

Youth Bulge and the Prospect of Demographic Dividend in Nigeria.

By

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1.0 Introduction

The youth consists of the crucial human resource required by a modernizing economy particularly for the attainment of MDGs. This is because they are usually vibrant and dynamic young men and women with visionary minds. Nigeria has a very young population and the majority are youths. In order to reap the full demographic dividend of the youth bulge, there is need to optimally harness the youth potentials. The paper; therefore examines the ways of unleashing the potentials of the youth for improved productivity. It also highlights the negative impact of pornography on the productivity of the youth and calls for moral education and value re-orientation. The paper also calls for an effective national youth policy as a framework for youth empowerment and involvement in decision-making.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of 140,431,790 in 2006 according to National Population Commission (2009). She has a very young population majority of whom are youths. The dwindling economy and persistent low human development index of 0.42 (UNDP 2010) has made it difficult to reap the full demographic dividend of the youth bulge. Hence, there is urgent need to put measures in place so as to optimally harness the youth potentials. From generation to generation, the youth has remained the treasure and strength of any society. Their strength can be utilised for good (example, productive activities) or bad (example, thuggery). For human development, the strength of the youth should be utilized for good only.

The major objective of this paper, therefore, is to examine the ways and means of harnessing the potentials of Nigerian youths for desirable positive change in the economy. The specific objectives include;

- To highlight the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of Nigerian youths.
- To highlight the negative impact of pornography on the productivity of the youth.
- To examine the relative effectiveness of youth programmes in Nigeria
- To suggest more appropriate policy measures for unleashing the youth potentials in Nigeria.

The rest of this paper is divided into four sections. Section two gives a brief review of the literature with emphasis on youth development challenges and policies in Nigeria. Section three provides the sources of information that were used in the discussions. The discussion under section four focuses on the implications of addiction to pornography by the youth. Finally, section five summarizes and concludes the discussions with policy recommendations.

2.0 Conceptual Framework and Brief Literature Review

In recent times, there has been growing literature on issues relating to youth and development. The underlying argument has been that the youth can be used for good or bad. As positive instruments of change in the society, youths can use their vibrancy and creative minds to enhance productivity. Unfortunately, either for lack of opportunity or positive encouragement, they misuse their potentials. Ironically, most countries with youth bulge instead of enjoying demographic dividend have to contend with youth restiveness and radicalism. Nigeria is a classic example. There is a consensus of opinion that countries with young age structure are prone to conflicts, see for example, Urdal and Sciubba (2007) and Population Action International (2007).

Given this paradox of youth bulge and radicalism most literatures underscore highly the importance of harnessing the potential of youths effectively and efficiently. But unfortunately, the youth often fail to develop a sense of responsibility necessary for their effective participation. Many factors have been identified for this among which are general apathy, wrong perception of the role of the youth, youth unemployment, abuse of technology among others.

3.0 Data and Methods

The information used in this paper are sourced from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), National Population Commission (NPC) and other published materials. A case study was made of a sample of students from the University of Lagos. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics and logistics regression.

4.0 Preliminary Results

This paper highlights the need to harness the potentials of youth in Nigeria for the improved productivity. Demographically, the paper confirms that Nigeria has a youthful population. Unfortunately, rising youth unemployment and the negative impact of technology have adverse effect on productivity. Through the internet the youth access all sorts of negative information that are anti-development.

Currently, the country is faced with the challenge of youth restiveness, civil unrest and conflicts, corruption, crime and violence, commercial sex work, drug addiction, cultism, moral decadence (idle thoughts including addiction to pornography), youth unemployment and lack of opportunities for self improvement. These have encouraged out-migration of the youths and thereby depleting the workforce potentials and consequently decreased productivity. By implication the youth bulge has not yielded the desired demographic dividend for Nigeria.

From the case study it was obvious that most youths are addicted to pornography and they spend substantial time and money to sustain the unproductive habit. In conclusion, there is urgent need to ensure effective and efficient utilization of the youth potentials for improved productivity. The following suggestions are made as ways and means of actualizing the dream:

- The youths should be actively involved in decision-making and overall development process.

- Moral education should be emphasized given the negative influence of globalization and information technology. There should be outright ban on illicit websites.
- Value re-orientation should be pursued vigourously as most of the youths now have conflict of values.
- Finally, government should support research in the area of youth development.