



Unemployment and Youth Violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria

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Abstract

Many societies both advanced and developing are grappling with the problem of unemployment, but the phenomenon seems acute in developing countries such as Nigeria, where its economy and foreign earnings are based on the exportation of natural resources. Recently, unemployment situation in Nigeria has fallen into double digits with many youths roaming the streets in search of employment, while others have resorted to criminality such as armed robbery, terrorism, cultism internet fraud, pipeline vandalism and illegal oil bunkering to survive. The study is intended to examine the changes in the perception of grievances stemming from economic programme among cohort youth group in Ndokwa East Local Government Area in Delta State of Nigeria. 20 questionnaires were administered among 20 participants who were selected from the youth group using purposive sampling techniques, and the data was analyzed using a descriptive analysis method. Apart from questionnaires, the study also relied on journal articles and oral interviews as other sources of data collection. Study reveals that despite increase in government employment and empowerment programmes, there was still lack of transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in the implementation of government employment and empowerment programmes, and these were major causes and drivers of conflict in the Local government area.

Keywords: Unemployment, Youth, Conflict, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

Unemployment is one of the biggest social problems facing the Nigerian society today because of the present economic recession in which many companies are downsizing. The youth are mostly affected by the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria. As unemployment rate continues to rise so there is increase in youth restiveness and other forms of criminal behavior, such as kidnapping, oil bunkering, militancy, armed robbery, piracy etc. According to the National Bureau of Statistics¹, Nigeria's unemployment rate was 13.3% in the second quarter of 2016, up from 12.1% in March of the same year and reaching the highest since 2009. Also, youth unemployment also increased to 24% in 2016 from 21.5% in 2009.

The federal government, both at the federal and state levels, have put in place several employment and empowerment programmes such as the Federal Government Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P Project), and the Delta State Development Commission Programme (DESOPADEC) as well as employing some youth from oil producing communities for surveillance and pipeline monitoring. Despite how laudable these programmes are, they have failed to ameliorate the unemployment situation facing many youth from oil bearing communities including those from Ndokwa East. Many have resorted to subsistent fishing/farming and daily low paying jobs for their survival. Due the high level of joblessness among youth in oil producing communities and increased poverty, there is an increasing demand for increase in revenue derivation or

outright resource control from various militant groups in the Niger Delta.

The unemployment situation facing oil producing communities is made worse due to the activities of multinational oil companies (MUOCs). These companies, in many occasions, fail and also neglect their corporate social responsibilities to the communities where they operate. Some provide employment opportunities for some youth of these communities; however majority of these employments are usually temporarily and on part time basis. As a result, many oil bearing communities lack basic infrastructural development, which increases the poverty situation in many oil bearing communities.

In view of the current rate of joblessness in Ndokwa East Local Government Area, this research tries to provide data aimed at measuring ongoing programme performance, and to track the experiences of cohesive groups of participants through time to reveal any evolving changes to their experiences or attitudes which may be attributable to NSRP's interventions. Specifically, the study intends to track changes (patterns, trends, drives and dynamics) in the perception of grievances stemming from economic programme from cohort groups of youth in target states. The findings and conclusions reached in this study are based on two assumptions: i. there is a significant relationship between high rate of unemployment and youth restiveness in an area; ii. there is likelihood for grievances among youth to increase when there is lack of transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in government employment and empowerment programmes.

Key event in Ndokwa East that might affect participants' view:

The most critical event in Ndokwa East that may affect respondents' view is the misconception by many youths that participating in research work is an avenue to make some quick cash. Many of the youths are poor and jobless, as a result are always seeking for quick means to make ends meet. This situation creates desperation among many them. Ndokwa East local government area with headquarters at Aboh is isolated and poorly developed. There are very limited job opportunities in the area, except at the local government secretariat whenever employment opportunities are available. The economic life of the people is purely at the subsistence level mainly in fishing and farming. Many youths rely either on riding commercial motorcycle, or using speed boat to ferry passengers across the River Niger to Ndoni area of Rivers State. Due to the critical unemployment situation in the area, many youths see strangers particularly NGOs, researchers, and CSOs as avenue to make money. Many of the youths in the area respond to calls by strangers only when they believe they can make some money. When such money is delayed or not forthcoming, many of them become reluctant and unwilling to participate in research work. Even those already participating, enquire first if some money will be given before the start showing up for interview. Our participants in this research are no exception to this scenario as many of them thought the interview was for them to make money, but the research team had to educate them on the significance of the research work to them and their community. As a result, it is difficult for the issue of money or financial benefit not to influence their perception on issues around them. Researchers are sometimes placed in a precarious situation, especially where participants are more interested in money or the immediate benefit rather than what they stand to gain in the future, to convince respondents to understand the usefulness of the research to them. Where such skills of human relations is not well developed by the research team, then participants involvement in the whole research process becomes a challenging task for the team. The problem becomes even more daunting in a longitudinal study where the research team has to spend about 30 minutes each year before commencement of interview to disabuse the minds of the respondents over financial remuneration or physical benefit.

Methodology

Primary data for this research was obtained through administration of pre-coded questionnaire to 20 respondents who are members of Ndokwa East Youth Assembly (NEYA). Another method of data collection was through oral interview of respondents. Apart from the primary data used for this research, secondary data were sourced through books, journals, and internet sources. Prior to the date of the interview, the lead researcher had pre-informed the youth president who also doubles as the gatekeeper to inform the participants about the scheduled interview. In order to ensure that all participants were present during the interview the lead researcher made several

telephone calls and sent SMS to participants notifying them of the date and venue of the interview.

The questions in the questionnaire were divided into three separate sections so as to elicit different sets of information from the respondents. The first section contains questions on socio-demographic factors, while the second section contains questions on the respondents' experience of empowerment programmes, and the last section contains questions on respondents' observed changes in the implementation of government employment / empowerment programmes. In addition, oral interview was conducted in order to elicit detail information from some respondents who were not literate enough to understand the type of questions they were being asked.

The population of this research was members of Ndokwa East Youth Association. The sample size for this research is 20 sampled members of the association who are selected for the purpose of administration of the questionnaire and continuation of the longitudinal cohort study. The procedure for this study is based on a purposive sampling technique.

The questionnaires were administered to respondents based on their level of participation in the association and knowledge of issues within local government area. The interview of respondents was conducted in three days from 2nd of October through 3rd of October, 2016 at Aboh, the local government headquarter of Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State.

Data in Table-1 indicates that majority of the participants are males, and majority of them fall between 26-35 years. Also, majority of respondents are self-employed, while only 2 are into subsistence farming and fishing. Lastly, half of the respondents have completed senior secondary school, while only 9 have completed either a two years post-secondary school or undergraduate university degree. The fact that many of the participants are educated at secondary school level explains why many of them are unemployable. Akpan² also found a relationship between level of education and employment opportunities.

Limitation/challenges to the study: Our fundamental challenge to this research was the unwillingness of many participants to participate in the research except they are paid for their time. This is the case because there is this misconception in many rural communities that being selected to participate in research is an opportunity to make money. Additionally, the absence of randomization or probability sampling techniques also creates bias in the research findings, because the interpretation of result is limited to the group under study. There is also the problem of internal validity with a study that uses the purposive method of sampling because such sampling technique is not representative. Thus the problem of selection of participants which, in this case is purposive and non-random, present some serious problem with generalization.

Table-1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristics	Categories	Value
Sex	Male	15
	Female	5
Age Group	16-20	0
	21-25	1
	26-30	8
	31-35	7
	36-40	4
Employment Status	House wife	1
	Self-employed business	13
	Commercial farming/fishing	1
	Subsistence farming/fishing	2
	Presently unemployed	1
	Student or apprentice	1
	Other please specify	1
Level of education	Completed junior sec	1
	Completed senior sec	10
	Completed 2 years post-secondary	5
	Completed undergraduate university degree	4
Marital status	Single	7
	Married	13
	Divorced	

Results and Discussion

The study reveals that 85% of respondents believe youths in the area are not unemployable compared to 15% who think it is true that many of the youths are unemployable. However, when this result is compared to that of 2015, the numbers of respondents who believe that the youths are unemployable appear to have sharply increased by 10% from 75% in 2015, while those who claimed that the youths are unemployable declined from 25% in 2015 to 15% in 2016. Apparently, when this findings is

compared to participants level education, where majority had completed just senior secondary school, compared to the few that had completed undergraduate university degree, there is the tendency to conclude that majority of the youths are unemployable. However, some respondents believe that youths in the area are actually unemployable because they are poorly educated. But others contend that youths are employable, but the poor implementation by the government of skill acquisition and employment programmes is responsible for youths being unemployable (Figure-1).

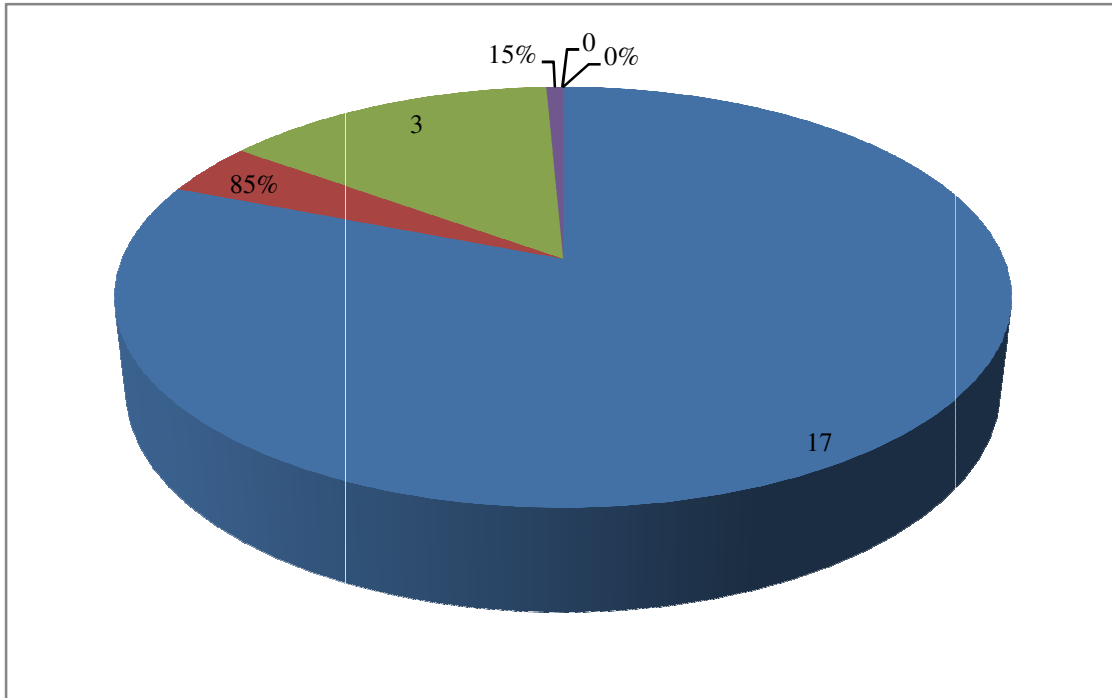


Figure-1: Youths are unemployable.

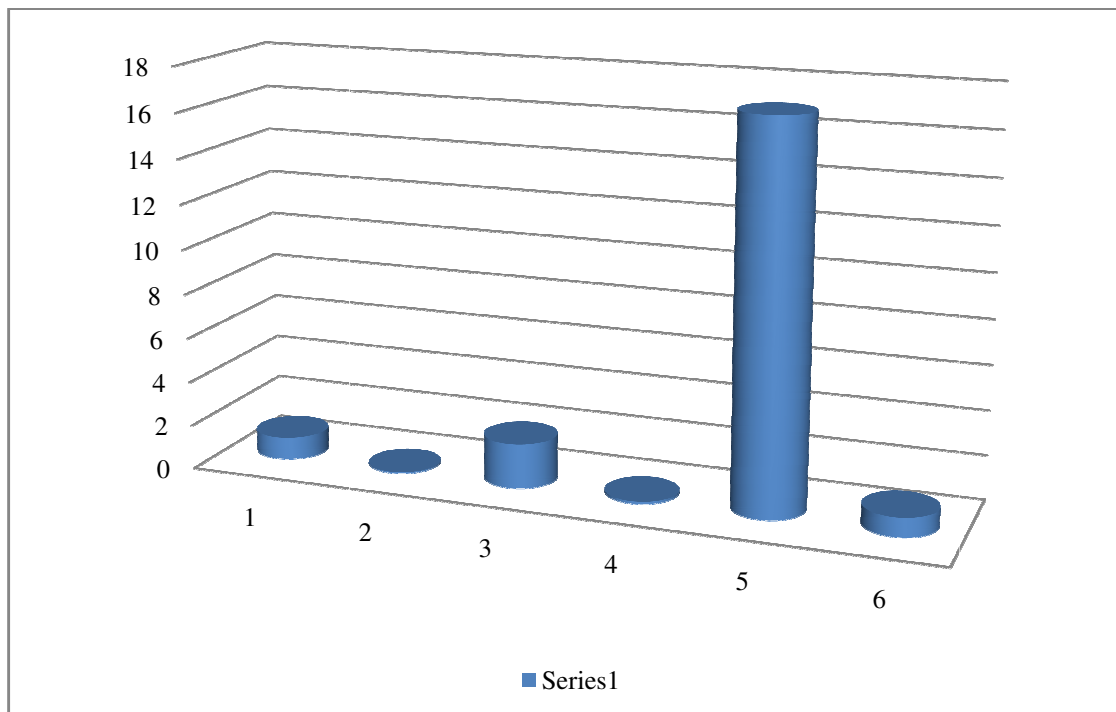


Figure-2: Youths are underemployed.

The data shows that overwhelming majority of the youths (95%) is underemployed while only 5% of respondents think otherwise. A similar result was found in 2015, where 95% of the participants claimed that youths in the area are underemployed. As to why many youths are underemployed, many respondents attribute this situation to lack of employment

opportunities and lack of transparency, and inclusiveness in government employment and empowerment programmes. While this argument by participants may be tenable, however, where many of them have only completed senior secondary school education, it is difficult for them to find well paying jobs with such level of education.

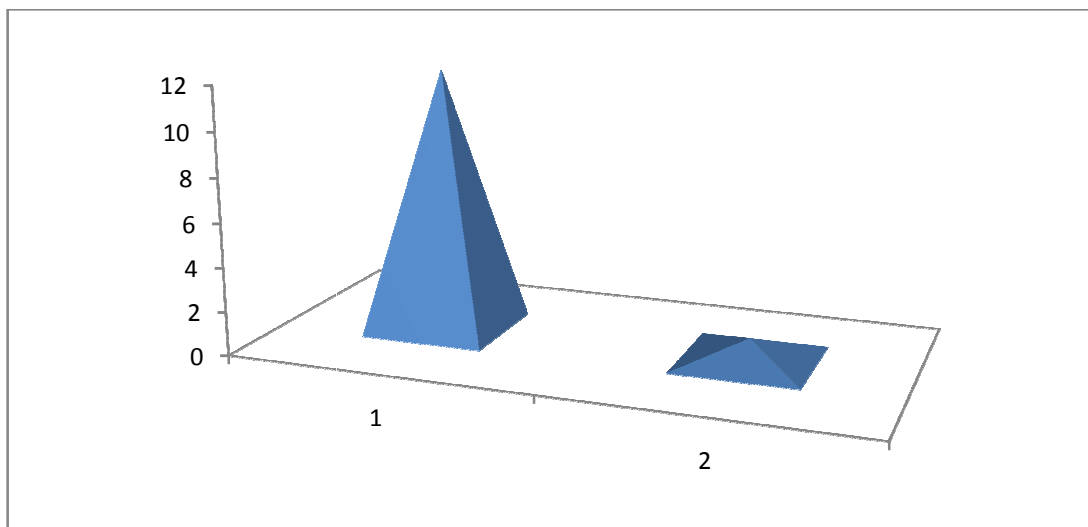


Figure-3: 70-90 percent unemployment rate.

The data reveals a very high rate of unemployment among youths of the area. 100% of participants indicate that either 70-90% or more than half (50-65%) of youths is unemployed. The general believe among participants that youths are unemployed has not changed dramatically when the present finding is compared to that of 2015. In fact, the percentages of those who claim that youths are unemployed have jumped up by 15% from 85% in 2015 to 100% in 2016. High rates of unemployment in area could cause several social vices including criminality. For example, Cohen³ identified depressed economic condition in a country and high unemployment rate as major factors that contribute to criminality and violence in a country. Cohen also argued that these factors are extremely difficult to change and address except there is reordering of the political and economic structure of a country. Recently, Asamu et al⁴ found unemployment to be a significant contributor to youth criminality and other social vices. In sum, high rates of youth unemployment increases youth restiveness.

Awareness of programmes by government, private or non government organization to provide employment for youths: The result shows that majority of respondents (82%) indicate that they are aware of programmes by government, private or non government organization to provide employment for youths of the area, while 18% said they do not know if such programmes exist. When this finding is contrasted with that of 2014 and 2015 respectively, there appears to be an increase in the number of people who claim to be aware of the existence of programmes to provide employment for youths in the area. In 2014, only 35% claim to be aware, while in 2015 this figure increased by 40%, that is, from 35% in 2014 to 75% in 2015. In 2016, the rate of awareness also increased by 7% that is from 75% in 2015 to 82% in 2016.

Listing of employment/empowerment programmes targeted at youths in the LGA: Our finding shows that 70% of the respondents named 13 programmes that provide employment or

empowerment for youths in the local government area. There appears to be an increase in awareness of programmes to provide employment and empowerment for youths in the area because many programmes that were not named or listed in 2015 are named in 2016. For example, in previous years the emphasis has only been on federal government Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P) and Delta State Skill Acquisition programme (DESOPADEC), but in 2016 other new programmes have been introduced by the government at the federal, state and local level. These programmes include OSSai-n-OSSai empowerment programme where the current member of the House of Representative representing Ndokwa East provided ke-ke and trucks for youths. There is also the YAAKEB empowerment programme introduced by Governor Okowa where youths of Delta State are trained in POP, Catherine and tilling. EMPOWER, a federal government employment programme intended to engage graduate youths in teaching. Lastly, Friday OSANEBI empowerment programme, where the current member of the state House of Assembly is training some youths of the area in skill acquisition. The new programmes are laudable in alleviating the unemployment situation in the area, except that most of these employment and empowerment programmes are provided by government officials and none is coming from the private sector. Since they are provided by the government and political elites, the beneficiaries are usually pre-selected and are mostly those close and loyal to the politician including their close friends and family members. The tendency for people not close to the government official to benefit or be selected is very slim.

Benefit from employment/empowerment programmes: 85% of respondents indicate that they have not benefited from any employment/empowerment programmes, while 15% said they have benefited from such programmes. Our finding shows that the percentage of those who claim they have not benefited from employment and empowerment programmes have been fluctuating. In 2014, the figure was 90% but increased by 5% to

95% in 2015, and declined by 5% to 85% in 2016. On the other hand, the number of those who said they have benefited also fluctuated. In 2014, the figure dropped from 10% to 5% in 2015, but rose to 15% in 2016. The reason for the increase in the number of beneficiaries in 2016 is that the government and politicians representing Ndokwa East constituency have introduced more employment and empowerment programmes which have reached youths that may have not benefited in previous years, and there is increase awareness of the existence of these programmes.

Anyone else who has benefited from the programme: Our analysis shows that 45% of respondents claim they know someone who has benefited, while 55% said otherwise. When this finding is compared with that of 2015, it shows a decline of 10% in the number of those who said they know somebody who has benefited from employment and empowerment programme, that is, from 55% in 2015 to 45% in 2016. In contrast, the percentage who claims they know someone who has benefited rose from 45% in 2015 to 55% in 2016. One possible explanation for this sharp increase (10%) of those who claim to know someone who has benefited from employment and empowerment programmes is because there is increase in government employment/empowerment programmes, and increase awareness of the existence of such programmes.

In Figure-4 Data shows that 10% of respondents think the programmes are very effective, while 45% believe the programmes are effective in helping youths. Conversely, 30% of the respondents assert that the programmes are not effective in helping youths, while another 30% claim they do not know whether or not the programmes are effective in helping youths.

However, when compared to 2015, those who claim the programmes are effective in helping youths declined by 10% from 45% in 2015 to 35% in 2016, while those who believe the programmes are very effective rose by 5%, that is, from 5% in 2015 to 10% in 2016. On the other hand, the percentages of those who claim the programmes are not effective in helping youths have been steadily declining since 2014. For instance in 2014, 65% of participants asserted that the programmes were not effective in helping youths. It decreased from 65% to 35% in 2015 and fell to 30% in 2016. This downward trend could be attributable to the fact that respondents appear to see more people who have benefited from government employment and empowerment programmes, and other skill acquisition programme initiated by politicians representing Ndokwa East constituency. Despite this downward trend, many respondents still think the programmes are not effective in helping youths, because majority of those who benefit have connection to top government officials. For example, one of the respondents described lucidly how most government employment and empowerment programmes works this way:

“The selection process was not transparent, only few people close to politicians are selected”.

Another respondent also noted: “Only few get selected and benefit from government employment programmes”. This perception about lack of transparency in selection and implementation of government programmes has persisted despite the introduction of several empowerment programmes by the state governor and other law makers representing Ndokwa East local government area.

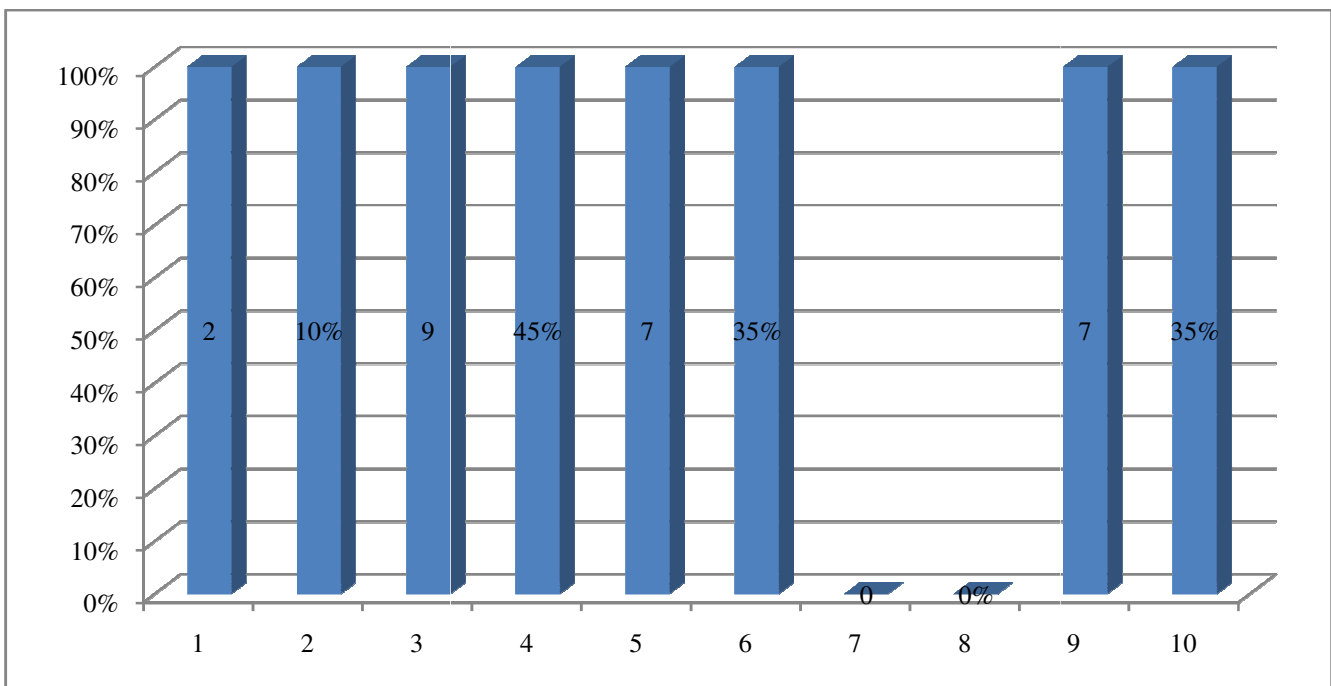


Figure-4: Effectiveness of Programme in helping youths.

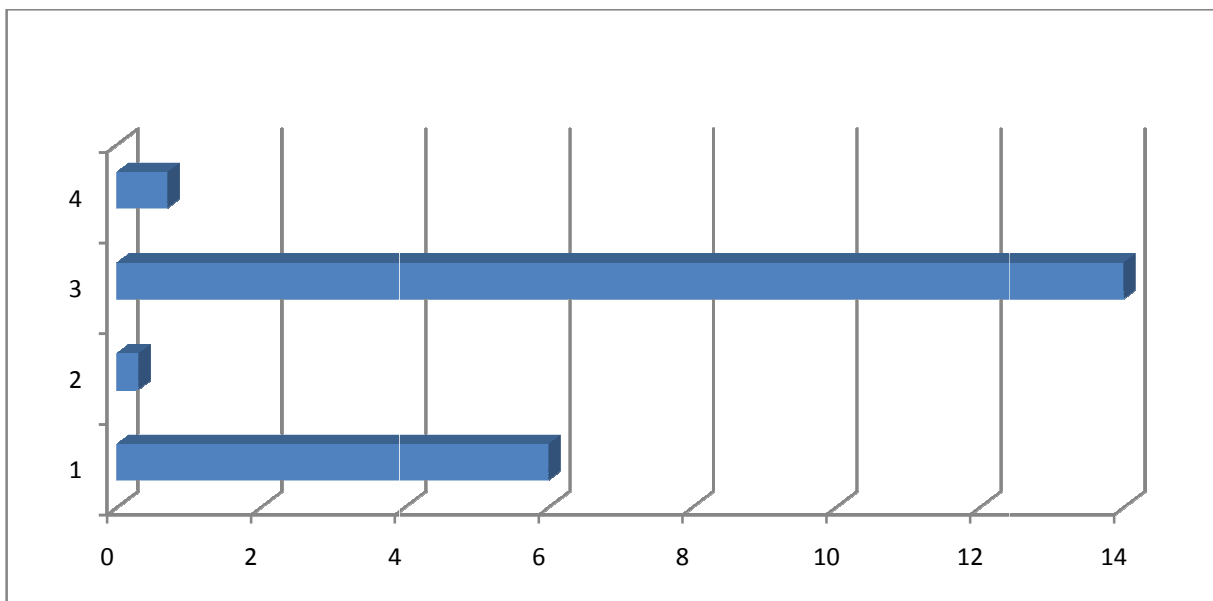


Figure-5: Changes in youth employment programmes in the last 12 months.

Data shows that majority (70%) of respondents think there has not been any changes in the last 12 months, while 30% believe that there have been changes in youth employment programmes. The reason why many respondents still think there has not been changes in youth employment programmes despite the introduction of new employment and empowerment programmes by the federal and state government is because many youths believe that the process of selection in these programmes are not transparent. Individuals or youths who are connected to people in government may have advantage over those that are not connected to influential people in government. This may explain the reason why some respondents think the programmes are not effective in helping youths because only few youths with connection to politicians benefit and get selected into these programmes.

The result shows that majority of respondents (70%) believe that government does not regularly publish information on selection process to these programmes, while 30% think they do. Also, 50% of respondents indicate that this happen more than 12months ago, while 45% believe it happened less than 12 months ago. When this finding is compared to that of 2014 and 2015 respectively, we see a decrease in people’s perception. For example, those who think the government does not regularly publish information on the selection process were 95% in 2014 but declined to 75% in 2015, and fell further to 70% in 2016. In contrast, participants the government regularly publishes information on the selection process increased from 5% in 2014 to 20% in 2015 and rose to 30% in 2016. The conclusion drawn from this trend analysis is that there is increase transparency in government employment and empowerment programmes.

The finding shows that 10% of the respondents claim the government ensure equal opportunities for all youths in the

selection process, while overwhelming majority (85%) assert that the government does not. 45% of participants believe this occurred more than one year ago, while a similar percentage (45%) said it happened less than 12months. However, in 2014 and 2015, overwhelming majority of respondents (100%) claimed that the government does not ensure equal opportunities for all youths in the selection process. This figure has seen a 15% drop, that is, from 100% in 2014 and 100% in 2015 to 85% in 2016. This implies that there is increase transparency and inclusiveness in government employment and empowerment programmes.

Table-2: Greater Chances for youths not linked to politicians.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1	2	10.0	10.0
2	17	85.0	85.0
77	1	5.0	5.0
Total	20	100	100

Table-2 shows that majority of the respondents (85%) believe there are very limited chances for youths not linked to politicians to be selected, while 10% think there are greater chances for youths not linked to politicians to be selected. However, in 2014 and 2015, the respondents who claimed that there are less chances for youths not linked to politicians to be selected rose by 10%, that is, from 75% in 2014 to 85% in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Conversely, the respondents who believe that there are greater chances to be selected despite being linked to politicians declined by 5% from 15% in 2014 and 2015 to 10% in 2016.

We found that youth associations and CSOs make very little inputs in the design of employment programmes. 85% of respondents believe youth associations and CSOs do not make input, while 10% claim that they do make input, and 5% indicate that they do not know whether or not youth associations and CSOs make inputs in the design of employment programmes.

However, compared to 2015, there is a 10% increase in those who think youth associations and CSOs do not make inputs in the design of employment programmes from 75% in 2015 to 85% in 2016, while those who think youth associations and CSOs make input dropped by 15% from 25% in 2015 to 10% in 2016.

The distribution in Figure-6 shows that majority of respondents (85%) think that the government does not publicise budget and expenditure information on employment programmes, while 10% believe the government does, and 5% claim they do not know whether or not the government publicise budget and expenditure information. However when this finding is compared to 2014 and 2015 data, it shows a decline of 15%, that is, from 100% in 2014 and 2015 respectively, to 85% in 2016. This implies that the government has increased its publicity of information on budget and expenditures of employment programmes. Further, 50% of respondents believe this occurred more than 12 months ago, while 45% think it happened less than 12 months.

Table-3: Selection of female youths to benefit from employment programmes.

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1	10	50.0	50.0
2	9	45.0	45.0
77	1	5.0	5.0
Total	20	100	100

In Table-3 Data shows that half (50%) of respondents believe that female youths are selected and benefit from employment programmes, while 45% think they do not, and 5% indicate that they do not know whether or not female youths are selected. Also, 60% of respondents think it happened more than one year ago, while 40% said it occurred less than one year ago. When this finding is contrasted with that of 2015, then it shows an increase in the number of participants who claim that female youths are selected and benefit from programmes. In 2015 it was only 5% who said that female youths benefit from employment programs, but that figure has risen to 50% in 2016, while the percentage of those who think female youths are not selected fell from 85% in 2015 to 45% in 2016. The implication of this analysis is that there is more inclusiveness of female youths in government employment and empowerment programmes.

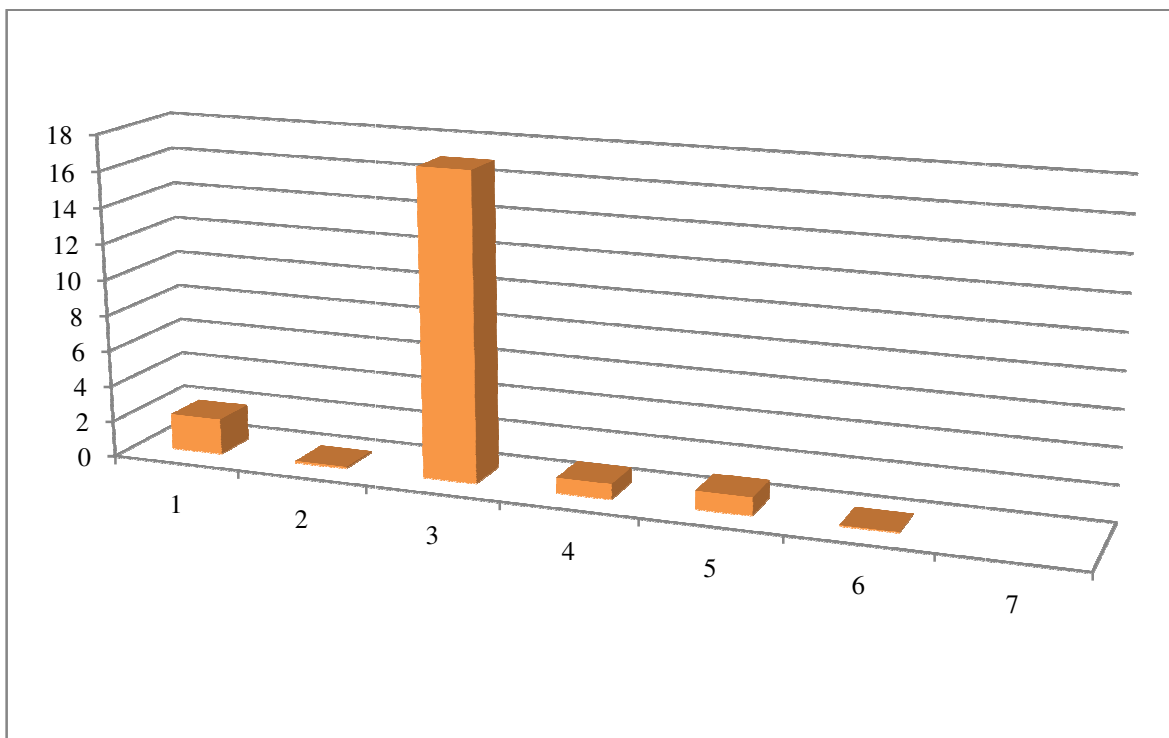


Figure-6: Gov. Publicises budget and expenditures information on employment programmes.

The result shows that 80% of the respondents indicate that the number of beneficiaries in government employment programmes have not increased compared to 20% who think the number of beneficiaries are increasing. Also, 50% of respondents think this happened more than one year ago, while 45% believe it occurred less than a year ago. When this finding is compared to 2014 and 2015 data, it shows that the percentage of respondents who believe the number of beneficiaries are increasing have continued to be on the increase, from 5% in 2014 to 15% in 2015 to 20% in 2016. In contrast, the youths who claim that the number of beneficiaries is not increasing declined by 10% in 2014, but remained the same (80%) in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that there is an increase in the number of beneficiaries of government employment programmes, as the government has taken deliberate steps to provide employment for jobless youths. For instance, the federal government EMPOWER programme and the state government YAAKEB scheme are newly introduced employment and empowerment programmes that have helped to reduce the number of unemployed youths on our streets.

Changes noticed in how employment programmes are implemented: The result shows that some youths believe that there are changes in the implementation of employment and empowerment programmes. Some of the changes identified by participants include increase announcement on the radio, increase publication of government programmes, and more youths having opportunity to be trained in skill acquisition programmes. The federal government EMPOWER programme illustrate this fact because there is announcement on both electronic and print media for applicant to apply online for permanent teaching appointments. Despite these changes, other respondents still think that the selection process in to these programmes is not based on merit, the process lack some level of transparency as youth who have people in position of authority will always have upper hand, since the number of those who applied for the jobs always far exceed the number government intends to recruit.

Conclusion

Unemployment remains a very serious problem facing many Nigerian youths. The problem of unemployment is quite severe among the youths who form the largest segment of the Nigerian society. In fact, over 70% of Nigerian population is youth, out of which 54% of them are unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics). When their creative talents and labour power are fully and effectively utilized, a nation can make giant strides in socio-political and economic development. Youths in Nigeria are confronted with various challenges including problem of unemployment. The challenging problem of unemployment that the youth face is the underlying factor for most of their behaviours. As a result, their perception on key questions raised in this research points to a number of implications and recommendations. The perception of high unemployment rate

among them (100%) alone suggests a risk. They can express disapproval of that condition in various ways including using violence against the state and society.

The perception of lack of transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability in government employment and empowerment programmes suggest a failure of government in putting in place a team that ensures that the selection process is transparent and get to expected target populations. The government, private companies and NGOs initiate employment and empowerment programmes, but in most cases but such programmes often fail to achieve their objectives because they do not get to their target beneficiaries. In most cases, these programmes are high jacked by local political elites who ensures that their own person is given such position. Consequently, these youths become tools in the hands of politicians to be used in election rigging and intimidation of political opponents. However, many turn their anger and violence against society when their affiliation to local politicians is no longer generating the desired benefit. This view is supported by Ted Gurr⁵ in his theory of frustration and Robert Merton's⁶ social structural theory. They argued that people become agitated and violent when there are limited opportunities for them to get what they want through legitimate means. A success that is highly cherished by the Nigerian society. As a result, such individuals resort to violence and criminality in order to vent their anger at society.

Many Ndokwa Youths engage in private businesses such as commercial motorcycle and subsistence fishing and farming as a way of ameliorating their difficult economic situation, while others retreat into a sub-culture of criminality. These activities provide illegitimate means for acquiring material things cherished by the larger society. This situation agrees with the work of Cloward and Ohlin in Iwarimie-Jaja⁷ who argued that individuals engage in criminal activities when the opportunity for them to become successful through legitimate means is restricted. Since there are limited opportunities for many youths in the Niger Delta to become successful, many of them use illegitimate means such as armed robbery, kidnapping, oil bunkering, piracy, oil theft, cyber crime, cultism etc to acquire the material things that are highly cherished by the Nigerian society. Unemployment is a major cause of the crisis in the Niger Delta. The situation is aggravated by the lack of transparency in the implementation of government employment and empowerment programmes. As many youths are unemployed, so there is increase in the level of poverty, which leads to frustration and agitation and violence.

Our research finding shows that there is increase awareness of the existence of government employment programmes. There is also increase publicity of such programmes. Nevertheless, selection into these schemes is not based on merit. This is because other extraneous factors such as nepotism, political godfatherism, and party loyalty still play major influence rather than educational qualification. This explains why there is less input of youth associations and CSOs in the design and

implementation of these programmes. More significantly, the lack of transparency in the whole process also makes it difficult for the government to publish regularly information on the selection process, budget and expenditure, and list of beneficiaries. Since poverty is an endemic social problem in Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta area, the government is more likely to adopt a pre-selecting method for beneficiaries of any of their employment and empowerment programmes. This situation creates desperation, especially among jobless youths, who may be compelled to join cult groups and other criminal gangs in order to cause violence in society.

Recommendation

Government: Establish a committee with responsibility to oversee the implementation of employment and empowerment programmes so that everybody has opportunity to benefit and being selected.

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