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## Youth empowerment in agriculture: A palliative measure for employment sustainability in Nigeria

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### Abstract

A nation without youth is akin to a mansion that lacks a good foundation. Youths are the essential resources for every nation, especially for sustaining agricultural productivity as an important sector for nation building. Youth is defined as the time or stage in which one is in the active age of his/her life. It is the prime age of someone's life. Agriculture which stands as a pivot for nation building cannot be prosperous in the absence of youth's emancipation because they are the engine behind the successful operation of the system. To restructure Nigeria as a unity nation will be more challenges and perilous, as far as the youths are faced with multiple problems. There are several approaches to the problems of the youths nowadays. If young people were provided with employment opportunities, they can become productive assets and take their part in the society there by offering the best of their skills and talents to bring about development. But if this opportunity is denied, there is a chance that youth will embrace crime and violence in order to survive. This is occasioned by the fact that an idle hand is the devil's workshop. In view of these, this study used literature available to review the following: the meaning of youths, agriculture as a palliative measure for employment generations, youths and agriculture for nation building and the challenges of youths in the contemporary society. The challenges of youths in our contemporary society are as follows: poverty, jobless, cultural violence, economic hardship, prevalence of armed robber, erosion of democratic norms and government policies, lack of social security, cultism and gangs of assassins, corruption, brain drain and psychological disorder, examination malpractice, sexual promiscuity and HIV pandemic, lack of the spirit of patriotism and loyalty to the Nigerian nation. This paper therefore provides the need for the Nigerian government to do check and balance in respect to her leadership selection. This should be in consonant with cultural rebirth for youths at all levels; secondary school, technical school, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. The rule of law in the nation should be strictly obeyed irrespective of the sex and government at all levels should revitalize agriculture to reflect youths' mind as a career.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, youths, challenges, employment, sustainability

### Introduction

Investment in agricultural sector anchors economic growth of a country which brings about food security. Agricultural sector is a strong driver of the Nigerian economy. It employs about 70% of the nation's labour force and has the capacity to alleviate poverty and ensure food security (Udemezue, Chinaka and Okoye, 2019a) [54]. Before the advent of oil boom in the 1970s, Agriculture was the major sector upon which majority of Nigerian population relied on for their livelihood. Agriculture was able to grow at a sufficient rate to provide enough food for the increasing population, raw materials for industries, increasing public revenue and foreign exchange for government and employment generations for the teeming population. There has been a dramatic increase in the incidence and severity of poverty in Nigeria today, and this occasioned by the dwindling performance of the agricultural sector where the majority of Nigerians relied on national cake (oil boom) for their daily income. The role of Agriculture in accelerating economic growth and the development process of any nation should not be taken for granted, because it is the bedrock upon which countries depend on for their economic growth and restructuring. Therefore, whatever affects agricultural sector indirectly affects the country's economy directly and this could bring about food insecurity in totality over the decades (Udemezue, 2019b) [55]. However, the practice of agriculture in this region has largely remained unattractive to the people, especially the youths for various reasons which include; low returns on time and input investments, limited access to land, low investments in infrastructure necessary for efficient value chains (Collinson, White, Ginsburg and Gomez-Olive, 2016) [10]. There is also a disparity in the number of males and females engaged in agriculture in West Africa.

In 2011, 54.7% males and 55.2% of females were engaged in agriculture, however, the figure dropped in 2016 to 53.5% for males and 53.8% for females. The estimated figures by 2050 are expected to be 50.4 5% and 51.3% for males and females respectively (World Population Prospects, 2015) <sup>[13]</sup>. It is seen from these figures that there are more females engaged in agricultural activities than males in the West African sub-region. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development Affairs (2011) <sup>[12]</sup> estimated that the number of youths in West Africa that will be engaged in agriculture will reach 68.7 million by 2050, which is more than the figure of 2011 (31.8 million), 16.2% of the estimated overall population and 40% of the estimated working-age population.

Nigerian youths constitute the most active segment of the entire population of over 140 million people (Akpan, Agu and Tsav, 2016) <sup>[3]</sup>. They are the social engineers, a veritable channel and catalyst for positive changes in the rural community, school, urban settings and some other aspects of human endeavours. Their energy, vigour, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of any society. These youths need love and a fair share of the national wealth, because they are people with high hopes, great expectations from parents and elders in the society.

There is a rising wave of maladaptive behaviour among youths today and this has posed a big challenge to nation building. According to Nwafor (2006) <sup>[43]</sup>, most youths who are not gainfully employed become agents of social destabilization and disunity, economic sabotage and thugery. They had been exported to the most trying time imaginable. Millions of them have been left wallowing in poverty as they roam the streets of major cities in search of non-existent jobs and opportunities. Several graduates of tertiary institutions have been forced into crimes and criminality, and those of them who are not very physically daring have taken to frauds and all sorts of shady pre-occupation. The young women in this frustrated class have taken to disguised prostitution or full-blown harlotry. These days in Nigeria there are not enough motivating examples for the youths to copy, such as made for juvenile discipline and natural law-abiding propensity.

Empowerment is a process of opening up something that has absolutely unlimited potentials, this implies reducing vulnerability and dependency among people. Everett (1991) in Akpan, Agu and Tsav (2016) <sup>[3]</sup>, sees empowerment of people as the broadening of choice; the expansion of opinions and alternatives available to people in determining the course of events, which will shape their lives and determine their own destinies. This suggests that individuals who empowered will be involved in the crucial issues of the nation. Living together peacefully; interacting and sharing in the same national issue is something that the youths can do effectively when empowered. Indeed, massive and conscious empowerment of youths would automatically discourage them from violence-related activities. Therefore, youth empowerment is the process or ability to open up something of absolute potentials to the lives of the youths to reduce uncertainty, vulnerability and dependency among them.

Youth empowerment in agriculture not only ensures food sufficiency but also reduces unemployment rate, idleness and poverty. Sidi (2004) <sup>[51]</sup> observes that unemployment compounds the problems the youths are facing in Nigeria.

By staying idle, they are prone to such vices as prostitution, armed robbery, and rape. Nigerian girls in the rural areas could be mobilized and taught to keep poultry farms so as to have more meat for the home. Educated girls develop self confidence in themselves, are more capable of accommodating others, can take decisions of their own and make choices according to their own independent judgments. This would be a great political investment of a high value for Nigeria.

According to Grewal and Ahmed (2011) <sup>[36]</sup>, the rural concentration of poverty in the developing countries such as Nigeria highlights the importance of agriculture in poverty reduction strategies, because most of the rural population relies directly or indirectly on agriculture. Department for International Development (DFID) (2004) <sup>[25]</sup>, also reports that, at the micro-economic level, growth in agriculture which could only be enhanced by its appropriate investment expenditure has been consistently shown to be more beneficial to the poor than the growth in other sectors. Their analysis also reveals that increasing agricultural productivity has probably been the single most important factor in determining the speed and extent of poverty reduction during the last 40 years (Oluwasegun, Taiwo and Opeyemi, 2016) <sup>[46]</sup>. Investment in agricultural sector for poverty reduction is supported by Oni (2014) <sup>[47]</sup>, investment favours agricultural sector not only because of its low skill and competence requirements, but also because of its potential for stimulating growth in the secondary and tertiary sectors. For instance, increased commercial agricultural activities through induced investment may lead to expansion of small food processing industries. This will in turn increase labour mobility from rural to urban areas (Grewal and Ahmed, 2011) <sup>[36]</sup>. Enyim (2013) <sup>[28]</sup>, investigated the link between government spending on agriculture and poverty reduction in Nigeria's economic growth in the period 1980-2009. Using poverty level as the dependent variable, while the independent variables are government expenditure on agriculture and agricultural credit guaranteed scheme (ACGS), it was discovered the one percent increase in agricultural credit guaranteed scheme fund (ACGSF) will on average lead to 0.06 percent decrease in poverty level. It was also recommended that effort should be made by the government to see that the rural farmers benefit from the opportunities surrounding her expenditures in the agricultural sector; in an attempt to reduce the poverty level in Nigeria.

### **Who are youths?**

In Nigeria, youth activities traced back to the pre-colonial era, despite their limited number, they organized themselves on age grade based in their various communities. Today, youth in Nigeria constitute large of the population. From statistics available, persons between the ages of 12 plus and 30 years account for about 43% of our population (Adisa, 2013; Ruhl, 2019) <sup>[1, 49]</sup>. There is no universal agreement on what youths are. Some people believe that youth is more a state of mind than a time of life, because of this, former United States Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, famously said, "This world demands the qualities of youths; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease". Scholars have been given definitions on who a youth is, but none seems satisfactory because definition itself is a social

construct to capture social reality. Words are usually constructed and defined in order to understand and reflect to what exist at a particular time of the period. However, many government agencies, nonprofit programs and media outlets define youth as a distinct period of time in life that names ages for when it begins and when it ends. In some countries, youth begins at 8 years old; in others, it starts at 16. Therefore, confusion exists when naming the youth ends, as some it is started at 18, 21 or 25 years old ([www.Who%20Are%20Youth\\_%20-%20Freechild%20Institute.html](http://www.Who%20Are%20Youth_%20-%20Freechild%20Institute.html)).

A youth is someone who is between a childhood age and adulthood age. How do we measure or determine someone's childhood or adulthood status? This is determined or measured by a person's physical, mental and psychological state of mind.

According to Macmillian and Marriam-Webstar dictionary, Youth is defined as the time of life when one is young, and often means the time between childhood and adulthood or maturity. This implies that youth can also be defined as in terms of adolescence with a specified age limit. However, the term adolescence refers to as specific age range during a specific developmental period in a person's life, unlike youth which is a socially constructed category (Andy, 2013)<sup>[31]</sup>. It is also defined as "the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit, among other characteristics of one who is young" (Dictionary.Com). It is the stage of constructing the self-concept. The self-concept of youth is influenced by variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender, and culture. It is a time of a person's life when his/her choices are most likely to affect the person's future (Thomas, 2003; Wing, 2012)<sup>[52-58]</sup>.

In the light of the above, some scholars referred youths to as those persons possessing certain distinct physical characteristics which include: Ability to think fast, ability to display much energy towards the actualization of goals, assertive and resistant personality, and ability to change a state of art. Therefore, youths are expected to be the most active population of a country. The higher the number of youth, the higher should be the quantity of wealth and national income, all things being equal. But the reverse has been the case in most developing countries of the world where the youths are marginalized by a clique of opportunists and politicians (Jike, 2002).

One of the most frequently asked questions about the demographic profile of a youth is at what age, can an individual be called a youth since the characteristics set above may not be mutually exclusive from what some adults would display. Using the United Nations standard, a youth is someone who is between the age of 15 and 24 years. For the World Bank, such an individual must attain 25 years before he/she can qualify to be a youth. The Federal Government of Nigeria pegs the age limit at 30 years maximum while some researchers believe that youthful ages exceed 30 but not above 40 years. The idea of puberty and maturity comes into play apart from the issue of age and the physical characteristics. If someone is behaving the way a youth is expected to behave, then simply such a person is not matured. This thinking is also relative to time, space, culture, geographical region and economic boundaries. Because in some societies, male and female children or youth are exposed to early marriage while it is indeed an aberration in some other parts of the world (Jike, 2002). Subjecting many factors into consideration, a youth is therefore defined as a person who is still within the

indicated age limit enshrined in the law of his/her country on the age of a youth, and such a body is able to display physical, mental, psychological, social, political, economic, cultural attributes expected at a particular time of persons at his/her age. In view of this, legal systems around the world skirt the issue by using terms like adolescent, juvenile and teenager to describe this age range. Sometimes, this is to provide a distinct boundary for when people can begin voting or serving in a military; other times, it is to allow a person to be executed or taken from their families. The age ranges of youth are generally defined in law to meet political objectives, rather than for the genuine wellbeing of young people or society at large. The Free child Project defines youth as anyone between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. Anytime we refer to children, we are talking about anyone 11 years old and younger. When we use the phrase young people, we are including all people under the age of 18 ([www.Who%20Are%20Youth\\_%20-%20Freechild%20Institute.html](http://www.Who%20Are%20Youth_%20-%20Freechild%20Institute.html)).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the term "youth" is associated with young men from 15 to 30 or 35 years of age. Youth in Nigeria includes all members of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18–35 (Nigeria National Youth Policy, 2009)<sup>[41]</sup>. Many African girls experience youth as a brief interlude between the onset of puberty, marriage and motherhood. But in urban settings, poor women are often considered youth much longer, even if they bear children outside of marriage. Varying culturally, the gender constructions of youth in Latin America and Southeast Asia differ from those of sub-Saharan Africa. In Vietnam, widespread notions of youth are sociopolitical constructions for both sexes between the ages of 15 and 33. In Brazil, the term youth refers to people of both sexes from 15 to 29 years old. This age bracket reflects the influence on Brazilian law of international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO). It is also shaped by the notion of adolescence that has entered everyday life in Brazil through a discourse on children's rights (Dalsgaard, Anne, Karen and Tranberg, 2008)<sup>[24]</sup>.

The United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. The UN also recognizes that this varies according to the laws of a given nation. To clarify their definition, they gave a useful distinction between teenagers (i.e. those between the ages of 13 and 19) and young adults (those between the ages of 18 and 32). In order to impose some uniformity on statistical approaches, the UN itself is aware of contradictions between approaches in its own statutes. Hence under the 15–24 definition (introduced in 1981) children are defined as those under the age of 14 while under the 1979 Convention on the Rights of the Child, those under the age of 18 are regarded as children (Furlong, 2013)<sup>[31]</sup>.

With respect to the this, it can be deduced from the above definitions that youth can be defined pontifically as a time or stage in which one is in the active age of his/her life. It is the prime age of someone's life. This implies the time in life when one is strongest and most active in the schemes of things and ideas. Youth marks the beginning of full rationality in the human existence and living. At that stage, one assumes to think; do I create to live or exist? Of what useful I'm to people and the nation at large? What are those longest or shortest routes to get one's need? What are those decisions in life that anchor development? Have I been made it in life? If not, what are the obstacles? Paying much



attention on the above questions as a youth will bring about development for nation building since youths are one of the nation's most potent and latent resources. What affects youths indirectly affects nation directly because they are the backbone of every nation. Therefore, it is necessary to organize them and channel their ideas and energies desirable goals in the interest of national development.

### **Agriculture as a palliative measure for employment generations**

Agriculture is the major activity in most of the West African countries, which constitutes about 60% of the total employment rate in the region in 2009 (Matthew and Adegboye, 2010). It was the main stream of the Nigerian economy before the advent of oil in the 1950s. Agriculture covers an area of 924,000 square kilometers. However, about 75 percent of Nigeria's land is arable, of which more than half of the land is not cultivated yet. Agriculture is still largely at rain-fed and subsistence level that characterized by smallholdings, traditional and inefficient method of cultivation, storage and processing (Olagunju, 2007; Eneji and Akwaji, 2018) <sup>[45, 27]</sup>. It is still the single largest contributor to the well-being of majority of the population, sustaining over 86 percent of rural households. According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (2017) <sup>[9]</sup>, 1.3 billion people engage in various forms of agriculture around the world, 97% of these people are from developing countries; depending on the region, 30-50% of household income in rural regions is generated directly through agriculture. The income generation and employment status of agriculture in Nigeria today are not a paradox per say but a reality that secured about 50% jobs for the majority of youths in the rural areas. Root and tuber crops have the complimentary capacity to diversify Nigerian economy into multiple facet one for nation building. Therefore, agriculture is the entry points for development through income and employment generation as well as poverty reduction if the potentials are properly harnessed.

According to Oluwasegun, Taiwo and Opeyemi (2016) <sup>[46]</sup>, the importance of agriculture in reducing poverty in Nigeria is derived from the following facts: (a) The incidence of poverty is disproportionately high in Nigeria, in which the country still relies heavily on agriculture for employment and income generation. (b) The poorest households typically rely more on agriculture as source of income and employment. (c) Nigeria today is reported to be largest importer of food items globally; the proper mobilization of the country's natural resources can guarantee domestic production of all the imported food items. (d) Because most of the poor people have no skill other than manual labour to sell, they generally face many obstacles in connecting with non-agricultural economy, whereas, agricultural growth can provide them jobs where they live. (e) Social and economic factors further exclude the larger population of the youth and women from other white collar job opportunities in the country; this is a gap in which agricultural growth can fill.

The direct impact of agriculture on poverty reduction depends on the interaction of several effects. According to Grewal and Ahmed (2011) <sup>[36]</sup>, the first of these to be ascertained is the effect of agricultural investment which raises the income level of those employed in the sector. Secondly, how much the poor people benefit from agricultural investment and growth. This depends on the rate of participation of the poor in agriculture. The indirect

contributions that agricultural sector make to the growth of the rest of economy are based on the demand of its products from the non-agricultural sectors of the economy. Engel's law stipulates that, as income rises, peoples' spending of income on agricultural products such a meat, eggs, vegetables and fruits rise.

Research has shown that Nigeria's rising extreme poverty numbers is a direct result of years of negligent and ineffective government policies on agriculture. Over-dependence on oil for years and an inability to generate non-oil revenue has led it to this problem. Nigeria's 2018 record budget is running on a deficit to be funded with much borrowing, thereby increasing government debts. The solution to this problem would be the development of a credible agricultural policy aimed at eradicating poverty (Eneji and Akwaji, 2018) <sup>[27]</sup>. According to Eneji and Akwaji (2018) <sup>[27]</sup>, Nigeria, now ranked among the poorest countries in the world, started its independent nationhood with poverty level of only 15% of its population in 1960 but is today struggling to reduce it from about 70% of its population of about 190 million.

Poverty in Nigeria is a paradox because its level appears as a contradiction considering the country's immense wealth. The North-West and North-East geo-political zones recorded the highest poverty rates in the country with 77.7% and 76.3% in 2010, while the South-West geo-political zone recorded the lowest at 59.1%. Among States, Sokoto had the highest poverty rate at 86.4% while Niger had the lowest at 43.6% in 2010. Agriculture should be the industrial and economic springboard for the nation's quest for poverty reduction and accelerated growth and development as it is well-placed to have a high multiplier effect on the economy because of its linkages to the other real sectors of the economy (Eneji and Akwaji, 2018) <sup>[27]</sup>. The contemporary socio-economic literature is replete with evidences of the potency of agriculture as a driver of sustained economic growth and development. The experiences of China, Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia—countries with development characteristics similar to Nigeria are instructive. These countries have relied on their agricultural prowess to facilitate the process of industrialization from predominantly agrarian economies (Uzor, 2010) <sup>[56]</sup>.

Export of agricultural commodities is the main source of job and income creations of external trade, in which about six billion Dollars is generated, or approximately 16.3% of the tangible and intangible commodities are exported from the region (International Monetary Fund and World Bank, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. The export potentials of the agricultural commodities generate a reasonable level of revenue that the governments use in paying for the importation of final products, equipment in terms of capital and intermediate goods for industrial use and services (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development Affairs, 2011) <sup>[12]</sup>. The principal export crops for Nigeria are cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, (peanuts), palm oil and rubber, which together account for nearly 60 percent of non-oil merchandise exports. Livestock also thrives in the country and they include cows, donkeys, ducks, geese, goats, chicken, guinea fowls, pigeons, pigs, sheep and turkey. The main export destinations for Nigeria's agricultural produce are the European Union, the United States and Canada. Nigeria is about the world's fourth largest producer of cocoa, and the crop is the country's second largest foreign exchange earner after crude oil. Cassava is the most

cultivated commodity in Nigeria. The country has enormous comparative advantages in cassava production which if well harnessed could become a key driver of economic growth and employment generations (Shinka, 2009).

There has been a long-standing interest on the relationship between agricultural development, employment generation and poverty reduction, as the number of people who are living in poverty and hunger continues to increase (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2017)<sup>[9]</sup>. The issue of poverty is not limited to West African states only, but it is also a global issue of concern. In 2016, about 815 million of the World population suffered hunger as a result of poverty, this was recognized to be the first increase in the rate of hunger since the food price crisis of 2006-2008 and is a substantial increase from the 777 million people who suffered from under-nourishment in 2015 (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2017)<sup>[9]</sup>. To arrest the situation, the West African agricultural sector generates more than 35% of GDP (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2017)<sup>[9]</sup>. Nowadays, employment in the agricultural sector has reduced to 54% in 2016 in the West African region due to the fact that young people are not motivated enough to participate in agriculture as occupation despite the fact the sector dominates the West African economies (Clunies-Ross, Forsyth and Huq, 2009)<sup>[5]</sup>. The agricultural sector in developing countries contributes significantly to the overall growth of their economies, and its development has special potentials for employment generation and poverty reduction. Moreover, agriculture is an essential determinant in the quest for ending poverty at all levels, and achieving sustainable food security (Collinson, White, Ginsburg and Gomez-Olive, 2016; Osabohien, Osabohien and Urhie, 2018)<sup>[10, 22]</sup>. Therefore, agriculture has great potential to provide an essential contribution to employment for the unemployed and reduce poverty among rural farmers because when people are employed they will have a source of livelihood and will be able to care for themselves and their dependents. In spite of the potentials of agriculture in generating employment and reducing poverty in West Africa, the sector has been neglected because of the inconsistent policies and government not providing the necessary support needed in the agricultural sector. Employment in agriculture is significant at 1% level and is negatively related to poverty, that is, the higher the rate of employment in agriculture, the lower the rate of poverty. However, this supports the theoretical underpinning that a higher level of employment in agriculture should help reduce the rate of poverty. The reason for this result in the ECOWAS countries is closely linked to the fact that the people engaged in agriculture are more in the rural communities and the majority of them still use crude implements with low productivity as the attendant outcome (Osabohien\*Matthew, Gershon, Ogunbiyi and Nwosu, 2019)<sup>[48]</sup>. However, the results from this study support the findings of previous studies that were carried out in exploring the potentials of agriculture in generating employment and reducing poverty (Tersoo, 2013). The study of Osabohien *et al.* (2018)<sup>[22]</sup> posited that though the agricultural sector dominates the African economy in terms of the labor force by employing two third of the poor located in the rural areas, the production capacity of the sector remains low. This calls for the need to develop the sector through effective programmes such as insurance against shocks and risk, provision of 'soft' loans with little interest rates to the farmers coupled with the provision of

agricultural credits such as fertilizers. This will invariably get more people interested in agriculture and provide employment for more people both in the rural and urban areas and in turn poverty reduction (Osabohien, 2018)<sup>[14]</sup>.

Agricultural development remains one of the major weapons for generating employment and reduction of poverty in West Africa. This is confirmed from the work of Osabohien\*Matthew, Gershon, Ogunbiyi and Nwosu (2019)<sup>[48]</sup>; from their findings, improvement in agricultural development has the potential of reducing poverty by approximately 47.90% and 13.74% respectively. Similarly, employment is also a significant factor for poverty reduction in West Africa as was observed from their result that 1% increase in the level of employment approximately reduces poverty by 24.83% and 59.31%. Human development (education and health) is also needed for poverty reduction and employment generation in West Africa (Osabohie, Matthew, Gershon, Ogunbiyi and Nwosu, 2019)<sup>[48]</sup>.

Fan (2006)<sup>[29]</sup>, Found out that agricultural research, education and rural infrastructure are three most effective public spending items in promoting agricultural growth and poverty reduction. Return to public investments vary significantly across different types on investment and region within the same country, investment targeting regions with highest return can yield much greater success in poverty reduction. The study also discovered that the number of poor lifted out of poverty in rural India per unit of investment in agriculture varies from 1.6 in irrigated areas to 3.5 in high potential rain-fed areas to 9.5 in low potential rain-fed areas. Similarly, the number of poor lifted out of poverty in rural China per unit of investment in agricultural research varies from 2 in coaster provinces to 4.4 in Central region to 33 in Western region.

Also, Okpe and Abu (2009)<sup>[44]</sup>, empirically investigated the relationship between foreign private investment in agriculture and poverty reduction in Nigeria from 1975–2003. It was found that foreign direct investment and foreign loan in the Nigerian agricultural sector significantly alleviated poverty. They also maintained that government expenditure and the continuous rise in petroleum profit tax would aggravate poverty levels in the country. The study of uncertainty of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the of agriculture in Nigeria which was conducted by Ajuwon and Ogwumike (2013)<sup>[2]</sup>, revealed a positive and significant impact of FDI on agricultural growth both in short run and long run. They therefore recommended that, engendered domestic income diversification will boost the agricultural sector. Similarly, Kolawole and Omobitan (2014)<sup>[37]</sup>, investigated the impact of agricultural sector on poverty reduction in the country over the period 1986 to 2012. Among econometric techniques employed for the research, the error correction mechanism (ECM) model reveals that food production index and government spending had negative impact on poverty headcount ratio in the country. Oni (2014)<sup>[47]</sup>, examines the role of agriculture in poverty reduction in Nigeria between 1980 and 2011. The results from the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) unit root test and Error Correction Mechanism revealed that per capital agricultural GDP, physical infrastructure per capita and social infrastructure per capita were positively and significantly related to poverty reduction while per capita non-agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) and inflation rate were negatively and insignificantly related to poverty reduction in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends

among others that government should provide the needed assistance to Nigerian farmers to transform and adopt the use of modern technology so as to stimulate higher productivity in agriculture and reduce the level of poverty in the country.

### **Youths and agriculture for nation building**

A nation without youth is akin to a mansion that lacks a good foundation. Youths are the essential resources for every nation, especially for sustaining agricultural productivity as an important sector for nation building. This category of people is virtually left out in policies and program considerations even though this is a crucial stage for this group of people for transition into adulthood. The unemployment rate of this group globally ranked 12.6% compared with 4.8% as the rate of the adults in 2010 and this has the possibility of tempting most youth to embark on migration especially to urban centers and beyond since this act creates opportunities for accessing job opportunities. Agriculture being one of the foundation pillars of any society can only function as such if this insufficient youth participation is reversed. For instance, improving youth productivity in the agricultural sector and exploring effective livelihood diversification is imperative for nation building. Also, investing in the youth by promoting good habits is crucial if they are to realize their full potential (Francis, William and Mathenge, 2015; Udemezue, 2019b)<sup>[30, 55]</sup>. A nation build on the vacuums of youths cannot stand because they are the pillars of nation-building. Therefore, building the youths, building the nation is a slogan for the minorities to strengthen the shackles of leaderships of a developing country with selfish ideas.

Presently, skills, industriousness, productivity, and competitiveness are the determinant factors of national greatness. However, possession of the nuclear bomb is enough to make a nation great without reference to the industriousness and creativity of its citizens. Knowledge from Adam Smith told us that, every serious nationalist and politician has come to know that the wealth of a nation is not based on the wealth and opulence of its rulers, but on the productivity and industriousness of its citizenry. This leads to question why is it that the task of nation-building been so difficult in Nigeria, and the fruits are so patchy, despite our enormous human and natural resources? As matter of this, Gambari, (2008)<sup>[35]</sup> attributed the cause as follows; Threats and challenges posed by the environment for nation-building; the quality of leadership that has confronted these challenges; and (3) the fragility of political and development institutions. Since environment is the man's first right, there is need to understand the environment for nation-building in Nigeria, so we can clearly identify our strengths, weaknesses, and core challenges. We also need to evolve a system of leadership selection and accountability which produces the sort of leaders that will confront the challenges of the environment in a way that is beneficial for nation-building. Therefore, we must find these resources in ourselves if we are to succeed in building our nation; otherwise, "default would be not in our styles but in ourselves" as Shakespeare rightly said (Gambari, 2008)<sup>[35]</sup>.

Nations don't happen by historical accident; rather they are built by men and women with visions. Nation-building is therefore the product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. It is a predetermined idea and action taken by men and women to restructure nation based on the

prevailing conditions. Nation-building is always a work-in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention. Nation-building never stops and true nation-builder never gives up because all nations are constantly passing through new challenges. Nation-building has many important aspects. It is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. It is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose not difference, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. It is therefore about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose (Gambari, 2008)<sup>[35]</sup>. The large youth population in Africa should be seen as an asset for the continent's development if appropriate human capital investment measures are taken. Youth participation in agriculture is thus beneficial to mankind both directly and indirectly. Involvement of youths in agricultural activities has the potential of reducing the problems of the ageing farm population and decreasing youth unemployment and this calls for securing the interest and participation of young people in agriculture in the form of a deliberate shift in policy, training and promotion that specially targets the youth. This category of people is not only is the productive backbone of every society, the major source of ideas and innovation, but also the main market for food consumption and very often the leaders and drivers of public opinion, public policy and action for nation building (Akpan, 2010). Agricultural growth doesn't only benefit the people in rural areas and farmers. It also benefits the rest of the economy and creates employment for large numbers of people, thereby curbing youth unrest, and the pull factors that result in high rate of crime committing. In many developing countries, the money that goes into the pockets of consumers comes primarily from agriculture. This, in turns, produces the wealth to sustain local manufacturing and the purchase of local produce as well as stimulate export growth for nation building. Agriculture can be the cow that feeds the people in the both present and early decades of a country's economic development for nation establishment for the better generation unborn. As agricultural output increases, there will be associated benefits, including opportunities for the manufacture and marketing of products to sustain the livelihood of the people. Agriculture is the main root of economic building and whatever affects agriculture indirectly, affects economy directly. Therefore, the primary expectation of agriculture is to maintain the economic building of nation's development. Diversification of Agricultural inputs and budgets made for agricultural production by corrupt government officials and politicians could cause incapacity building of Nigerian economy as well as dwindling in agriculture thereafter (Udemezue, 2019b)<sup>[55]</sup>.

Agriculture which stands as a pivot for nation building cannot be prosperous in the absence of youth's emancipation because they are the engine behind the successful operation of the system. Agriculture is a root for nation development and a nation build without an integral part of youth and agricultural relationship is like a building on a falsehood that lacks sustainability and prosperity.



Therefore, for a nation to have a viable economy and sustainability, such a nation should incorporate youths and design agricultural policies to attract youths who are the contemporary hope of the nation. In Nigeria today, agriculture needs youths because the economic security of the nation depends on its contributions, in some countries today youth is also needed because it can carry on the task of creating the new and better society as well as moving society from tribal confusion towards dividend democracy. Therefore, the relationship between youths and agriculture is inseparable because they are an identical twin of different genes. So, whatever affects youths indirectly, also affects agriculture directly.

### Youth Problems and Dimensions

Youth unemployment on the country is now assuming serious problems, particularly in the wake of the current global economic recession. Africa in particular especially Nigeria cannot wait; it has to make use of resources available and take action now to respond in the short-term to the impact of the global recession, while also putting in place programs to address the structural causes of the problem. Youth constitute not only a formidable demographic force, but also make up the next generation of parents, workers and leaders. Their wellbeing, therefore, has implications not only for their own lives, but also for the societies they will build and maintain. Their ability to play these roles effectively depends on the support of their families, communities and on the commitment of their governments to their development. Meeting their needs is a major continuing public policy challenge which calls for constant rethinking of policies, re-assessment of priorities, commitment of adequate financial resources, and effective implementation of programs. More efficient and equitable resource allocation and improved policy formulation and implementation can only be achieved with a better understanding of their problems (Ruhl, 2019)<sup>[49]</sup>.

There are several approaches to the problems of the youths nowadays. If young people were provided with employment opportunities, they can become productive assets and take their part in the society there by offering the best of their skills and talents to bring about development. But if this opportunity is not forthcoming, there is a chance that youth will quickly turn to crime and violence in order to survive. This is occasioned by the fact that an idle hand is the devil's workshop. Increasingly, youth are being miss-guided by the get rich-quick syndrome of politics and the accompanying corruption engendered in the last two decades. The most disheartening trend is that many of them are beginning to share the view that hard work does not pay in this country. Another important challenge is the sheer size of the population and the obvious high proportion of youth. This alone is capable of rendering programs of government and international agencies unsatisfactory to the teeming population. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) has not been able to provide the needed succor to the unemployed youth. Even the older one, the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), is currently unable to absorb the recent graduates of the country's tertiary institutions. There are fundamental problems which finance alone cannot address satisfactorily. Most of the graduates from the Nigerian system have received education with limited skill. This is why fresh graduates are finding it difficult to secure gainful employment.

According to Adisa (2013)<sup>[1]</sup>, the challenges of youths in our contemporary society are as follows:

**Poverty:** The incidence of poverty is very high among the youths in Nigeria. Because of a poverty-stricken, youth can easily be seen in the proliferation of sub-culture gangs and groups in major towns and cities. Today, areas boys' phenomenon has turned out to be a major urban issue in Lagos and other Nigerian cities. They take laws into their hands because the state that enforces those laws that allow the capitalists to enrich themselves at the detriment of the civil populace is not effective. An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere and wherever there is no justice; there can never be law and order. Justice, as a matter of fact is a precondition for the maintenance of law and order and social justice at large.

**Joblessness:** A situation where able bodied men and women who are ready to work but are not given jobs by their country in charge, the likely tendency is that they might resort to all sorts of crimes and vices. Unemployment in combination with poverty will rather promote crimes than reduction. In Nigeria, majority of those who are unemployed today are youths, and graduates who had about four to five years in acquiring intellectual property and yet nothing is available for majority of them to do and could be the reason unemployed youths are easy prey of the political jobbers.

**Culture of violence:** The nature and character of the state in Nigeria has negatively change the posture of most Nigerian youths today. Today, political jobbers use jobless and idle youths for political assassination and political violence. It is even dishearten that those whom the state see as trouble makers are the same youths its politicians empowered with guns and machineries to kill and maim the opposition. Culture of violence has increasingly penetrated the country's primary and secondary schools thereby eliminating the values that teachers in the 1980s used to enjoy.

**Economic hardships:** The Nigerian economy is in a shambles because of our overdependence on foreign markets and foreign policies. This attitude creates room for the poor masses, especially the illiterates, urban poor, rural agriculturists who are not favourable by the unfolding economic conditions. This is why Nigeria is feeling the impacts of the global meltdown so seriously on inflation, economic growth, subsidy, governance and government ongoing reform programmes.

**Prevalence of armed robbery:** In most Nigerian cities, youth gangs and forms the habits of tormenting the lives of the ordinary citizenry day and night. This trend began in the 1980s but has changed in tempo and dimensions in contemporary Nigeria. This incessant armed robbing in the country stemmed from government's unable to create a conducive environment among the youths who most of them are graduates of various academic disciplines.

**Erosions of democratic norms and government policies:** In the days of yaw, Nigerian youths were alive to their civic responsibilities of resisting autocratic policies of government, but nowadays, youth groups are characterized by mentally derailed groups, half-baked graduates and

politically unconscious mass illiterates who allow themselves to be used as political thugs during political programmes. Due to their weakness in terms of their vision and mission on their country and themselves, they hardly challenge government that smacks of logic and democratic practices in its policies. Mental weakness erodes self-confidence and allows one to be alienated from his rights.

**Lack of social security:** Nigeria is a nation without adequate welfare packages for the youth. Even the allowances being paid to the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members are just too small to take care of the needs of most of these young graduates who are probably come from poor homes. The Nigerian government does not have any serious policy for them than the preventive and punitive measures of the so called civilian and political dictators

**Cultism and gangs of assassins:** Nowadays, both urban and campus violence are part and parcel of routine experiences cultism, kidnappings and gangs of assassins. This is because successive military and civilian regimes had paid leap services to the needs and aspirations of the next generation whom they would meet at their old age or left behind after their death. Even in the present democracy, majority of government officials are much more concerned with what comes into their pockets rather than what they can do to better the lots of the citizenry as the dividends of democracy. The consequences of all these are monumental on the behaviour of the youth. This is one of the reasons why Nigeria's Ivory Towers have been turned to theatre of wars. Every year, over 20 students lost their lives as a result of cultic clashes among students in Nigerian Universities. Yet, this was not enough for governments at all levels to accelerate the sensitization of Nigerian youths against cultism in Nigerian higher institutions of learning (Momoh, 2002).

**Corruption:** Nigeria is a country where corruption is a norm rather being an exception. Corruption exists virtually at all levels. Society at large encourages corruption because success is predicated upon material things. Whoever is appointed into a political office is expected to ride a good car, live conspicuous lifestyle, extend such illegally acquired money to his kinsmen and relatives (World Bank, 2008). The faces of corruption are just too elusive that cannot even be exhausted in a book. Most of the youths today, are either agent of corruption or master minders of corruption.

**Brian drain and psychological disorders:** some of youths are so concerned with "visa lottery", and cheap money that comes from internet fraud. The story is largely as a result of long years of military rule and virtual collapse of governance at all levels. Most Nigerian cities are full of mentally derailed persons, instances of the state of mental imbalance could be gauged in the rate of hostility that people display in public transports, at bus stops and as well as in public institutions.

**Sexual promiscuity and HIV pandemic:** Since the outbreak of HIV pandemic till year, 2007, the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS was high in Nigeria. Today, it has stood between 5 and 4%. This is largely through the efforts of the Nigerian government. In fact, the activities of the National

Action on Campaigns against HIV/Aids (NACA) and Lagos State Aids Agency must really be commended in this regard. But what of the youth that are promiscuous in their sexual relations? Multiple sexual relations are common among most adolescents and youths. Unprotected sex had left many families in sorrow as the dreaded HIV/AIDS had terminated lives that ought to have contributed to the future of this country. Here it is not the government that must be blamed first but the citizens. How many people have taken out of their times to advocate for an HIV/AIDS-free society? People cannot do it, it does not concern me and this is often the type of response that comes out of peoples' mouth whenever such a question is posed. The youths, must secure their future by protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and the dreaded pandemic.

**Examination malpractice:** This is another major problem among the youths today. The problem of examination malpractice is destroying the value of meritocracy in Nigeria's educational system. Virtually everybody must be blamed for the syndrome. Long years of neglect of the educational sector, negligence of proficiency and professionalism by successive governments have led to the serious degeneration of Nigeria's educational values. Most of the youths believe in cheap marks rather than reading hard to pass.

**Lack of the spirit of patriotism and loyalty to the Nigerian nation:** Despite the fact that Nigeria is in a democracy, majority of the citizens are not patriotic in the real sense of it. This is because the values people appreciate in this present age and times are disintegrative values with the tendency of causing chaos to life and the society at large. But the Nigerian state should be blamed largely for this problem. How much of the social contract has the state fulfilled since independence as well as after the disengagement of the military from the Nigerian political space.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Definition of youth probably changes with circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic and socio-cultural settings. The UN Secretariat uses the terms youth and young people interchangeable to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions. It is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence.

To restructure Nigeria as a unity nation will be more challenges and perilous, as far as the youths are faced with multiple problems. Having reviewed a number of problems and challenges facing the Nigerian youth, this paper therefore provides the need for the Nigerian government to do check and balance in respect to their leadership. This should be consonant with cultural rebirth for youths at all levels; secondary school, technical school, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities. The rule of law in the nation should be strictly adherent to irrespective of the sex, government at all levels should revitalize agriculture to reflect youths' mind as a career, Skill training must be incorporated in all aspects of education at all levels so that graduates will be equipped for employment or be able to seek alternatives in business and entrepreneurship youths should avoid those drugs that endanger health and also those



human acts that welcome problems in the society. These will make the dreams of Nigerians about a prosperous nation be optimistic and realistic.

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