracy, the rule of law protects the rights of citizens, maintains order, and limits the power of government. Everybody is equal under the law. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of their race, religion, ethnic group, or gender. No one may be arrested, imprisoned, or exiled arbitrarily. If a person is detained, the person has the right to know the charges against him or her, and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to the law. Anyone charged with a crime has the right to a fair, speedy, and public trial by an impartial court. No one may be prosecuted except by a law established in advance. No one is above the law,

not even elected or appointed State officials. The law is fairly, impartially, and consistently enforced, by courts that are independent of the other branches of government. Torture and cruel and inhumane treatment are forbidden. The rule of law places limits on the power of government. No government official is expected to violate these limits. No State official either appointed or elected, or even political party can tell a judge how to decide a case. Office holders cannot use their power to enrich themselves. Independent courts or established bodies can punish corrupt State officials, no matter who is guilty (Diamond, 2008; Fukuyama, 2000).

In advanced countries like the United States, Britain, France and Canada, where democracy has worked, citizens must not only participate and exercise their rights, they must also observe certain principles and rules of democratic conduct. People must respect the law and reject violence. Nothing ever justifies using violence against political opponents (Abati, 2011c). Every citizen respects the rights of his or her fellow citizens, and their dignity as human beings. No one is expected to denounce a political opponent as evil and illegitimate, just because an opponent is canvassing different views. People question the decisions of the government, but not reject the government's authority. Every group has the right to practice its culture and to have some control over its own affairs, but each group accepts that it is a part of a democratic state. When people express their opinions, they should also listen to the views of other people, even people who may hold contrary view. Hence, everyone has a right to be heard (Fukuyama, 2000; Ukpogon, 2011).

Above all, democracy requires compromise. Groups with different interests and opinions must be willing to sit down with one another and negotiate. In a democracy, one group does not always win everything it wants. Different combinations of groups win on different issues. Over time, everyone wins something. If one group is always excluded and fails to be heard, it may turn against democracy in anger and frustration. Everyone who is willing to participate peacefully and respect the rights of others should have some say in the way the country is governed (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Ukpogon, 2011). The above discourse is the ideal type that may be found in a well developed and stabilized liberal democracy. However, the reality may not encompass all the issues discussed above

As regards the concept of unemployment, there seems to be a consensus on the definition of unemployment. Simply put, unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs. The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as numbers of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998:63). Also, for Adebayo (1999) this exists when members of the labor force wish to work but cannot get jobs.

Youth unemployment, therefore, could be described as the conglomerate of youths with diverse background, willing and able to work, but cannot find any. When the supply of labor outstrips the demand for labor, it causes joblessness and unemployment. Given the lack of sufficient employment opportunities in the formal sector, young people may

be compelled to engage in casual work and other unorthodox livelihood sources, thus leading to underemployment (Echebiri, 2005; Gibb & George, 1990; Onah, 2001).

Various forms of unemployment have been identified and elaborated upon in the literature. These include seasonal, frictional, cyclical, and structural unemployment (Adebayo, 1999; Damachi, 2001; Hollister & Goldstein, 1994; Robert, 1993; Todaro, 1992). Unemployment is measured among people in the labor force (Obadan & Odusola, 2001; National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The labor force of a country as defined by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2009) is a set of people or citizens of a country who are willing and are able to make available at any given point in time their efforts for gainful employment. The unemployed are the individuals with no work, but are looking for work at the time of any study.

Unemployment is a global trend, but it occurs mostly in developing countries of the world, with attendant social, economic, political, and psychological consequences. Thus, massive youth unemployment in any country is an indication of far more complex problems. The ILO (2007) report showed that the proportions of world unemployment are steadily increasing and that the number of those without jobs remained at an all time high of more than 195 million, or 6.3 percent, in 2007. For instance, during that period (2007), the Middle East and North Africa were the regions with the highest unemployment rate in the world at 12.2 percent, followed by sub-Saharan Africa at nearly 10 percent. East Asia's unemployment rate of 3.6 percent remained the lowest. The report affirmed that population growth, especially in South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, was putting a lot of pressure on job creation. The report concluded that half of all workers in the world - some 1.4 billion working poor - lived in families that survived on less than US \$2 a day per person. These people worked in the vast informal sector - from farms to fishing, from agriculture to urban alleyways - without benefits, social security, or healthcare. Some 550 million working poor lived on US \$1 or less per day. In absolute terms, it is estimated that there are about 122 million youths on the African continent (Echebiri, 2005; Chigunta, 2002). Therefore, projections of the population growth into the 21st century indicated that the proportion of youths, in relation to the overall population, will continue to grow. Todaro (1992) pointed out that the high rate of unemployment is a result of continuous transfer of economic activities, especially the youths from rural to urban areas.

### **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION**

In Nigeria, accurate unemployment rates are difficult to access. However, according to Oyebade (2003), Nigeria's unemployment can be grouped into two categories: first, the older unemployed who lost their jobs through retrenchment, redundancy, or bankruptcy; and second, the younger unemployed, most of whom have never been employed.

For Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), the statistics from the Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics showed that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60% of the total population of the country. Also, 64 million of them are unemployed, while 1.6 million are under-employed. The 1990-2000 data on youth

unemployment showed that the largest group of the unemployed is the secondary school graduates. Also, 40% of the unemployment rate is among urban youth aged 20 - 24 and 31% of the rate is among those aged 15-19. Also, two-thirds of the urban unemployed are ranged from 15-24 years old. Moreover, the educated unemployed tended to be young males with few dependents. There are relatively few secondary school graduates and the lowered job expectations of primary-school graduates. The authors, however, admitted that there is no consistent trend of unemployment rates in Nigeria. An increase in one or two years is sometimes followed by a decline in the subsequent years.

According to National Bureau of Statistics (2009:238; 2010:2), the national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2000 and 2009 showed that the number of unemployed persons constituted 31.1% in 2000; 13.6% in 2001; 12.6% in 2002; 14.8% in 2003; 13.4% in 2004; 11.9% in 2005; 13.7% in 2006; 14.6% in 2007; 14.9% in 2008 and 19.7% in 2009.

Specifically as regards the age group, educational group and sex, data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics (2010:3) further showed that as at March 2009 in Nigeria, for persons between ages 15 and 24 years, 41.6% were unemployed. For persons between 25 and 44 years, 17% were unemployed. Also, those with primary education, 14.8% were unemployed and for those with only secondary education, 23.8% were unemployed. Furthermore, for those with post secondary education, 21.3% were unemployed. For those who never attended school and those with below primary education, 21.0% and 22.3% were unemployed respectively. As regards sex, data showed that males constituted 17.0% while females constituted 23.3%.

It is important to note that the figures above may not have captured in totality the youth unemployment situation in Nigeria, however, they are pointing to the fact that the phenomenon is a very critical issue with far-reaching implications for stability of democracy.

### **CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

In the study of unemployment in Nigeria, Adebayo (1999), Alanana (2003), Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010), Ayinde (2008), Echebiri (2005) and Morphy (2008) have identified the main causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The first is the rapidly growing urban labor force arising from rural urban migration. Rural-urban migration is usually explained in terms of push-pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate. The factors are further exacerbated in Nigeria by the lack of infrastructural facilities, which makes the rural life unattractive. Youths move to urban areas with the probability of securing lucrative employment in the industries. In addition to this, there is the concentration of social amenities in the urban centers. This meant that the rural areas are neglected in the allocation of social and economic opportunities. According to Sarr (2000), youth migrants in Africa are three times more in number than other migrants. The author argued that the urbanization rate of the youth was 32 percent in 1990, compared to less than 25 percent for the non-youth population. He estimated that by the end of year

2010, over 50 percent of the youths in Africa will be residing in urban areas where job opportunities are limited to a few modern sectors and establishments.

The second is the rapid population growth. Going by the 2006 census in Nigeria, the nation's population was put at 140,431,790 and projections for the future indicate that the population could be over 180 million by the year 2020, given the annual growth rate of 3.2 percent (National Population Commission & ICF Macro, 2009:3). With this population, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa. It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labor force, which is far outstripping the supply of jobs. The accelerated growth of population on Nigeria's unemployment problem is multifaceted. It affects the supply side through a high and rapid increase in the labor force relative to the absorptive capacity of the economy.

The third is the outdated school curricula and lack of employable skills. Some scholars and commentators have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigeria graduate is not employable and, therefore, does not possess the skills needed by the employers of labor for a formal employment. Often, this is attributed to the Nigeria's education system, with its liberal bias. The course contents of most tertiary education in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial contents that would have enabled graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers.

The fourth is the rapid expansion of the educational system which directly leads to increase in the supply of educated manpower above the corresponding demand for them. This contributes to the problem of the youth unemployment in Nigeria. For instance, according to Manning and Junankar (1998), the total number of graduates turned out by the higher institutions in Nigeria, which were 73,339 in 1986/1987 which rose to 131,016 in 1996/1997. Presently, with over 97 universities in Nigeria (both federal, state, and private) and the increasing demand for higher education there has been the problem of suitable employment for the varieties of graduates are turned out by these higher institutions every year. Ordinarily, this should not have been a problem, but the reality is that the Nigerian economy is too weak to absorb this large number of graduates (Utomi, 2011).

Further, there is no vibrant manufacturing sector which has the capacity to absorb unemployed youths in Nigeria. There are over 800 collapsed industries in Nigeria and over 37 factories have closed shops in 2009. About half of the remaining operating firms have been classified as "ailing," a situation that poses a great threat to the survival of manufacturing in the country in the next few years. According to a survey carried out as part of its membership operational audit in January 2010 by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), the 834 figure represents the cumulative aggregate of firms that have shut down their operations in 2009 across the country. The MAN survey usually covers five manufacturing enclaves, into which the country is divided, in terms of manufacturing activities. These include the Lagos, northern, southeast, south-south and southwest areas. The report of the survey showed that in 2009, a total number of 176 firms became terminally sick and collapsed in the northern area, comprising the Kano and Kaduna states manufacturing axis. In the southeast area, which is comprised of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, and Abia states, a total number of 178 companies closed shop during the period. While in the south-south area, which

consisted of Rivers, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom states, 46 companies shut down operations before December 2009. According to the survey, the southwest area, which is comprised of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kogi, and Kwara states, lost 225 companies during the year. It said that the Lagos area, covering Ikeja, Apapa, Ikorodu, and other industrial divisions in the state, followed closely with 214 manufacturing firms closing shop before the end of 2009 (Maiyak, 2010; Okafor, 2008; Oparah, 2011; Usman, 2011).

In a nutshell, the fact is that the Nigeria investment climate is not investor friendly. Besides, high and multiple levies and taxations being paid by these companies, energy crises have combined to make the cost of doing business in Nigeria to be very exorbitant. When the industries and factories closed shops or relocated to a friendlier economic environment, workers were laid off and prospects of recruiting new ones were dashed. All these exacerbated the crisis of youth unemployment in the labor market (Adeloye, 2010; Onifade, 2011).

Discourse on the causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria will be incomplete without discussing the issue of the massive corruption is perpetuated, and still being perpetuated, by successive military and civilian administrations. Corruption, which has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria, has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks, while some incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats and administrators in the public enterprises and parastatals have liquidated these organizations (Okafor, 2007a). The point being made here is that the collaboration of the political elites, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from the oil sale in the last 50 years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youths in various sectors of the economy. The ruling (political) class failed because they replaced the vision, policy, and strategy, which should be the thrust of every leadership with transaction (contract award and other mundane money-related activities). Each successive government took turns to prey on the nation's wealth, by using public power, resources, good will, utilities, instrument of abuse, and personal gains (Okafor, 2005).

The most recent rating of Nigeria, by the Transparency International (TI), on corruption computed a scale of 0-10 that showed that corruption has yet to abate. Nigeria was ranked 134 out of 178 countries that were assessed. They were viewed against previous ratings for the year 2008 and 2009, in which Nigeria was ranked 121st out of 180 countries and 130th out of 180, respectively; the country has declined alarmingly on the corruption scale. In the African Bracket, Botswana led with a score of 5.8, while the crisis-ridden Somalia was at the bottom with a score of 1.1. Countries like Ghana, Liberia, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin Republic, Mali, and Niger led Nigeria. No Africa country made the top 20 list of countries with low corruption in the survey. This is despite the fact that Nigeria has streams of institutional mechanisms for combating corruption, namely, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related offenses) Commission (ICPC), and the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) (The Guardian, 2010; Ijioma, 2010).

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STABILITY OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

This paper has adopted *neo-liberalism* as its theoretical base to explain the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Neo-liberalism refers to the desire to intensify and expand the market by increasing the number, frequency, repeatability, and formalization of the transactions. The ultimate (unreachable) goal of neo-liberalism is a universe where every action of every being is a market transaction, conducted in competition with every other being and influencing every other transaction. Neo-liberalism seeks to transfer part of the control of the economy from the public to the private sector, under the belief that it will produce a more efficient government and improve the economic indicators of the nation. The neo-liberal theory sees the nation primarily as a business firm. The nation-firm is selling itself as an investment location, rather than simply selling export goods. A neo-liberal government pursues policies designed to make the nation more attractive as an investment location. These policies are generally considered to be pro-business.

The main features of neo-liberalism include: the rule of the market; cutting public expenditure for social services; deregulation; privatization; and eliminating the concept of "the public good" or "community". Neo-liberalism assumes that higher economic freedom has a strong correlation with higher living standards; higher economic freedom leads to increased investment, technology transfer, innovation, and responsiveness to consumer demand (Martinez & Gracia, 2000). Neo-liberalism believes staunchly on the freedom of individual contract. The freedom of contract is the right to choose one's contracting parties and to trade or work with them on any terms and conditions one sees fit. The contracts permit individuals to create their own enforceable legal rules, adapted to their unique situations. Parties decide whether contracts are profitable or fair, but once a contract is made, they are obliged to fulfill its terms, even if they are going to sustain losses by doing so. Through making binding promises, people are free to pursue their own interests. For neo-liberalism, it is a moral duty of human beings to arrange their lives to maximize their advantages in the labor market (Harvey, 2005).

Through the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies, which actually started with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, Nigeria mortgaged her future in the hands of the International Financial institutions to the extent that by the end of the 1980s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ordered borrowers countries to downsize their public sector and civil services (ILO, 2005). Consequent upon this, Nigeria reduced its workforce by 40% in less than two years. Particularly those that are hit hard as a result of the neo-liberal policies are the women and youths, who often have jobs that are vulnerable to economic shocks. As a last resort, the Nigerian informal economy flourished with jobs, such as hawkers, traders, repairers; these jobs were less likely to grow the economy and accounted for almost all the new jobs accessible to the young people (ILO, 2005). Commenting on the Nigerian situation in the era of globalized neo-liberalism, Mazrui (2001) argued that on the attainment of independence, the economic marginalization of Nigeria was partly due to the fact that colonization had created elites of consumption, rather than elites of investment. However, in the period of globalized neo-liberalism, typical Nigerian elites are more adept at making money than at creating jobs and wealth. Money could be made in a

network of capital transfer without generating genuine growth. The Nigerian elites have learned the technique of circulating money without a talent for creating new wealth. Neo-liberalism had generated urbanization without industrialization; has fostered western consumption pattern without western productive techniques; has cultivated among Nigerians western tastes without western skills; and has initiated secularization without the scientific spirit. Thus, a stage has been set for a weak economy and massive unemployment of the youths (Mazrui, 2001; Utomi, 2011). Within this context, Adejumobi (2011) remarked:

“Graduate unemployment in Nigeria is over 50%, poverty rate - of less than \$2 per day is over 70%, basic infrastructures have completely collapsed - electricity, water, good roads, etc, there is general insecurity, and an oil exporting country imports refined petroleum for its local use so that oil buccaneers can live off the sweat of the people. Nigeria runs perhaps the most expensive civilian government in the world - the National Assembly consumes significant percentage of the national budget; some past leaders, who were virtually broke before luck smiled on them with state power now own private jets that they travel in; and some others who have little or no knowledge about the oil industry now own oil wells, which they sell for raw cash. The picture is that of a jungle.”

Following from the theoretical discourse above, it is evident that the youth unemployment in Nigeria will have a lot of implications for stability of democracy in Nigeria. It is misplaced to argue that one of the greatest threats to democratic stability and sustenance in Nigeria is the large army of unemployed youths. Bubbling with energy and innovations, these youths could be used for destabilizing influence in Nigeria by the politicians who may wish to capture power at all cost or unleash mayhem to their political opponents. The presence of large army of unemployed youths in Nigeria is a clear case of failure of leadership to utilize abundant human and natural resources in the country to create jobs that will engage the youths in productive and meaningful economic activities (Adejumobi, 2011). The massive social and economic dislocations occasioned by the pursuit of neo-liberal policies by government over the years and the unrestrained and conspicuous amassing and displaying of wealth by the politicians and other public office holders in the midst of widespread abject poverty in the present dispensation have not helped matters either (Nwonwu, 2010). All these have serious implications for stability of democracy in Nigeria in variety of ways.

First is that unemployed youths have become political thugs and blood-thirsty hoodlums at the disposal of the politicians. The point here is that when large of youths are unemployed their quest to survive may make them to become willing tools in the hands of maverick and disgruntled politicians who may want to use them for anti-social and clandestine political activities. The utilization of the unemployed youths to perpetuate ethno-religious clashes in the present democratic dispensation are well documented (Ibrahim, 2006; Okafor, 2007b). However, the utilization and manipulation of mostly unemployed and ignorant youths to perpetuate post elections violence during 2011 presidential election adjudged to be free, fair, transparent and credible by both local and international observers that claimed over five hundred lives in especially states like Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi, Katsina and Gombe (including over

nine youth corps members on national assignment) and displaced over fifteen thousand persons in the Northern parts of Nigeria is a clear indication of an attempt to use this category of youths to bring democracy to a brink and destabilize the nation (Adepegba, 2011; Ibrahim, 2011; Lartey, 2011; Olatunji & Abioye, 2011). It also shows that some politicians are not ready to utilize legal provisions to seek redress of perceived injustice in the electoral system. The implication here is that no democracy has thrived and stabilized in the atmosphere of lawlessness, political thuggery, intimidations, killings, maiming and unabated destruction of lives and property like the type witnessed between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 in some states in Northern Nigeria when it was evident that a particular presidential candidate was losing or had lost election. This kind of violence amounts to infringing on the rights of other citizens to freely make their choice. This can lead to neither the growth of democracy nor its stability (Abati, 2011c; Obeakemhe, 2011).

Besides using the unemployed youths for political thuggery, they have been used as local militants to attack, bomb, vandalize and destroy oil pipelines, lives and property in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Gilbert, 2010; Ojatorotu, 2010). For more than a decade, this category of youths have constituted the larger population of the militants in the areas who have been terrorizing and kidnapping both the expatriate and local oil workers and demanding hefty ransoms (Epelle, 2010). With this, all kinds of kidnapping including those of the political opponents and /or their relatives have spread to parts of Nigeria thus creating a general state of insecurity. Besides the legitimate agitations and demands of the youths in the Niger Delta as exemplified in militancy, some politicians have caught in on this opportunity to sponsor the kidnappings of their political opponents. It is pertinent to note that no responsible or sane investor would want to invest in a country characterized by insecurity, confusion and uncertainty. Besides the reluctance of new investors to come in to invest in insecure and unstable environment, the existing investors may wish relocating their investments to safe haven. All these on the run long will exacerbate the crisis of youth unemployment and further reduce the economic fortunes of Nigeria which democracy needs to stabilize and survive.

It is on record that Nigeria is the six largest producer and exporter of crude oil. Therefore disrupting oil exploration and production by the unemployed youths who felt aggrieved by the pollution and destruction their environment and general underdevelopment in their area will reduce the foreign exchange earnings which Nigeria as a nation most depends on to finance development projects and to stabilize democracy (Akinbobola, 2010). For Nigerian democracy to survive and stabilize there should be stable economy in order to meet the yearning and aspirations of the masses. This can only be achieved or realized in the atmosphere of stable economy (Ogungbemi, 2010).

Furthermore, another implication of youth unemployment is the resurgence of urban urchins popularly called “area boys” in Nigeria parlance. This set of unemployed youths are mostly found in urban towns and cities across Nigeria. These area boys are a threat to democracy as they are idle hands and minds often recruited by the politicians to harass and intimidate political opponents. These youths could be manipulated by the politicians for a mere token. These groups besides being used for political thuggery, they can also be used for action, behavior and activities that

could undermine electoral process such as ballot box stuffing, ballot box snatching, killing and maiming of political opponents. All these actions are all part of clandestine political activities which are inimical to the growth, sustenance and stability of democracy in Nigeria.

In addition, there has been increase in the involvement of youths in various anti-social activities and offences as a result of unemployment. Such offences include; arson, assault, murder, abduction, stealing, armed robbery, sex offences, unlawful possession of arms and so on. Figures supplied by the Nigerian Prisons Service (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009:248) actually confirmed this. For instance, persons admitted into the prisons by age group between 2004 and 2008 showed that as regards the youths between the ages 16 and 20 years, 31,700 youths were admitted in 2004. Others include; 40,170 youths (in 2005); 19, 122 (in 2006); 16,236 (in 2007); and 25, 317 (in 2008). As regards the youths between ages 21 and 25 years, 39,045 youth were admitted in 2004; 34, 600 (in 2005); 28,705 (in 2006); 57,736 (in 2007) and 28, 049 (in 2008). Also, for persons between ages 25 and 50 years, 63,100 persons were admitted in 2004; 65, 140 (in 2005); 75,491 (in 2006); 80, 134 (in 2007) and 73, 071 (in 2008). All these figures show that the Nigerian political environment is not safe with large of number youths are into anti-social and criminal activities largely as a result of unemployment. This has the potential to destabilize and truncate the democratic process in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

From all indications, youth unemployment is a menace in Nigeria and constitutes a real danger and a threat to Nigeria's democracy. This is because these youth could be manipulated to undermine the stability of Nigeria's democracy at any point in time. Against this background, there is the need by government at all levels and other stakeholders to embark on massive job creation to take these youths off the streets. Granted, there may not be a quick fix to this problem, but all the stakeholders must as a matter of fact do something urgently. Some of the suggested ways of tackling this problem may include but not limited the following;

First, government must play its constitutional role by creating enabling socio-economic and political environment including the provision of infrastructure to make industrial climate investment friendly. This will encourage investors to invest and thereby create jobs in order to absorb the unemployed youths.

Second, it is said that Nigerian employers often complain that graduates from the Nigerian tertiary institutions are unemployable. Although this may not have presented adequately the true picture of a typical Nigerian graduate from a tertiary institution in Nigeria, the fact still remains that there is the need to reinvigorate and overhaul the entire educational system at all levels to create room for entrepreneurial education so the Nigerian tertiary education graduates will become job creators rather than job seekers. Hence, teachers at all levels of education must be properly rewarded and motivated in this regard.

Third, government must not relent in the crusade against all forms of corruption in public and private lives in Nigeria. As noted earlier, most scholars and institutions have identified Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. This posture does not give Nigeria a good image. In fact, scholars often wondered why a country as rich as Nigeria with enormous human and natural resources has remained perpetually poor and underdeveloped. The main factor that has been identified to have contributed largely to this is massive looting of public treasury at all levels of government by the past and present rulers. Therefore government must support the various anti-corruption agencies and bodies to carry out their mandates successfully so that funds meant to development projects are utilized appropriately. This will lead to job creation that will absorb most unemployed youths in Nigeria.

Finally, democracy is a journey not a destination. For Nigeria, it is a learning process. As a matter of fact it may not be a perfect system of government, but it has several advantages over other systems. People including the Nigerian youths must feel the positive impact of democracy in their lives. The situation whereby only a few privileged persons in positions of authority benefit from this system of government and the expense of the impoverished masses portends a great and real danger that may incur the wrath of the unemployed youths in Nigeria if not addressed urgently.

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