



## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND NATIONAL SECURITY: A STUDY OF BENUE STATE 1999–2013

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### Cite this article:

Haa Joy Mbavefeter (2023), Youth Unemployment and National Security: A Study of Benue State 1999–2013. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 6(2), 124-141. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-BFVOMG7E

### Manuscript History

Received: 25 Feb 2023

Accepted: 2 April 2023

Published: 24 April 2023

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**ABSTRACT:** *This research was set out to examine the relationship between youth unemployment and national security particularly in Benue State from 1999 to 2013. Data for the purpose of the research task were obtained from secondary sources such as the use of textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, magazines, publications and statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Nigeria. The research identifies the major causes, effects and consequences of youth unemployment on the security and safety of Benue State, as well as the socio-economic development environment in the state. The findings reveal that security in Benue State is largely attributable to the alarming rate of unemployment. The study recommends that youth improvement programmes, investment in education, infrastructural building, creating socio-economic and political environment, and check on rural-urban migration and ammunition control are pivotal to checking youth restiveness and insecurity in the state.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Unemployment, Crime and National Security.



## INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has been a major challenge in most developing countries especially Nigeria. This has made national security a major issue for the government and has prompted a huge allocation of the national budget to combating security challenges. As a developing country, Nigeria faces her own share of social, political, economic and cultural problems which have serious security implications. Such problems bedeviling the country include youth unemployment and the rising wave of crime, which have serious implications for national development. Unemployment rate in Nigeria has continued to be on the increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available in the country. The later part of the 1980s witnessed increased job opportunities available for graduates in abundance. Ex-corps members were placed in jobs at various ministries and parastatals as well as in private sectors, according to their discipline across the country, with many starting off with car loans and housing allowances. Getting employed meant immediate change in the status of youths. As employed persons, their standard of living improved as they could feed, clothe themselves and afford shelter over their heads. Some earned enough to extend support to their family members. Significantly, this generated feelings of worth and responsibility in graduates of that time. However, from 1987 upwards, job opportunities became scarce due to the increased number of university graduates as well as the shrink in the industrial sector. Thousands of graduates could not get placed in jobs after their service year (NYSC Inspector Manual, 1995). The problem of job scarcity and consequent graduate youth unemployment was due to the poor performance of the National economy, a direct consequence of global economic recession (NYSC Inspector Manual, 1998). This was compounded by the lack of employable skills among many of the graduate youths as a result of mismatch of skills with the demands in the labor market. This made unemployment creep in gradually.

Unemployment is a very dangerous phenomenon in an industrialized economic system. Across the globe, the recent financial and economic crisis has led to soaring youth unemployment. However, before the crisis, the job situation, including youth unemployment, was already a major concern in most of the countries. In Africa for instance, youth unemployment is exacerbated by the additional challenges of a youth population which is considerably higher than other regions, weak national markets and persistently high level of poverty (ILO, 2012). Numerous studies argue that youth unemployment and underemployment are threats to the social, economic and political stability of nations (Urdal, 2006).

The importance of youths as veritable tools for the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized, nor can any society neglect her youths in the scheme of things in her quest for national socio-economic and political development. According to statistics from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the youth unemployment rate is over 50 percent; about 64 million Nigerian youth are unemployed. The scourge of unemployment has deprived many Nigerian youths access to contributing their quota to national development. The result of the rising youth unemployment situation in the country has provided shrinking options to job seekers as those who find work are forced to be less selective about the type of job they settle for, including part-time work and temporary contracts, because they are in desperate need for any income. Thirty to forty million unemployed youths constitute a veritable army of the hungry and disillusioned and an anger that can undermine the stability, security and peace of any nation, if left unattended to.



National security entails the ability of Nigeria to advance her interests and objectives, to control instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, and improve the welfare and quality of life of every citizen (Obasanjo, 1999). National security has also been defined as the “aggregate of the security interest of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities and institutions which inhabits the territory of Nigeria.” In his interpretation of the aforesaid definition, Mohammed (2006) concludes that “national security from any perspective is about safeguarding the interest of citizenry and providing the type of atmosphere that is free from threats that could inhibit the pursuit of the good of all.” It is about the process and measures required to preserve law and order. Unemployment can be seen as one of the core causes of the rising level of social disorder and insecurity permeating the entire country and continent.

In Benue State, the rate of unemployment is devastating despite the natural resources endowed in the state. This is one driving force behind the prevailing crime rate in the state. The youths are educated in diverse areas of discipline but have no jobs that would have kept them busy and not thinking of criminal activities such as cultism, armed robbery, rigging election, thuggery, etc. In the quest for survival, the youths engage themselves in alcoholism, smoking and drugs. According to Morphy R. (2008), a high level of unemployment is one of the critical socio-economic problems facing Benue State. While the labour force grows with an increasing proportion of youths, employment growth is inadequate to absorb labour market entrants. As a result, the youths are affected more by unemployment. Unemployment in Benue State is defined as the proportion of the labour force that was available for work but did not get to engage themselves in jobs. With a high portion of unemployed youths in Benue State, crime will become the order of the day as youths are left jobless. Crime is said to be any unlawful activities that an individual engages himself towards the destruction of properties and distortion of public peace. Benue’s poverty incidence is high at 36 percent, which means that more than one out of every three persons is poor. With the high rate of poverty brought about as a result of unemployment, the Bureau of Statistic ranks Benue as the 8th poorest state in Nigeria, with some of the highest unemployment rate.

In this study therefore, the researcher examines youth unemployment and its implications on national security with particular focus on Benue State from 1999–2013.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of youth unemployment is evident in Nigeria. Every year, thousands of graduates are produced but there are no jobs for the majority of them. Nigerian streets are littered with hawkers who originally would have found gainful employment in some enterprises or would have demonstrated their skills and resourcefulness if there were an enabling environment and reliable management structures on ground. For Nigeria, the challenge of unemployment facing the youths at the moment constitutes a very serious concern for both national security and socio-economic development of the country (The Guardian, 2011). A number of states, including Benue State, experience a rise in youth unemployment. Unemployment situation in Benue State is typical of the capitalist system in Nigeria. Youth unemployment has been the bane in society in recent times. Unemployment is a problem that has continued to threaten the security of Benue State, ruin the state and its social fabrics and negatively affect the state’s image as a whole. And also, another problem is that there is a high tendency for the unemployed to be involved in crime.



It is for this reason that the researcher was motivated to undertake this study in order to investigate youth unemployment and national security in Benue State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- a) To examine those major factors that cause youth unemployment.
- b) To determine the relationship between unemployment and security.
- c) To identify the consequence of youth unemployment on national security, particularly in Benue State.
- d) To examine the efforts by the government, both federal and state, as well as organizations in employment generation.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Data for this study were basically derived from secondary sources like text books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines and publications on the web, and statistical data were gathered from the National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.) in Nigeria to analyze the link between youth unemployment and national security with the study of Benue State (1999–2013). The study is purely historical and the analysis statistically descriptive.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on youth unemployment and national security in Benue state from 1999–2013. This study also focuses on the causes of unemployment, effects of unemployment on national security and also the efforts on reducing unemployment in Benue State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **The Concept of Youth Unemployment**

Both active and inactive populations characterize every economy. The economically active ones are referred to as the population willing and able to work, and include those actively engaged in the production of goods and services and those who are unemployed. This category of people comprises mostly the young people in the society. The youths are a very important ingredient in the development process of a people, as it constitutes a greater part of the society, and represents diverse interests in polity. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Its involvement in political and economic development is not only a necessity, but also a central necessity for successful national development (Ayinde, 2008). Youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can produce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in the society is positively correlated with the development of their country. The service of the youths is desired wherever hard work is needed. This is because the youths are capable of staying long on a job without breaking down but it is not the



same with the elderly. Most of those used in suicide bombing by terrorist groups in the country also fall within this age. Moreover, most of those involved in the Niger-Delta militancy are of these age groups. The fact is that, if these youths have alternative means of livelihood or are gainfully employed in the economy, most of them will not take part in these criminal activities.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as members of the economically active population who are without work but are available for and seeking work, including people who have lost jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998).

According to Fajana (2000), unemployment refers to the situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment. It is one of the macro-economic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate.

Okafor (2011) defines unemployment as the number of people in the population who are willing and offer themselves for employment but could not be employed because of lack of vacancies for them. Unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs.

Youth unemployment could be described as the conglomerate of youths with diverse backgrounds, willing and able to work, but which cannot find any. When the supply of labour outstrips the demand for labour, 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 (Onah, 2001). According to statistics from the Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60 percent of the total population of the country. Sixty-four 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. There is also a 40 percent unemployment rate among urban youths aged 20–24 and 31 percent rate among those aged 15–19; two-third of the urban unemployed range from 15–24 years old. Moreover, the educated unemployed tend to be young males with few dependents. There are relatively few secondary school graduates and the lowered job expectations of primary school graduates. 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 the National Bureau of Statistics (2009), the labour force of a country is a set of people or citizens who are either unemployed or gainfully employed, while the unemployed are the individuals with no work at the time of any study. According to Adebayo (1999), unemployment exists when the labour force wishes to work but cannot get a job.

The most appropriate definition of unemployment is given by International Labour Organization (ILO) (2007), which defines the unemployed as a percentage of the economically active population who are without work, but are available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998). All legal definitions of unemployment and in particular, the international definition given by labour statistics assumes that the unemployed individual is actively looking for work, except in the case of someone who has been laid off where references to that state might seem superfluous.



## **The Relationship between Youth Unemployment and Crime**

Crime has been one of the major problems of civilization from the beginning, and its magnitude has increased over time. In the political arena, public policy regarding crime prevention has long been a hotly debated issue. Considering the enormous efforts put towards extinguishing crime, it is amazing how little the crime industry has changed in contemporary history. Economists traditionally use the employment rate as an indicator of the amount of employment opportunities available to individuals. Therefore, a high unemployment rate suggests that there are fewer employment opportunities available and thus, the opportunity cost of choosing crime over legitimate work is low (Becker, 1968).

Crime rate in Benue State has assumed a worrisome dimension. In the light of the worsening crime situation, and the ineffectiveness of the crime control apparatuses, Benue can be deemed to have a crime problem. Sadly, there are reports of crimes committed mostly by the youths at virtually every corner of the state. Criminality has become an integral part of the state's daily life.

The frustration and desperation that daily torments the unemployed creates a fertile ground for crime to thrive. In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Benue, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increased militancy, violent crimes, restiveness and political instability (Ajufu, 2013). The scariest undertone of the state's socio-economic underachievement, by far, is the steady rise in youth crime, nurtured in the climate of increasing national income and the simultaneous failure of employment-generation and poverty alleviation programmes. Armed insurgencies and wanton destruction of lives and property by Boko Haram in the Northern part of the country are now competing for space in international headlines. The season for discontent has special ramifications for a state with unemployed millions, and the net effect has been a tragic precipitation of violent crimes: assault, burglary, extortion, kidnapping, political thuggery, etc. Other highlights of Benue's prolific crime syndicates are economic fraud, usually in the form of innovative internet schemes, money laundering and racketeering.

Furthermore, Awogbenle, A.C. and Iwuamde, K.C. (2010) contended that unemployment has been identified as the major cause of social vices like armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more. What holds true for Benue and most other states of equivalent human development indicators is the fact that crime is often a means of survival.

Consequently, youth unemployment poses a great threat to the nation's stability and development, and if not checked on time, it may lead to disastrous consequences for the nation. Desperation can drive the unemployed youths to live outside the law in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence. Crime as a result of unemployment has adverse effects on the economy. It increases the cost of doing business for the private sector and providing public services. Resources that would have otherwise been invested in increasing output and funding education, health and other welfare programmes are diverted to crime control and prevention.

A situation where the fund allocated to security alone is equal to funds allocated to education, health and critical infrastructure combined in a fiscal year, as is the case with Nigeria, is



detrimental to national development. The development of a society largely depends on the rate of crime. If the crime rate is high, it could scare away or discourage investors.

Youth unemployment and its relationship with attended crime are part of major social problems affecting the growth and development of the state. Many Benue people cannot meet the basic needs of life because they have no jobs.

### **Impact of Unemployment on Security in Benue State**

The quest for the impact of unemployment on crime in Benue State metropolis has been a preoccupation of both academic and policy makers. It has been discovered that the observed situation of unemployment on crime is more serious than what official statistics wants us to believe. The causes of unemployment in Nigeria include poor infrastructure, insecurity, non-diversification of the economy and poor educational system that does not readily produce employable graduates. In the words of Adebayo (1999), unemployment leads to psychological problems of frustration, depression, hostility and criminal behaviors. He tries to view peoples' ways of reasoning regarding their standards of living. As the cost of living is high and the standard of living is low, for the sake of survival, people engage in crimes due to unemployment. In corroborating this opinion, Musari (2009) stressed that youth unemployment primarily encourages the development of street youths and *area boys* who were denied legitimate means of livelihood to grow up in a culture that encourages criminal behaviors. Crime resulting from unemployment can be limited if youths of Benue State are given jobs or an avenue is created for them to have something to do. This will increase the revenue of the state and increase the economic growth. According to Sarr (2000), unemployed youths survive by engaging in various activities such as petty trading, casual work, borrowing, stealing, pick pocketing, prostitution, touting and other illegal activities. Some have become drunkards and others are on drugs such as cocaine and Indian-hemp. Bennel (200), in line with Sarr (2000), argued that urban society is becoming increasingly criminalized, especially with the proliferation of youth gangs. Several studies, including Igbuzor (2011), have shown that the majority of prison inmates are youths aged 30 years and below who have no jobs. Also, delinquency, crime and drug abuse are on the increase among youths of Benue State as a result of unemployment.

### **Consequences of Youth Unemployment on National Security**

Youth unemployment is only a system of a long and enduring problem in respect to national security. Unemployment, perceived in some discourse as the major threat to national security, needs to be re-evaluated or put in historical perspective. Youth unemployment seems to have contributed to the rising case of violent conflict in Nigeria. Unemployment according to the International Labour Organization could be seen as numbers of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998:63). It constitutes the total number of people that are out of work. Arguably, unemployment seems to be a global trend. However, Nigeria's unemployment situation deteriorated following the state's inability to put in place appropriate mitigating mechanisms to abate or control its spread and impacts. It can be stated that unemployment has a severe negative implication on national development in Nigeria as most of its productive force are unemployed. What this means theoretically is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given cause at token benefit (Salawu, 2010). Unemployment could be a medium for one to be



predispose to engaging in illicit activities that would undermine the security of the environment.

Youths are the foundations of any society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talent and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainment. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation and energies, and builds her vitality and purpose. And because of these dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured. This is the picture of the youths in developed societies. They have achieved these through heavy investments in qualitative education. However, the picture is different as to the relevance of the youths in developing nations, especially in Nigeria.

The treacherous rectangle of poverty, illiteracy, corruption and unemployment has dealt a serious blow to the challenges of the youth in their sensibilities. This leads to what is referred to as the attitude of fatalism, resignation and acceptance of the situation (Idoko, 2010). This has created an environment where the youths are cheaply available for manipulation by self-seeking politicians as thugs, hired assassins and violence. They provide cheap labour to execute the design of political gladiators and ethnic champions using the youths' restive nature as a political strategy to achieve their interest.

Accordingly, youths face distinct risks in situations of armed conflict and past conflict. They are more likely to be recruited into fighting forces, become targets for sexual violence, and need and lack reproductive health care and education. Young people are susceptible to being used as perpetrators of conflict and civil disorder, yet they remain the most vulnerable and most affected, if unaddressed. Their perpetrators capitalize on the energy, resourcefulness, enthusiasm and innovation of the youths to achieve their personal interests (Amuta, 2008). Honestly, the situation in Nigeria has gotten to a point where a state of emergency should be declared in youth unemployment because it is at the moment getting out of control and a threat to our nascent democracy.

Thus, unemployment has driven many Nigerians into various activities that constitute a threat to the country's security. There have been instances in which young graduates were arrested for being involved in one form of crime or the other. Most of these criminal graduates attribute their involvement in these crimes to the unemployment situation in the country. For instance, the cover story of the News Magazine (26 September, 2011) was captioned "Graduate Bandits on the Prowl". According to the report, most of the graduate robbers that were interviewed argued that they took to crime for want of job.

Furthermore, due to the collapse of infrastructure including electricity supply and a good network that is supposed to be taken care of by the government, small and medium scale businesses, which provide employment opportunities for jobless people, are fast eroding. Many artisans such as furniture makers, welders, aluminum window fitters, tailors and so on who cannot afford power generators are today out of work. In desperation, a large chunk of Nigerian youths have taken to riding commercial motorcycles, while others are into street hawking just to keep body and soul together (The News Magazine, 28 March, 2011, captioned "Graduate *Okada* Riders: The Wasted Generation"). The unlucky ones, like the late Mohammed Bouzizi of Tunisia, get their wares seized for violating anti-hawking regulations.





More so, companies and industries like textile industries, steel companies, and the Nigeria Railways are folding up. Private firms that provide employment for Nigerians are gradually shifting base to other West African countries like Ghana, Côte d' Ivoire, Togo and South Africa. Many manufacturers experience low turnover in their businesses as they have to contend with incessant power failure, thus having to rely on generating sets which have to be fueled at exorbitant costs. As a result, many indigenous workers are retrenched by most of these companies when they migrate to other countries. Some of those who are privileged to remain in employment can hardly make ends meet as the entire monthly salary package may not last half of the month due to increasing costs of housing, food and transportation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of the critical bounding assumption. The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a research study. It introduces and describes the theory which explains why the research problem under study exists. A lot of theories that cover unemployment and national security have been propounded by different scholars from different disciplines, but the most relevant theory for this study is the frustration-aggression theory.

### **Frustration-Aggression Theory**

The Frustration-Aggression Theory, though having its roots in psychology, has been popularized and adopted in political science in determining the political behaviour of man. The theory states that “aggression is always a consequence of frustration” and that “frustration always leads to some form of aggression” (Leeds, 1978; Dollard, 1939). As theorized, frustration breeds hostility and produces anger (an emotional readiness to aggress). Hostile aggression springs from anger. The principle works everywhere. Ivo and Rosaline Feierabend (1972, 1968) applied the frustration-aggression theory in a study of political instability within 84 nations. It was found that when people in rapidly modernizing nations become urbanized and literacy improves (as is being experienced in Nigeria today), they become more aware of material improvements. However, since affluence usually diffuses slowly, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor intensifies frustration, and unprovoked aggression ensues and escalates. These aggressions are manifested as crimes and violence in Nigeria.

Unemployment and the attendant poverty situation it brings, though not always by itself, poses a serious problem to democratic governance as well as the security integrity of the nation itself. Their consequences have a number of security implications. For example, lack of employment opportunities has contributed to youth involvement in urban conflicts and militancy that confront the Nigerian nation today. The increased rate of sectarian violence, crimes and terrorism are connected with unemployment (Rotimi, 2011). Where the youths cannot get clean jobs, they make themselves available for odd jobs to stay alive which takes any imaginable criminal dimension. As the roots of violence and insecurity tend to be complex, sometimes people resort to violence when they are oppressed, discriminated against, socially isolated or economically deprived. Some researchers hold that poverty and inequality trigger violence (Awake, 2012).



## **BENUE STATE: BACKGROUND AND SECURITY PROFILE**

### **Historical Background of Benue State**

Benue state was created on February 3rd, 1976 from the former Benue-Plateau State in which the Igala and Bassa people were brought from Kwara State. The state derived its name from the river Benue, the second largest river in the country and most prominent geographical feature in the state. Benue State is located in the middle belt area of Nigeria and is bordered by Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Ebonyi and Cross River to the south and Kogi State to the west. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon on the south-east. Benue State has a population of 4.7 million (2006 census) and occupies a land mass of 33, 955 square kilometers.

The state comprises several ethnic groups: Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, Abakpa, Jukun, Hausa, Akweya and Nyifon. The Tiv are the dominant ethnic group, occupying fourteen (14) local government areas, while the Idoma and Igede occupy the remaining nine (9) local government areas. Most of the people are farmers while the inhabitants of the riverine areas engage in fishing as their primary or important secondary occupation. The people of the state are famous for their cheerful and hospitable disposition as well as rich cultural heritage.

Benue State is the nation's acclaimed food basket because of its rich agricultural produce which includes yams, rice, beans, cassava, potatoes, maize, soya beans, sorghum, millet and cocoyam. The state also accounts for over 70% of Nigeria's soya bean production. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, engaging over 75% of the state farming population. This has made Benue the main source of food production in the nation. Farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seed, insecticides and other foreign methods are being increasingly used. However, cost and availability is still a challenge. The state also boasts of one of the longest stretches of river systems in the country with great potential for viable fishing industry, dry season farming through irrigation and for inland water highway. The state is blessed with abundant mineral resources. These include Limestone, Gypsum, Anhydride, Kaolin, Natural Gas, Salt, Petroleum oil, Lead and Zinc, Barytes, Clay, Coal, Calcite, Gemstones and Magnetite. Breweries and cement manufacturing are its major industries.

The tertiary institutions in the state include a federal university (Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi), a state university (Benue State University, Makurdi), a private university (University of Mkar, Mkar), the colleges of Education at Katsina-Ala and Oju, Akperan-Orshi, the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Makurdi and Mkar, and a number of Polytechnics.

Currently, the state owes its legal existence to the provisions of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As a state, it is constitutionally mandated to establish an executive arm of government headed by an elected Governor, a legislative arm of government which members shall be drawn from constituencies defined in the constitution and a judicial arm made up of judges, magistrates and other officers that help in the administration of judicial related activities within the state.



## **The Youths and Security Challenges in Benue State since 1999**

Globally, the issue of insecurity and its imperative is of monumental importance. Recently, there are instances of global uprisings perpetrated by the youths. Large protest movements by mobs are invoked by the opposition party against the government. This mob action threatens the police and paralyzes the entire society.

In Benue State, the picture and the paradigmatic features explained above have raised their relative tenacity and severity, hence making youth development sine qua non in our quest for national security. Beginning with the Harare declaration to the plan for youth empowerment (1995) through the World Youth Ministries Meeting in Portugal (1988), the reverence of youths in contemporary development has received increased recognition. In Nigeria, the National Youth Development Policy (2010) and its accompanying implementation strategy are the palpable testimonies to the renewed interest in the youth and the development process.

The youths are important ingredients in the development process of a people, as they constitute a greater part of the society, and represent diverse interests in polity. Their involvement in political and economic development is not only a necessity, but also a central necessity for successful national development (Abada, 2005).

The youths in Benue State form a large part of the population with thousands seeking to make crucial inputs in the national process and also make ends meet in the \ (Abada, 2005). Yet the fact remains that for the youths to be effective as agents of the democratization process, they must not shy away from taking up politics decisively. Given their amorphous nature, the youths must provide the vanguard that will entrench politics of internal mobilization and active popular participation rather than constituting threats to insecurity.

In the past, Benue was among the states that suffered setbacks because of communal crises and rampant armed robbery cases. Citizens within and outside the state were afraid to invest in viable ventures. The situation was so bad that some communities were sacked as a result of land disputes. Armed robbery became so serious that banks became targets while local government elections were marred by the battle for supremacy among politicians. It is not an exaggeration to say that reconstruction is still taking place in some of the places that were devastated between 2001 and 2006. The quest for national security is conceived to go hand-in-hand with human security. It is derived from the belief that the pursuit of national security should be propelled by the pursuit of human security which attaches more priority on the protection of people than on the security of territories or governments. It is important to note that human security does not supplant national security; rather, both concepts are mutually supportive and entail taking preventive measures to reduce vulnerabilities, minimize risk and take remedial actions where prevention fails.

A few examples of the several security challenges in Benue State from 1999 to 2013 will suffice:

- 1999 Benue valley conflict
- 2000 conflict between the Kwalla and Tiv people of Qua'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State
- The 2001 Tiv/Jukun crisis



- The 2002 Tiv – Jukun ethnic conflict
- The 2003 political onslaught in Kwande Local Government Area.
- The 2003 communal crisis between the Minda and Kparev of Makurdi Local Government area
- The 2003–2005 communal crisis between Shitile, Ikyurav – Tiev and Kusuv communities in Katsin-Ala Local Government
- The 2006 Kwande political crisis
- The 2007–2008 renewed dispute between Mbaduku people of Vandeikya Local Government Area and Udam people of Cross River State
- The 2010 communal crisis between the people of Tsambe and Mbangur in Vandeikya Local Government Area
- The 2010 communal crisis between Mbagur and Mbawua communities in Vandeikya Local Government Area
- The 2010 communal crisis between Nyiev and Uyoo communities in Kwande Local Government Area
- The 2011 communal crisis between Mbajir and Mbacoghur communities of Guma and Tarka Local Government Areas
- The 2011 political crisis in Ugba-Logo Local Government Area
- The 2012 communal crisis between Ojantele and Ijeqwu communities in Otukpo and Obi Local Government Areas. There are many more (Akegh, 2011; Duru 2011, 2012)
- The 2012 political crisis between Tarka and Guma Local Government Area
- The 2013 communal crisis between Tor-Donga and Gbise in Kastna-Ala local government Area.

The above examples show how Benue people have not experienced any respite since the beginning of the new millennium (the past 15 years). Communal and political crises in Benue State became more pervasive after the 2007 national election.

## **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS IN BENUE STATE**

### **Socio-economic Environment in Benue State**

The global economy in the recent past has been facing turbulent times with regards to the performance of economic institutions (Ukpata, 2010). There has been an alarming increase in the number of failed organizations all over the world, especially in the developing world countries such as Nigeria. For instance, in Nigeria, particularly Benue State, so many organizations, both private and public, have witnessed a high rate of failure. The Benue State



government established well over ten companies in the 80s and 90s to cater for the industrial needs of the people. Some of these companies include the Tarka Mills Limited (an integrated vegetable oil processing plant), Benue Burnt Bricks Ltd, Benue Bottling Company Ltd and Benro Packing Company Ltd, which have been liquidated, while others such as the Agro Milers Limited (a rice milling company), Ben Fruit Company Ltd and the Benue Breweries Limited, amongst others, had parts of their shares de-invested by the state government and sold to individual investors, and the other two were placed under receivership management status. Several efforts and propositions have been made by both government and corporate managers to revamp failed organizations, particularly the Benue State-owned companies. The Benue State government had adopted efforts, which include recapitalization, reorganization, downsizing and public-private partnership (Utor, 2008). Observation has shown that despite the efforts made to revamp the Benue State-owned companies, they are still failing. And we are yet to correlate the reasons for these mass failures. Could it be due to internal environmental factors such as technology, regulatory, cultural, market competition or due to internal, environmental factors such as management, decision making, mismanagement, etc. which form the explanatory variables on implications of the failures of these commercial institutions of youth development in the state.

As is common to the development thrust of any state government in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world, the collapse of organizations spelt doom for the gainful employment of the labour force of such government, especially its concomitant effects on the employability of the growing population of the youths. With the steady increase in the number of young school leavers produced from both colleges of education, polytechnics and universities in the state, it is practically impossible for the government to guarantee their employment in the civil service, which has been the general expectation of the public. Therefore, the only way that the government can provide an advantage to tackle the unemployment problem is to ensure that its commercial organizations are well staffed, managed and adequately controlled to accommodate the young graduates.

Contrary to these popular expectations, most of the Benue State-owned organizations have been terminally and perennially sick, which has led to a large number of migrant youths leaving the state to western region or states to engage themselves in cocoa plantations; some found themselves picking up menial jobs across many states of Nigeria. This situation constitutes one of the major pre-colonial labour problems of the Benue province and has remained unabated until now.

### **Unemployment Distribution in Benue State**

According to National Bureau of Statistics (2010), the unemployment rate for Benue State between 1999 to 2013 showed that the number of unemployed persons constituted 4.4% in 1999, 5.5% in 2000, 4.9% in 2001, 8.5% in 2002, 4.8% in 2003, 11.7% in 2004, 18.6% in 2005, 10.8% in 2006, 67.4% in 2007, 8.5% in 2008, 8.5% in 2009, 9.5% in 2010, 14.2% in 2011, 14.9% in 2012 and 13.7% in 2013. The unemployment rate in 2013 seems to have reduced maybe because of the numerous programmes put forward by the government such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE – P) and so on, to tackle unemployment. So many people, especially the youths in Benue State, have been recruited into these programmes, which has made and will make many self-employed. As regards the age group, the report shows that as at March 2009



in Benue State, for persons between 15 and 24 years, 9.0% were employed persons between 25 and 44 years, 11.1% were unemployed persons between 45 and 65 years, 3.6% were unemployed as compared to the national average of 41.6% and 14.9% respectively. Furthermore, for those with only primary education, 3.8% were unemployed, and for those with only secondary school education, 5.8% were unemployed, while for those with tertiary education, 8.3% were unemployed. For those who never attended school and those below primary education, 4.0% and 5.3% were unemployed respectively. The total population of Benue State by 2001 census was 3,500,000 with an average population density of around 99 persons per sq. km.

With the low level of capital investment and very few entrepreneurs, Benue State is considered a 'civil servant state,' where most of the non-agricultural workers are civil servants. Most inhabitants (75%) are subsistence level farmers, 10% are traders, 6% are civil servants while 9% work in other occupations. The state produces more than 70% of Nigeria's soya crops and is dubbed 'the food basket of the nation.' More than half (54.6%) of the people in Benue State consider themselves as poor. Drawing from NBS (2010), the human poverty index for Benue State was 36%, several points above the national average of 32.2%. Adult unemployment stood at 3.8% while youth unemployment (of those aged 15–24) stood at 9% compared with national average of 14.9% for adults in 2008 and 41.6% for youths in 2009 (NBS, 2010). Among all the states in Nigeria, from the figures provided by the National Bureau of Statistics (2009), Benue State had the highest percentage for youth unemployment, with a record of 67.4% in 2007.

Benue State has the capacity to support a wide range of industries utilizing local agricultural and mineral resources although potentials are yet to be exploited. Private initiatives in commerce and industry, particularly by indigenes, is also on a small scale and is limited to carpentry, shoe repairs and manufacturing, small scale rice mills, leather and plastic industries, weaving, printing, catering, block making, food processing, etc. Industry and commerce have been greatly retarded by the absence of capital funds, basic infrastructure and the frequent political changes. Benue's unemployed population is a whopping 25.4% (or more than one in every four working age people is employed) as opposed to neighboring Plateau's 14% and FCT's 13%, and above the national average of 21.1%. The illiteracy level (35.8%) in Benue State is higher than the national average (34.6%) although enrolment is higher at 89.9% for women and 29.1% for men compared to the national ratio of 76% for women and 94.4% for men. In 2006, Benue had a 77.4% net enrolment rate for primary schools and primary schools' completion rate of 14.6% (NBS, 2006). Around one-third (33.5%) of children have access to secondary schools and net enrolment stands at 45%, while the secondary school completion rate is 19.2%. Statistics of Benue State unemployment seems to consist not of uneducated, rural populations, who have been uprooted by failing agricultural production from the absence of mechanization and decreasing incomes, but of some highly educated populations as well as who normally would form the core of the productive vanguard in the country.

**Table 1: Benue Unemployment Rates by Year (1999–2013)**

| Year | Rate % |
|------|--------|
| 1999 | 4.5    |
| 2000 | 5.5    |
| 2001 | 4.9    |
| 2002 | 8.2    |
| 2003 | 4.8    |
| 2004 | 11.7   |
| 2005 | 18.6   |
| 2006 | 10.8   |
| 2007 | 67.4   |
| 2008 | 8.5    |
| 2009 | 8.5    |
| 2010 | 9.5    |
| 2011 | 14.2   |
| 2012 | 14.9   |
| 2013 | 13.7   |

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics (2010)

**Table 2: Benue Unemployment Rate by Age**

| Year | 15–24 (%) | 25–44 (%) | 45–65 (%) |
|------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2008 | 9.0       | 11.1      | 3.8       |
| 2009 | 9.7       | 12.0      | 3.9       |
| 2010 | 9.0       | 11.0      | 3.6       |
| 2011 | 10.1      | 11.8      | 3.7       |
| 2012 | 8.9       | 10.5      | 3.9       |
| 2013 | 7.5       | 8.3       | 3.6       |

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics (2009)

### Efforts at Curbing Youth Unemployment in Benue State

Benue State is faced with the scarcity of unemployment for the teeming population of young people in the state. Government, the single largest employer of labour, finds it difficult to absorb the large number of graduates that are churned out by the secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. This has led to the spread of such crimes as armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, drug trafficking, political thuggery and advanced fee fraud in Benue society. It has become obvious that the government alone cannot bear the burden of employment. Thus, there is a need to come up with other means of keeping the huge population of young people occupied.

The acquisition of special and relevant skills and creation of jobs remained a focal point in the Nigerian Government policy overtime, at least on paper; hence, between 1986 and now, various administrations' initiatives to promote self-independence and self-reliance in the generation of



gainful self-employment have been profound. Starting with the acquisition of vocational skills, it is believed that the education system operated since the independence places emphasis on academic excellence rather than skill acquisition which can prepare the individual for a more useful and fulfilling life within the society. Vocational skill acquisition is believed to be more relevant to the development of the nation. Hence, a new national policy on education was promulgated in 1977, introducing vocational courses in the educational curriculum (Chinedum, 2006). The ineffectiveness of the vocational courses in the school curriculum to address youth unemployment which assumed alarming proportions prompted the Federal government to set up the Chukwuma Committee on 29 March, 1986 (Omoruyi & Osunde, 2004).

The report of the committee led to the creation of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in November 1986 charged with the responsibility of promoting skills acquisition, facilitating the spirit of creativity, self-reliance and independence. Consequently, the directorate has, since its inception in 1986, introduced different skills acquisition programmes for young entrepreneurs. The training scheme is specifically designed to tackle unemployment, reduce youth restiveness through the provision of functional skills. Indeed, the directorate started with the Masters' Trainers Program where unemployed persons were linked with craftsmen and women to train for some months.

The Graduate Attainment Programme (GAP) was one of the eclectic schemes introduced by the NDE to further address the problem of unemployment among graduates of tertiary institutions in the country. This development was extremely disturbing for the government considering the socio-political implications as well as the economic wastage that would result. Essentially, the GAP scheme envisaged helping participants in different ways: access to employers of labour at their places of employment which is based on discipline; acquisition of practical skills where applicable/available; and opportunity to take part in Start Your Own Business (SYOB) scheme and expectedly after 6 months duration, receive a stipend of N5,000 per month (increased to N10,000 in 2012). Between 2006 and 2011, the GAP scheme recorded 17,077 graduate participants throughout the country, according to the NDE Annual Report (2011).

Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) was an interim measure introduced earlier in 2000 to address the problems of rising unemployment and crime wave, particularly among youths. It was ultimately aimed at increasing the welfare of Nigerians essentially; the primary objectives of PAP were three-fold: reduce the problem of unemployment and hence raise the demand in the economy, increase productiveness of the economy, and drastically reduce the embarrassing crime wave in the society.

National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was a 2001 programme by the Nigerian Government aimed at poverty reduction, in particular, reduction of absolute poverty. It was designed to replace the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). NAPEP goals include training youths in vocational trades, to support internship, to support micro-credit, create employment in the automobile industry and VVF patients. The programme is seen as an improvement over the previous Nigerian poverty reduction programmes. According to a 2008 analysis, the programme was able to train 130,000 youths and engage 216,000 persons but most of the beneficiaries were non-poor.

The Benue State government launched a Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE – P) with the engagement of 10 thousand unemployed youths in various schemes in





Makurdi. According to the Benue State governor who launched the scheme, the SURE – P programme will help reduce the high rate of unemployment as well as alleviate the suffering being faced due to unemployment. He said “even though some states have invested the SURE – P funds in development projects, Benue has chosen to train and create employment for unemployed people in the state. The main objectives of the SURE – P programme is to empower youths to prepare to work for themselves or create jobs for others.

## CONCLUSION

There is a direct linkage between unemployment and insecurity, but it suffices to say that there are other causes of insecurity in Benue State. Unemployment is a constant in all countries and it is a challenge that can be managed. This research work has shown that youth unemployment is a pervasive issue in Benue State. It is not surprising that the ever-exploding youth bulge and unemployment threaten Benue State’s security especially when young men and women have little prospects of a comfortable livelihood when questionably acquired wealth is constantly displayed, and when the complex realities of globalization present economic challenges. It is clear that youths are helpless victims as well as perpetrators of national issues and challenges. As for unemployment, it adds fuel to the burning issues and challenges of national security. It is a major ingredient in the vortex of Benue State into which the youths have been thrust. But in all, they must be placed in their proper perspectives. Government must play its constitutional role by creating an enabling socio-economic and political environment including the provision of infrastructure to make the industrial climate investment friendly. The government must also have the political will to fight the scourge of corruption which is discouraging Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) because of the added cost of carrying out business activities in Nigeria.

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