

An assessment of the socio-economic effects of unemployment among youths in the western area of Sierra Leone (Case study: Brookfields community, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

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Abstract

Sierra Leone post conflict economic, social and political rebuilding stem primarily from decades of economic mismanagement, widespread corruption. Inefficient state control over economic and political activity, lack of investment in critical social areas and a decade long civil war. Over the years Sierra Leone has been placed at the bottom of the United Nations Human development Index.

In June 2001, Government formulated the Interim Strategy Paper, the National Recovery Strategy (NRS) in October 2002 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in December 2005-2007, as a sectorial policy and institutional reform to achieve economic growth, providing food security, job opportunities, basic social services and effective social safety nets.

The government being the key stakeholder in an attempt to address the youth crises has accorded it a priority status on its agenda by creating a new ministry-Ministry of Youth Affairs, with a mandate for promoting the development of young people.

This study therefore examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Youths Employment Scheme (YES) programme implemented by the government as a youth welfare project through job creation in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA).

Keywords: youth, unemployment, labor, welfare

Introduction

The state of unemployment in Sierra Leone is a growing concern. The youth unemployment level in the country is amongst the highest in the sub region, standing at almost 50% of the total unemployment figure in 2008 (Ministry of Labor, 2008). This high unemployment figure especially on youths reveals only part of the challenge as youths in the sub region faces. High rate of inactivity, underemployment and poor working conditions with very long working hours and low wages and vast many are left to roam without any possibility to land a secured job.

The root of the problem is set in numerous factors, including skills mismatch, a growing supply of labour unmet by collective demand, political instability and difficult economic environments. In light of this, the link between development and security is propelling a range of stakeholders to consider youth unemployment key to stability and long term and sustained economic environment. Some of these conclusions have been drawn from lessons learnt the many impacts of problems of youth unemployment, especially that of youths in the country.

As a result, youth unemployment in Sierra Leone has been recognized as a potential trigger for social instability; the prolonged state of underdevelopment and economic stagnation. As has been indicated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report that came after the war, the problem of youth unemployment has been blamed as one of the leading factor in the prolongation of the ten (10) years rebel war, a conflict that left the country in virtual disarray and gross unemployment and underdevelopment.

Even though the country boasts of having a very youthful population with 45% of its entire population been youths and

63% of the total youth population within the employment age; the problem of access to secure jobs continue to be problematic and as such is reflective on the socio-economic and security factors in the country. In addition, the problem of economic global melt-down and its attendant impacts on the economy and Labour market which had succeeded to worsen the situation, the country was labeled by the United Nations Development Index as one of the world's poorest countries. Beyond economic costs, high rates of youth unemployment and underdevelopment have social ramifications. Some youths with few job prospects and little hope of future advancement may see little alternative to achievement to criminal activities or joining armed conflicts as was evident in the brutal rebel war in the 90s.

Youth unemployment in Sierra Leone exists in twofold; there are those known to have employable skills and those virtually have very little or no skills; with the latter in the majority owing to the high rate of illiteracy and trades knowledge acquisition in the country.

Government experts have warned that the growing unemployment rate among Sierra Leonean youths is likely to become a serious national security threat. They have advised that the menace should be tackled urgently before it is too late as they are a major catalyst for civil unrest in a country.

The effects of the youth strategy has yet to be seen, but one critique believes that in order to tackle youth unemployment, a nation-wide development plan needs to be established. The plan should include private sector development, infrastructure rehabilitation, public sector reform and decentralization of power.

The international community is carefully observing the way in which youth unemployment is being dealt with in the country.

Stabilization of the country depends on the youth. If job opportunities continue to be hard to obtain and politicized gangs are not curbed, Sierra Leone will find itself again in a civil unrest. However, if the efforts of the international

community and the youth strategies put in place in the country are successful, the peace and the future of the country remain positive.

Presentation and Interpretation of the Result

Table 1: Response REATE

Age	Sex				Total # of respondents	Total %
	MALE	%M	FEMALE	%F		
15-20	37	18.5	18	9.0	55	27.5
21-25	60	30	25	12.5	85	42.5
26-30	40	20	20	10	60	30
TOTAL	137	68.5%	63	31.5%	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

The table above shows that 68.5% of the unemployed youth interviewed were males while 31.5% are females. This shows that, in this study, there are more males unemployed than unemployed females.

Sixty males (60) of one hundred and thirty-seven (137) respondents within the age bracket 21-25 are males while twenty-five (25) are females. The age 21-25 received the highest percentage (42.5%) followed by age groups 26-30 which has 30% and 15-20 has 27.5%.

From the various age groups, more males are employed than their female counterpart. This is because the unemployed females are shy to disclose their unemployed status and prefer to remain silent. Indeed, men’s and women’s jobs differ greatly, whether across sectors, industries, occupations, types of jobs, or types of firms. While these differences evolve with economic development, the resulting changes in the structure of employment are not enough to eliminate employment segregation by gender. So, women all over the world appear to be concentrated in low-productivity jobs. They work in small farms and run small firms. They are overrepresented among unpaid family workers and in the informal sector. And they rarely rise to positions of power in the labor market.

Gender segregation in access to economic opportunities in turn reinforces gender differences in time use and in access to inputs, and perpetuates market and institutional failures. For instance, women are more likely than men to work in jobs that offer flexible working arrangements (such as part-time or informal jobs) so that they can combine work with care responsibilities. But because part-time and informal jobs often pay lower (hourly) wages than full-time and formal jobs, a high concentration of women in these lower-paying jobs weakens the incentives to participate in market work and thus reinforces the specialization in nonmarket (including care) and market work along gender lines within the household.

Table 2: Educational Levels

Educational level	No of respondents	Percentage %
No formal education	55	27.5
Primary level	85	42.5
Secondary level	35	17.5
Tertiary/ College & Tec voc.	25	12.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

From the above table, the majority of the unemployed youths have attained primary education, followed by those who have never gone to school or attained secondary, tertiary/college/Tec-voc. Education.

With 42.5% of the respondents interviewed had attained primary education, 27.5% received no education, and 17.5% completed secondary school education, while 12.5% received tertiary/college/technical vocational education.

The exorbitant cost of getting quality education in Sierra Leone is preventing many youths from continuing their education. They roam about the streets because they cannot get jobs. It is clear that the high level of unemployed youth in city can be due to individual, social, or economic factors.

Table 3: Reasons for Youth Unemployment

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percentage
Lack of skills/education	100	50
Dropped in business activities, change in taste and climatic condition	23	11.5
Unavailability of Jobs	25	12.5
Lack of interest	17	8.5
Geographical reasons	20	10
Cultural/Social factors	15	7.5
Totals	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

Half of the total unemployed youth interviewed disclosed that, their unemployment status is as a result of having no skills training or educations that will enable them obtain a job. With 11.5% attributed their status to drop in business activities, change in taste and climatic conditions, and 12.5% revealed that there are no jobs available for them because there are more jobs seekers with skills than the available job, while 8.5% said that they lack interest and do not want to work.

Youth unemployment is often highest amongst deprived areas where there is pessimism over job prospects. Youth unemployment is often higher among people who have history of broken families, drug use or criminal record. Youth unemployment is often focused in certain areas – usually inner cities where there is a cycle of low achievement and low expectations.

Well, education does matter—not because school preempts work, but because, quite straightforwardly, many jobs demand levels of education young people have not yet attained. The same goes for experience: older workers have had more time

to develop skills, which makes them more productive and more valuable to employers.

There’s another misconception lurking here. As young people have struggled with underemployment in the aftermath of the Great Recession, a conventional explanation is that they’ve been squeezed out by older workers who are delaying retirement longer than previous generations because of declines in their retirement portfolios. In some circles, this is known as the “boxed economy” proposition—the notion that more work by older people means less work for younger ones (Pianin 2014).

Table 4: Areas of Impacts

Areas	Respondents	Percentage %
Individual	134	67
Social	45	22.5
Social-Political	21	10.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

According to the table above, 67% attributed the burden of unemployment rests severely on the unemployed individual, because he/she bears the brunt as he/she is unable to earn money to meet his/her financial obligations which will result to low standard of living; homelessness, loss of self-esteem,

Table 6: Methods of Coping with Unemployment

Activities	Respondents	Percentage %
Begging/Assistance from friends	20	10
Assisting drivers at lorry parks	30	15
Pushing wooden carts (omolanke)	12	6
Narcotic drug peddling/petty trader	22	11
Prostitution/sexual worker	20	10
Gambling	61	30.5
Other methods	35	17.5
Totals	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

When you lose your job, not only is your usual source of income gone but also your personal work relationships, daily structures, and an important series of self-purpose. Unemployment can be, and often is, a shock to your whole system. You can experience some of the same feelings and stresses that you would if you were seriously injured, going through a divorce, or mourning the loss of a loved one.

To help you keep your stress level down, your confidence up, and your health and relationship strong, you should adopt strategies/methods to cope with your status. Reward yourself on regular basis for your efforts, keep busy, and stay active outside your home. Isolating yourself at home, will not get you a new job and can lead to additional mental and emotional stresses.

The result reveals that 30.5 % of the unemployed youths interviewed coped with unemployment through gambling, 17.5% got assistant from other sources which they did not reveal, 15% coped by assisting drivers at lorry parks, 11% through narcotic peddling, 10% through begging or assistant from friends/relatives, 10% through prostitution and 6% from pushing wooden carts.

susceptibility to malnutrition, illness, mental stress etc.

The table further revealed that 22.5% of the unemployed respondents directed the severity of the impact to rest on the society in which the individual lives. The variables that affect the society maybe loss of human capital, social problems like crime such as, stealing, raping, pick-pocketing, hooliganism, etc.

However, 10.5% shifted the severity of the impact to socio-political environment, such as civil unrest, loss of revenue, smuggling, fighting, etc.

Table 5: Job Seekers

Job Seeking	No of respondents	Percentage %
No	20	10
Yes	180	90
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

From the table above, 90% of the respondents are currently seeking job to enable them to earn money to meet their financial obligations and to maintain themselves and their families, to restore self-esteem or to replenish their status while 10% are not looking for job because, they are with the opinion that there are no jobs and preferred the present status than taking a job.

Table 7: Solutions to Youth Unemployment

Solution	No. of respondent	Percentage %
Education and skills training	95	47.5
Availability of jobs	50	25
Sensitisation of youth	21	10.5
Ban the use of drugs	34	17
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, June 2017

Much of the discussion on finding solution to the unemployment problem are centered on the pivotal role of rapid economy growth is viewed as a means of generating more jobs.

Societies have tried a number of different measures to get as many people as possible into the workforce, and most societies have experienced close to full employment for extended periods for combating the menace. The unemployed youths need to change their attitudes towards job seeking activities.

The data revealed that 45% of respondent recommended a need for youths to be educated and involve themselves in skills training activities to a level that will permit them to be

gainfully employed. The cost of education/skill training should be minimal in order to meet the cost, 30% of the unemployed youth lamented on the availability of jobs. They vehemently stated that the government should create jobs for them. 7% and 18% commented on the sensitization of the youths about their career development and abolition of harmful drugs and further stated that the consumption of harmful drugs must be banned.

Discussion on the impacts of youth unemployment.

The unemployment report is one of the reports closely watched by sober minded government, because it gives the clearer indication of the direction of the economy. A rising unemployment rate will be seen by economic analyst and opposition parties as a sign of a weakening economy.

On the other hand, a drop in the unemployment rate shows the economy is growing.

This section provides information on the severity of the impact of youth unemployment. The impact of unemployment on the youth is devastating. It has physical impact on them especially physical. They do not only look pale, but malnourished. They are always sick of one illness or the other, they cannot purchase quality food, rich in protein; they normally eat cheap food with less resistance to the most common illness around.

In addition, they resorted to the use of dangerous drugs to suppress their heightened level of frustration. The commonest drugs they misuse are alcohols, marijuana, heroin, cocaine and cigarette, etc, some of these drugs are expensive to get and the consumption of these drugs might influence them to indulge in other means of raising money to meet insatiable wants commitment of procuring these drugs; frustration, personality disorder and mental imbalance might create a psychological impact but the severity depends on how you resist or withstand the menace; some of the effects maybe so severe that the victim may end up in the mental home. In fact, some family members abandon them to their peril. Such youth are social menace to all the ready-made soldiers in time of social unrest. They can cause massive destruction during those movements. They were the fuels that inflamed the just concluded war.

Societies have tried a number of different measures to get as many people into work, and most societies have experienced close to full employment for extended periods. The Sierra Leonean Government has designed a youth policy to address youth problems such as unemployment and dissatisfactions. President Ernest Koroma had promised to setup a commission to tackle youth unemployment but at the present moment, it still does not exist. In fact, only 1.4 % of the Sierra Leone's 2010 annual budget was earmarked towards youth issues. The UN Peace Building Commission (PBC), in 2006, selected Sierra Leone as a recipient to its fund and specifically identified youth employment as a key issue towards peace. Although, the Government has downgraded Youth Employment on its priority list, thus seem to be signs of progress. A new government youth strategy and the establishment of the Youth Employment Secretariat (YES) supported by the United Nations development Programme (UNDP) has been setup. The youth strategy has 149 chiefdom youth committees to address youth concerns and co-ordinate employment issues. So far, three districts committees have been setup.

Conclusion

To increase production and sales, employers often seek workers that are more experienced. This limits the youth to a small portion of jobs. Due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge, employers do not want to spend money and time training them. But in other cases where firms accept inexperience, the pay tends to be very low, which doesn't attract them from working. The inexperienced youth pay rates range from \$5-\$10 per hour. But alarmingly, in part-time work the most employable age is between 15-19 years of age. The employers see them as less efficient and less valuable so their pay is legally less. In some circumstances you will find that companies employ allot of the youth population, thus they can cut back on their total amount of wages they owe and earn larger profits.

Combating youth unemployment is a particular and immediate objective, considering the unacceptably high number of young people who are unemployed. All efforts must be mobilized around the shared objective of getting young people who are not in education, employment or training back to work or into education or training within the shortest possible time.

Youth make the most significant part of the world population. They are the most active, diligent, creative, contributive, innovative and energetic people out there. They can prove more productive and constructive in any field of life. But the irony is that a large portion of them around the world are unemployed and they cannot find any suitable job according to their expertise. Youth Unemployment has been and increasing trend for many years not only in the developing countries but also in the developed ones.

Youth Unemployment is a very serious issue and it must be resolved as soon as possible. It requires collective efforts by all the institutions and concerned authorities. We can get rid of this problem by introducing "Career Counseling Centers" in all the areas of the country in order to guide, train and educate youth and create entrepreneurial skills. There should be more and more investment in industrialization by public-private investors in order to increase the employment opportunities, especially for the Youth. Government and NGOs must come forward to collaboratively take initiative for eradicating Youth Unemployment. Small and Medium Enterprises must be encouraged in the rural areas. Moreover, Microfinance can also help youngsters to setup their businesses on a small level. We must also utilize our local natural resources by engaging our youth in this prosperous sector which also needs creative ideas and proper exploitation and youth who can do better job in this regard.

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