

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIO-CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation with its burgeoning youth population currently faces immense challenges in providing adequate opportunities for employment and empowerment for her youth. The socio-economic, political, and cultural life of the nation has been endangered because of poor youth empowerment and employment. The alarming rate of unemployment particularly among the youth has exacerbated social tensions, economic disparities, and political instability. These challenges are fuelled by corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient access to quality education and vocational training. This research shows how the Church plays a vital role as a moral and social institution which advocates for justice, equity, and empowerment. The church in her bid to tackle youth unemployment has actively engaged in initiatives which are aimed at empowering youth and promoting socio-economic development. These initiatives include skills development programs, entrepreneurship training, skill acquisition schemes, and advocacy for policy reforms. The socio-Christian approach adopted in this research offers a valuable framework for an understanding of these challenges within a broader context of social justice, human dignity, and community solidarity. Through harnessing the moral and ethical principles embedded in this perspective, stakeholders can work towards building a more inclusive, equitable and prosperous future for Nigerian youth. This research provides insights into the contemporary trends of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society from a socio-Christian perspective. It highlights the challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions thereby recommending the importance of collaborative efforts and holistic approaches in addressing these issues raised above.

Key Words: Contemporary, trends, youth empowerment, employment Nigerian, society, Christian.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation that is blessed with many natural and human resources. Over the years, the country has been stagnant with socio-economic development which is attributed to the failure of the political leaders who has failed to get it right over the years and this has continued to set the nation backward. According to Olurotunbi (2021), the number of people looking for jobs keeps rising as the population growth of Nigeria continues to expand and Nigeria is expected to be the world third most populous country by 2050, with over 300 million people. According to Ogar, Egbara and Ugal (2020) youth empowerment therefore is the aggregated effort and policies of various governments to cushion the effect of unemployment in a country or nation. Youth empowerment is a process where children and young people are encouraged to take responsibility of their lives. They do this by addressing the situation and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitude. The process of empowering the youths to increase quality of life through diverse economic and social programmes which aim at adding more value to the active population is youth empowerment.

For instance in Nigeria, due to the wide margin of unemployment rate, several government policies have been made to cushion the negative effect of unemployment through empowerment programmes. According to Ogar, Egbara, and Ugal (2020), successive administrations have given different names to programs aimed at addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region. The Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration (2007-2010) introduced the amnesty program, followed by the SURE-P Program under the Jonathan administration (2011-2015), and the N-Power program under the Buhari administration (2015-2023). These initiatives target the unemployed population with a significant focus on youth. Ogar, Egbara, and Ugal (2020) assert that the primary goal of these empowerment programs is to mitigate the adverse effects of unemployment, thereby reducing anti-social behavior among young

people. Unemployment and the absence of youth empowerment programs are identified as fundamental factors contributing to social vices in Nigeria. A United Nations report in 2020 highlighted the proliferation of social ills such as human trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, militancy, and other criminal activities due to youth unemployment. Presently, Nigeria ranks among the world's poorest nations, with over 75% of its population, particularly youths, living below the poverty line (Thomson, 2012). These conditions create social tension and exacerbate youth restiveness and social vices. The correlation between unemployment and social ills is particularly pronounced when empowerment programs are ineffective. Idle, impoverished, and uneducated youths often resort to various forms of anti-social behavior. The fundamental problem which this research is concerned is unemployment among Nigerian youth and attention is focused on the positive response of the Church in curbing it. The menace of youth unemployment has gotten to an unprecedented point, this ugly incident has become a hydra headed phenomena going by its many sided nature. The problem of unemployment has become a national thorn in the flesh in Nigeria as the situation is further compounded by the recent economic recession that has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people.

Thus, it is against this background that this paper seeks to explain the effect of youth empowerment and unemployment. Since both the federal and state government cannot tackle youth unemployment effectively, the Church as an institution of faith, hope and charity cannot afford to be indifferent to the issue of youth empowerment and unemployment in the society. It is against this backdrop, that this article would envision the Christian response to youth empowerment and unemployment in Nigerian and the society at large.

Conceptual Clarification

Youth Empowerment

According to Tope (2011), youth empowerment revolves around fostering cultural, attitudinal, and structural shifts within individuals, granting them the autonomy and capability to make informed decisions for their own betterment. Mike (2014) states that, it is a mechanism through which young individuals can achieve personal success and contribute to the prosperity of their nation. This self-realization does not only promotes their individual growth but also fuels their motivation to perform effectively. Vavrus and Fletcher (2006) defines youth empowerment as a process encompassing attitudinal, structural, and cultural transformations, empowering young people with the capacity, authority, and agency to enact change in their lives and in the lives of others, including both peers and adults. Oluwasanjo (2013) simplifies youth empowerment as deliberate actions aimed at enhancing the lives of young individuals, focusing on developing their potentials with the recognition that they are the future leaders. Ali (2012) furthermore highlights that youth empowerment is pivotal for the prosperity of nations, facilitating innovation, transparent governance systems, reduced reliance on government among youth, opportunities for expressing and advocating for youth concerns at both local and international levels. Kator and Adaigho (2015) remarks that Youth empowerment is a fundamental principle of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all nations have ratified. Consequently, government initiatives for youth empowerment are prevalent worldwide, aiming to establish supportive environments where young people can act autonomously and responsibly, shaping their own futures rather than being dictated by external influences.

Empowerment

According to Zimmerman (2000), empowerment entails granting power or autonomy to individuals or groups who have historically been marginalized or had limited control over their own lives. It adopts a strengths-based perspective, recognizing individuals' competencies and their right to autonomy, while acknowledging the need for external opportunities and resources to actualize these potentials. It surpasses mere acknowledgment of rights, also providing the necessary social structures and resources for individuals to demonstrate their capabilities and exert control over their lives. Support is offered through collaborative efforts rather than relying solely on professional expertise, contrasting with a needs-based

approach that leans on experts for solutions or problem prevention. According to Zimmerman and Warschausky (1998), empowerment also involves bypassing traditional modes of participation and influence that exclude individuals who don't conform to established norms, in favor of creating new standards of participation through fairer distribution and management of resources. It entails active involvement of individuals and groups in decision-making processes concerning matters that directly impact them. Empowering young people means encouraging them to become active citizens in their communities. Youth mentoring, as noted by Chinedu and Olabiyi (2015) can serve as a valuable tool in providing young individuals with positive role models, support, and encouragement, facilitating their journey towards realizing their full potential as contributing members of society.

Theoretical Framework

An evaluation of contemporary trends of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society through a socio-Christian perspective, the fusion of the empowerment model and systems theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play. The empowerment model, rooted in the belief in individuals' innate capacities and rights, aligns with the socio-Christian emphasis on dignity, justice, and stewardship. Meanwhile, systems theory provides a framework for analyzing the interconnectedness and interdependence of various factors shaping youth empowerment and employment within Nigerian society. The empowerment model posits that empowerment involves giving individuals the power, resources, and opportunities to control their own lives and achieve their aspirations. In the context of Nigerian youth, this translates to providing them with education, skills training, mentorship, and access to economic opportunities. From a socio-Christian perspective, empowerment is imbued with values such as compassion, solidarity, and social justice, reflecting a commitment to uplifting the marginalized and advocating for their rights.

Systems theory, on the other hand, views society as a complex network of interconnected systems where changes in one part of the system can have ripple effects throughout. Applying systems theory to youth empowerment and employment in Nigeria involves analyzing the various social, economic, cultural, and political factors that influence opportunities and outcomes for young people. This includes examining factors such as education policies, labour market dynamics, social norms, and government interventions. When integrated, the empowerment model and systems theory offer insights into how youth empowerment and employment initiatives can be designed and implemented effectively. For instance, programs aimed at empowering Nigerian youth may need to address systemic barriers such as limited access to quality education, entrenched gender inequalities, and structural unemployment. They may also need to leverage existing social networks and community resources to create sustainable solutions that resonate with local contexts and values. Moreover, a Christian perspective of this research underscores the importance of ethical leadership, community engagement, and a commitment to the common good in driving positive change. This involves not only empowering individual young people but also fostering a supportive ecosystem that values their contributions, respects their dignity, and nurtures their holistic development as active citizens and agents of social transformation. However by combining the empowerment model with systems theory within a socio-Christian framework, we gain a deeper understanding of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society, as well as pathways for fostering inclusive growth, justice, and flourishing for all.

Dangers of Poor Youth Empowerment and Unemployment in Nigerian Society

Promotion of Social Vices Amongst Youth

Lack of youth empowerment and unemployment brings about increases in crime rate in the society such as robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, cultism, drug trafficking, online fraud and so on. Online fraud popularly called *Yahoo Yahoo* is the trending crime which is invoke for youth as many youths see it as a quick means to make quick money. A proper examination would unveil that many unemployed youths in

Nigeria are deeply involved in it. Many youths involve in these crimes as a means to earn a living or measure up in the society. Furthermore, the promotion of social vices among youth can have long-term consequences for the future of a nation. A generation plagued by social vices may struggle to fulfill its potential, hindering innovation, productivity, and overall economic growth. When young people engage in behaviors that are harmful to themselves and others, it creates a culture of mistrust and fear, hindering cooperation and collaboration essential for societal advancement. Furthermore, social vices among youth contribute to a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Young individuals involved in criminal activities or substance abuse often face barriers to education and employment, limiting their opportunities for socio-economic advancement. This perpetuates disparities and inequality within society, hindering efforts to achieve inclusive growth and development.

The promotion of social vices among youth imposes significant economic costs on society. The resources required to address the consequences of social vices, such as healthcare expenses, law enforcement, and rehabilitation programs, divert funds away from investments in education, infrastructure, and other areas essential for long-term prosperity. This creates a drain on societal resources and limits the ability to invest in initiatives that could drive economic growth and innovation. Moreover, social vices among youth have far-reaching consequences for the future of a nation. A generation plagued by social vices may struggle to fulfill its potential, resulting in decreased productivity, innovation, and competitiveness on the global stage. This not only hampers economic growth but also undermines the overall well-being and resilience of society. All these tend to teach the younger generation negative options available for survival and also create insecurity in the lives of the people in the society.

Psychological Effect

Unemployment and lack of empowerment can lead to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and a sense of hopelessness among young individuals. The inability to secure meaningful employment or contribute to society can erode their sense of purpose and identity, leading to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the lack of opportunities for empowerment and employment can fuel feelings of resentment and disillusionment towards societal institutions and government authorities. Young people may perceive themselves as marginalized or excluded from the socio-economic fabric of society, leading to feelings of anger, frustration, and alienation. This can contribute to social unrest, protest movements, and even involvement in extremist ideologies or criminal activities as a means of asserting agency and seeking validation. Nexis (2009) opines that:

Unemployment, particularly when unexpected or involuntary, may take its toll on:

Mental health. A large body of scientific evidence demonstrates convincing evidence that unemployed people manifest lower levels of psychological well-being than their employed peers. Unemployment has been linked with a number of psychological disorders; particularly anxiety, depression and substance abuse, dangerous behavior include suicide and violence toward family members or others also correlate with un-employment. (p. 17).

Nexis' line of thought is affirmative, the shame of unemployment makes many youths to involve in alcoholism and use of hard drugs to forget their problems. With time, they become addicted to hard drugs and alcohols. Prolonged unemployment and lack empowerment can be very damaging to one's health. Agbodike, Igbokwe and Umeifekem (2015) view that:

Young men and women, who have put in a decade or two in schools and colleges, have dreams and aspirations. These are dreams of securing satisfying jobs following their years of struggle, meeting basic necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter and healthcare) graduating to a life of comfort and dignity and, eventually, enjoying the luxuries of life. The trauma of seeing their dreams shattered week after week, month after month, can and does lead to deep psychological scars that are very difficult to face at such a young age. These can impact any individual's self-esteem and can lead to clinical depression. (p. 23).

The psychological impact of unemployment and lack of empowerment extends beyond individuals to affect families and communities as a whole. An unemployed youth may experience strain in interpersonal relationships, financial instability, and a sense of shame or guilt for being unable to provide for their

families. This can create a cycle of generational poverty and psychological distress that perpetuates socio-economic inequalities and hinders overall societal well-being. The psychological effects of the lack of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society are profound, encompassing feelings of inadequacy, resentment, and social alienation.

Insecurity of Lives and Properties

The rise in crime and insecurity in can be attributed to unemployment, and absence of youth empowerment which are abetted by inefficient and corrupt police and customs forces. The idle minds became have become the devil's workshop. Accurate unemployment rates are difficult to obtain and generally mean little in a society where many who work are marginally employed and where begging is a socially accepted occupation. Young people are overwhelmed by the high unemployment rate in Nigeria. Every year, universities turn out graduates who were unfortunately thrown onto the job market with no prospect of job opportunities. And this has lead a lot into criminal acts. Unfortunately, due to bad government decisions, our factories are still not reactivating. Due to the unemployment among Nigerians, young people are now negatively attracted to violent crimes which have brought about untold hardship and insecurity.

Political Instability and National Crises

Okafor (2011) asserts that it is evident that lack of youth empowerment and employment in Nigeria will have a lot of implications for the stability of democracy in Nigeria. One of the greatest threats to democratic stability and sustenance in Nigeria is the large army of unemployed and empowered 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. Sometimes, most of the unemployed youths are used as thugs during election periods. Some politicians give them guns to kidnap political enemies and once in office they do not settle these youths and cannot make efforts to retrieve the guns from them. Anyanwu (2009) agrees to this and attests that the former governor of Anambra state was kidnapped in 2003 by members of his political party who opposed his visionary scheme. Akpan (2010) avers that:

The most notable criminal gangs in Nigeria are used and dumped political thugs, most of them were used during election and dumped at swearing-in still armed and without any compensation.

On the strength of the sophisticated weapons at their disposal, the members regroup their members and target their political mentors or enemies. (p. 40).

Most of these teeming unemployed youths use the guns to start searching for daily bread at the expenses of other's earnings while some become fugitive roaming the streets.

The absence of opportunities for youth empowerment and employment perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion, which in turn contribute to national crises such as crime, corruption, and economic stagnation. Without access to education, skills training, and economic opportunities, young people may turn to illicit activities or become vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups, posing significant security threats to the nation.

Health Implication

The lack of access to stable employment and income-generating opportunities can impact physical health outcomes. Economic deprivation may limit young people's ability to afford healthcare services, leading to delays in seeking medical treatment or preventive care. This can result in the exacerbation of existing health conditions and the emergence of new health problems. Sometimes an unemployed person may not have the money for adequate medical care especially in Nigeria where most federal and state hospitals lack adequate medical facilities and such could be found in few private hospitals at expensive rate. Agbodike, Igbokwe and Umeifekem (2015) attest that it is equally easy to visualize that lack of steady income could, apart from the above ills, also lead to inadequate nutrition and adversely effect on health of the youth and their families. This could lead to low life expectancy. As

some unemployed youths get addicted to hard drugs and alcohols to forget their sorrow such addiction could lead to the damage of their internal organs leading to premature death.

Revitalization of Idolatrous Worship

Youths can experience feelings of disillusionment, hopelessness, and frustration due to their inability to secure meaningful employment opportunities despite their qualifications and aspirations. Idolatry, or the worship of idols or objects as deities, can provide a sense of purpose and belonging to individuals who feel disconnected and adrift in society. It offers a false sense of control and significance, filling the void left by the absence of productive engagement. The lack of employment opportunities can erode self-esteem and self-worth among young people, leading to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. In their search for validation and acceptance, unemployed youths may turn to idolatry as a means of finding significance and approval. The allure of belonging to a community or group that offers acceptance and affirmation, even if based on misguided beliefs or rituals, can be compelling for individuals grappling with low self-esteem and identity issues.

Significance of Youth Empowerment and Employment in Nigerian Society

Youths, situated at the precipice between adolescence and adulthood, occupy pivotal roles across various spheres such as education, work, and apprenticeship (Ndu, 2000 and Yusuf, 2001). They represent the backbone of the Nigerian labor force and are instrumental in shaping the nation's future and governance (Ndu, 2000). Yet, despite their potential, many youths face a lack of empowerment and employment opportunities, resulting in detrimental psychological and societal consequences. The absence of empowerment initiatives leaves youths vulnerable to negative outcomes, including unemployment and involvement in social vices like crime and substance abuse (Yusuf, 2001). This dire situation engenders feelings of hopelessness and disillusionment among young individuals, hindering their mental well-being and perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. The resulting unrest and instability not only threaten individual livelihoods but also pose significant challenges to the nation's overall development and security (Elekwu and Azhehueme, 2015).

Furthermore, the societal repercussions of youth unemployment and disenfranchisement are profound, contributing to a myriad of issues such as political unrest, social upheaval, and economic stagnation. The lack of meaningful employment opportunities not only undermines individual dignity and self-worth but also fuels societal unrest and discontent. Moreover, the disenchantment and frustration experienced by unemployed youths can make them susceptible to manipulation by unscrupulous politicians and extremist groups, further exacerbating existing tensions and divisions within society (Elekwu and Azhehueme, 2015). In order to address these challenges, concerted efforts are needed to empower youths through education, skills training, and economic opportunities. By investing in youth empowerment initiatives, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its younger generation and foster a more inclusive, prosperous, and stable society. Empowering youths not only improves individual well-being but also strengthens the social fabric and resilience of the nation, paving the way for sustainable development and progress.

Government Response to Youth Empowerment and Unemployment

As a result of the ongoing security challenges and rising youth unemployment, the Nigerian government has recognized the imperative to implement effective strategies to address the concerning behaviors among young people. Nmodu (2014) highlights some of these approaches:

a. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Originating from the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, the MDGs were established with the aim of alleviating poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy by 2015. Developing nations were encouraged to adopt policies conducive to economic growth, such as sound governance, financial support, and infrastructure development, to meet these targets. Minister of Youth Development, Inuwa Abdulkadir, highlighted efforts in 2012, where 658 corps

members received training and support to establish agro-enterprises, while 131,659 corps members underwent skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programs.

b. Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS): Implemented in collaboration with the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), GIS offers unemployed graduates apprenticeship opportunities to enhance their skills and employability. Since January 2012, the government has directed funds from subsidy proceeds towards empowering youths as part of its social safety program.

c. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Post Service Scheme: Established through a public-private partnership, this initiative has seen increased funding to support core programs and provide skill acquisition training and empowerment opportunities, as noted by Minister of Youth Development, Inuwa Abdulkadir.

d. You Win Programme: The YouWin entrepreneurial initiative has been instrumental in creating 15,000 jobs during its initial phase. Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, commended the entrepreneurial spirit and managerial skills demonstrated by young participants.

e. National Directorate of Employment (NDE): As an agency dedicated to training and empowering vulnerable groups and youths, the NDE offers technical support and startup capital through revolving loan schemes.

f. The N-Power (Nigeria) Programme: This is designed to target Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35 to acquire and develop life-long skills and is provided with a monthly stipend of 30,000 naira while learning the skills.

g. The Conditional Cash Transfer Programme: This is directly supports the most vulnerable by providing no strings attached cash to those in the lowest income group, helping reduce poverty, improve nutrition and self-sustainability, and supporting development through increase consumption. A monthly stipend of 5000 naira is given to households in poverty-stricken communities along with an additional 5000 naira for families designated as priorities or extreme cases. Aside cash transfers, beneficiaries are supported, mentored and coached by trained Community Facilitators who visit them weekly to help them take ownership of their lives.

i. The Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP): This is a micro-lending investment programme targeting entrepreneurs with a focus on young people and women. This programme provides no-cost loans to its beneficiaries helping reduce the start-up costs of business ventures in Nigeria.

j. The Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF): It attempts to increase school enrollment by providing meals to school children particularly those in poor and food-insecure regions. The intention is a cycle of productivity, sustaining and connecting local farmers to nationwide and global markets while providing the next generation with the sustenance necessary for education and growth.

k. Re-Evaluation of Education Curriculum

Practical Approach of the Church Towards Youth Empowerment and Employment

Teaching and Symposium on Hard work

It is the responsibility of the church to educate the youths not only about the word of God, but in other spheres of life; in order for them to be found worthy morally and spiritually. The Church should plan for youths through nurture and mentoring, transforming them by infusing relevant and timely ideas for posterity. Dunu (2018) supports that the church therefore can deliberately plan to be part of the transformation of the youth by providing opportunities of mentoring programmes that instill values in them for them to be useful and successful in life. The church teaching the youths is very essential and if the youths would learn from the teachings of the church they will learn to live a moral life. The development of any society is anchored on morality and if youths who are the future of the society would embrace morality in their daily lives it will lead to a crime free society. It is also, the duty of the Church to teach youths to be diligent in business just as Paul advised Christians not to be lazy (2nd Thess. 3:10-12).

Church training could be on technical skills, crafts and so on. Dunu (2018) points that there is need for an internship programme in every church that can be expanded to orient a greater number of youth in public policy making skills. Such a programme will provide them with a training opportunity on public policy making tools. Proper training makes youths competitive at the workplace and productive members of the society. The Church should train youths on hard work as they are full of energy and vitality just like the Jews who regarded hard work as evidence of good character and trained their children to work in a trade. This will surely ensure a bright future for the youths. The Church has never in anyway encouraged laziness and idleness, from the onset Christ the founder was busy doing the work of his father during His earthly ministry and his first disciples were occupied with one work or the other. Among the early church the Apostles were hardworking yet spreading the gospel, Apostle Paul for instance cautioned the Thessalonian Christians not to be idle and busy bodies as an idle man is the devil workshop (2nd Thess.3:7-12). Hence, the church will make efforts to see that unemployment among youths will be reduced to the barest minimum.

Loan Grants to the Youths

Most times starting up a business requires capital and most youths who intend to establish one business or the other may not have it. Thus, loan grants to youths may go a long way in making them self-employed. The church should grant loans to the youths through her microfinance banks or should sponsor youths by paving way for them to obtain loan through commercial banks, Bank of Agriculture and so on. Whenever loans are granted to youths, there should be follow up to make sure that the youths utilize the granted loans to boost their business and obtain greater output. Anozie (2013) states that Anglican Diocese on the Niger (Anglican Communion) established *Aku Chukwu* Micro Finance Bank in order to provide short and long term loans to unemployed youths and members to start up a business, to encourage saving of funds which would be invested in business ventures and to provide the needed capital for development, to promote trading activities. The loans are given neither without collateral nor with interest to the youths. Some of the wealthy members also donate financial loans to youths. According to Diocese on the Niger Synod Report (2018) “a Lady whose choose to be unanimous gave a N3 million naira to people to empower them in small scale business” (p. 375). Proper care is taken to ensure that the youths who receive the loans utilize it very well. Some youths have utilized this wonderful opportunity provided by the Diocese to start up various businesses and invariably gain employment.

Establishment of Skill Acquisition Centers

Skills acquisition is the ability to learn or acquire new skills. It involves the development of a new skill, practice or a way of doing things usually gained through training. Apostle Paul acquired the skills of tent making and the early Church fathers emphasized the need for parents to teach their children skills for survival in the future. The Church contribution in establishing skill acquisition training centers and involving in social welfare services will improve significantly the rate of employment in the nation. Uloka and Ejimikonye (2011) opine that if youths are empowered through the acquisition of skills, there is the possibility that they will use the skills to create new avenues for wealth as they have a meaningful job. Thus, empowering the youths to set up business involves proper acquisition of skills through education and training of which the Church is capable off. Therefore, the Church should establish skills acquisition centers for the unemployed youths to learn skills and be self-employed or get employed by the Church. For instance, According to Diocese on the Niger Synod Report (2018) which attests that the Diocese on the Niger School of Skill Acquisition (DONSSA) has it that they trained about 219 candidates in the last three years. Also Nwokolo (2018) has it that there is an Anglican Women’s Ministry built by Beatrice Onyemelukwe Vocational Education College which offers computer training, catering, saloon and other training services. This year about 110 students graduated from Beatrice Onyemelukwe Skill Acquisition Center (BOSAC) with various skills as the vision of the project is to assist the government reduce unemployment by making youths to be creative enough to be self-reliant and to mold and guide future generation of small, medium and large scale industrialists in order to become job creators rather than job

seekers (Ogbu and Mmadubueze, 2018). Also the Diocesan Girls Guild has started building a vocational school. Catholic Church Diocese of Awka established a vocational school in Neni, here youths are taught various skills that will help them to be self-employed and also contribute in the development of the society. The skill acquisition schools have helped and are still helping youths in Anambra State.

Entrepreneurship Programmes

Entrepreneurship is the process of perceiving business opportunities, mobilizing both humans and material resources and initiating actions under an enterprise which is characterized by risk taking, innovation and creativity to meet individual, group or society needs. Entrepreneurship skills therefore, are business skills which one acquires to function effectively in the turbulent business environment as an independent or self-employed person in order to improve one's economic status and the society at large. The importance of entrepreneurship skills acquisition cannot be over emphasized since appropriate skills acquisition through entrepreneurship will help to make youths self-reliant and boost their economic status. The Church should organize entrepreneurship programmes from where her members and other youths can participate actively to gain appropriate skills through entrepreneurship activities which will help to make youths to be self-reliant and boost their economic status. During the annual programme of Catholic Youths Organization of Nigeria (CYON) in Diocese of Awka, there is entrepreneurship training on fishery at the Diocesan fish farm at Urum and successful participants are either employed or given financial assistance to start their own fish farm. It is quiet commendable that Diocese on the Niger organizes entrepreneurship programmes as Nwokolo (2018) observes that there was an entrepreneurship workshop at St. James Church on tailoring, tying/designing of latest styles of head tie, production of original balm and so on. From these programmes members and youths can participate actively to gain appropriate skills which will help them to be self-employed.

Re-Evaluation of Educational Curriculum for Youth Employment

The major mandate of the church and government is to provide employment opportunities to the teeming youth population who are of workable age. However, no government has and can employ the entire youths of the nation, especially where there is a high rate of population expansion as in Nigeria. According to Owan, Udida, Ekaette and Ekpenyong (2021), this means that youths are expected to seek new pathways to creating jobs for themselves and where possible, employing others. However, meeting these expectations of job creation by most Nigerian youths seems to be more of a hallucination than a reality, owing to the skill gap/deficiencies among most of the graduates. This is because not many Nigerian graduates are capable of employing themselves let alone create jobs for others. As a result, most graduates of tertiary institutions tend to expect and rely so much on the government for employment and a situation where the government is not able to meet these expectations some begin to engage in one form of crime or the other.

The constraints on problem-solving today lie on the societal and human side, thus requiring reengineering in our educational curriculum. These changes require new approaches within the curriculum and by promoting active learning and encouraging students to experiment and be more creative. According to Victor-Ishikaku and Oporu (2020), E-learning and entrepreneurship are among the strategies for achieving the paradigm shift that is required. However, the duration of training offered to higher education students in universities was too short for them to acquire the needed vocational skills is evidence that speaks volume on the quality of existing school curriculum.

Education is expected to equip learners with the requisite skills needed to function effectively in this regard. Schools can only live up to this expectation if there is a regular re-engineering of the curriculum to enable graduates of tertiary institutions not only to liberate themselves from unemployment, but to contribute meaningfully to the economic and technological advancement of society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- i. Government should embark on aggressive job opportunities for many jobless youth in our society. To some extent, this will keep the youth occupied and less likely to engage in social vices.
- ii. Parents, guardians and teachers also should play significant roles in educating, enlightening, guiding and protecting our youths.
- iii. All members of the society and government should eradicate selfish desires and work towards attaining public peace.
- iv. Corruption and misappropriation of fund must be rejected and those involved if need be must be prosecuted by the law or meant to face the penalty in their communities. By so doing in the community and the church, the fear of God will become paramount thereby raising children that will value and cherish good morals above materialism.
- v. The Church needs to change its teaching of issues that relate to economic emancipation. Churches should modernize their preaching on finance and focus more on human capital development.
- vi. The Church should carry out empowerment programs continuously in order to engage the youth.

Conclusion

A critical evaluation of the contemporary trends of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society through a socio-Christian lens reflects both the challenges and opportunities inherent in addressing the needs of young people. It is evident that youth empowerment and employment are not isolated issues but are deeply interconnected with broader social, economic, and political dynamics. From this Christian perspective, it is clear that empowering youths and providing them with opportunities for meaningful employment is not only a moral imperative but also a pathway to societal transformation and flourishing. This perspective challenges societal norms and structures that marginalize and disenfranchise young individuals, advocating instead for their inclusion and active participation in shaping the future of their communities and nation. It emphasizes the need to create supportive environments that nurture the holistic development of young people, addressing not only their material needs but also their spiritual, emotional, and relational well-being. Moreover, this research highlights the moral imperative to promote justice, equity, and solidarity in addressing the challenges of youth empowerment and employment. It also calls for policies and initiatives that prioritize the needs of most vulnerable and marginalized youth thereby ensuring that they have access to education, skills training, and economic opportunities. Also the need of fostering a culture of compassion, empathy, mutual support within communities and recognizing the well-being of each individual which is intricately linked to the well-being of the whole society. This research offers a rich and nuanced framework for understanding and addressing the contemporary trends of youth empowerment and employment in Nigerian society. It challenges us to confront the systemic injustices and inequalities that hinder the full realization of young people's potential and calls us to action in creating a more just, and flourishing society for all. By embracing this perspective and working together in solidarity, we can empower the youth of Nigeria to become agents of positive change and builders of a more hopeful and prosperous future.

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