

# Youth Unemployment and Its Effects on Societal Development in Nigeria: Challenges and Sustainable Solutions

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## Abstract

Nigeria's struggle with youth unemployment has intensified into one of the defining crises of the nation's development trajectory in the twenty-first century. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reveal that more than one in three Nigerians between 15 and 35 years of age cannot find work, and when underemployment is factored in, the combined rate climbs past 49 percent nationally. These figures translate into millions of young lives stalled at the threshold of productive adulthood a loss that carries consequences far beyond the individual. The economic output foregone, the taxes uncollected, and the human potential squandered represent a structural drag on the country's development that compounds with each passing year. This article provides a rigorous, evidence-grounded examination of the crisis its origins, its societal reverberations, and the pathways through which it can be durably resolved.

**Keywords:** Youth Unemployment, Nigeria, Societal Development, Skills Development, Public Policy

## 1. Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous nation in Africa, has a population exceeding 220 million, with more than 60 percent under the age of 35 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

This youthful demographic presents a significant opportunity for national development through innovation, productivity, and economic growth. However, this potential remains untapped. Youth unemployment in Nigeria has reached a structural crisis as opposed to a temporary downturn. It is important to note that in late 2023, the NBS overhauled its labour force survey methodology to align with ILO standards, resulting in significantly lower headline unemployment figures. Nonetheless, the NBS Labour Force Survey (2022) data, which reported a youth unemployment rate of 33.3 percent and rates surpassing 40 percent in some northern states, remains the most comprehensive dataset capturing the full scope of labour market exclusion. When underemployment is considered alongside unemployment, over 49 percent of young Nigerians are affected nationwide, and it is this combined indicator that most accurately reflects the depth of productive exclusion experienced by Nigerian youth.

The consequences of this crisis extend well beyond individual hardship. Youth unemployment undermines household financial stability, erodes community cohesion, and reduces trust in public institutions. It has been empirically linked to rising crime, extremist recruitment, and the mass emigration of skilled professionals a phenomenon popularly described in Nigeria as the "Japa phenomenon" (Ogu, 2020; UNDP, 2023). The 2020 EndSARS protests, which drew millions of young Nigerians into the streets, were largely a manifestation of the frustration felt by unemployed and underemployed youth who perceived the government as indifferent to their circumstances (Obafemi & Aworinde, 2022).

This article is organized into ten sections: definitional clarification, analysis of root causes, examination of societal effects, review of government programmes, comparative international lessons, a sustainable solutions framework, stakeholder roles, and policy recommendations. The goal is not simply to document a problem but to provide a credible, actionable framework for addressing it. Nigeria possesses the human capital and natural resources necessary to overcome this challenge. What is required is sustained institutional commitment and evidence-driven policy coordination.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks that together explain both the causes and consequences of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

**Human Capital Theory** (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) posits that individuals' productivity and employability are directly determined by their investment in education, skills, and training. Applied to the Nigerian context, this framework explains the persistent skills mismatch between graduate output and labour market demand: when educational institutions fail to equip young people with relevant, practical competencies, the human capital produced does not translate into employment. This theory underpins the article's emphasis on education reform, vocational training expansion, and alignment between curricula and industry needs.

**Structural Unemployment Theory** (Keynes, 1936; Phelps, 1968) attributes unemployment not to individual failure but to fundamental misalignments within the economic structure itself, including technological change, sectoral shifts, and the inability of labour markets to absorb available workers. Nigeria's unemployment crisis is prototypically structural: oil dependence, a weak private sector, rapid population growth, and inadequate infrastructure have created systemic barriers to job creation that individual effort alone cannot overcome. This framework informs the article's focus on macroeconomic reform, governance, and structural investment as necessary conditions for sustainable employment growth.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review and conceptual policy analysis design. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as relevant Nigerian government policy documents published between 2020 and 2026. Sources were selected based on their relevance to youth unemployment in Nigeria, methodological credibility, and recency. The study does not employ primary data collection; rather, it synthesises existing evidence to construct a coherent analytical and policy framework. Comparative case analysis of international experiences (Germany, South Korea, Rwanda, and Kenya) was incorporated to identify transferable models applicable to the Nigerian context.

### 4. Definitions and Context

#### 2.1 What Is Youth Unemployment?

For the purposes of this article, youth unemployment is understood as the state in which a young person who is both able and willing to work is unable to secure paid employment despite actively seeking it. The ILO conventionally places the youth age bracket between 15 and 24 years (ILO, 2023). Nigeria's NBS, however, applies a broader definition that extends to age 35, acknowledging the structural realities of the Nigerian economy, where prolonged educational pathways and delayed labour market entry are commonplace (NBS, 2022). This article adopts the NBS framework, as it more accurately captures the scope of exclusion experienced by Nigerian youth.

It is equally important to distinguish between full unemployment and underemployment. A person who is fully unemployed has no paid work at all. Underemployment, by contrast, describes a situation where a person is employed but in a role that fails to make meaningful use of their education or skills, or that does not provide sufficient hours or income to meet basic needs (ILO, 2023). In the Nigerian context, both forms of joblessness are pervasive, and both carry damaging economic and psychological consequences for those who experience them.

## 2.2 Scale of the Problem

Nigeria's youth unemployment challenge is among the most severe in sub-Saharan Africa. The NBS Labour Force Survey (2022) reported a combined youth unemployment and underemployment rate exceeding 49 percent nationally, meaning that approximately half of all economically active young Nigerians are either without work or engaged in work that does not reflect their capabilities. The problem is geographically uneven. States in the northwest and northeast record significantly higher rates than those in the southwest and southeast, reflecting structural differences in infrastructure, security, education quality, and private sector density. Table 1 below presents the regional distribution of this challenge.

**Table 1: Youth Unemployment Rate by Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria (2022 Estimates)**

| Geopolitical Zone | Unemployment Rate (%) | Underemployment Rate (%) | Combined Rate (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| North-West        | 45.3                  | 18.2                     | 63.5              |
| North-East        | 43.7                  | 19.1                     | 62.8              |
| North-Central     | 38.2                  | 15.4                     | 53.6              |
| South-West        | 28.5                  | 14.2                     | 42.7              |
| South-East        | 26.1                  | 13.8                     | 39.9              |
| South-South       | 29.8                  | 14.9                     | 44.7              |
| National Average  | 33.3                  | 15.9                     | 49.2              |

*Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2022.*

## 3. Root Causes of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

The scale and persistence of youth unemployment in Nigeria cannot be explained by any single variable. It is the product of several deep-rooted structural conditions that have developed over decades and now reinforce one another in ways that make superficial or short-term interventions ineffective. The following subsections examine each of these causes in turn.

### 3.1 Poor Quality of Education

One of the most significant contributors to youth unemployment in Nigeria is the persistent misalignment between what the education system produces and what the economy requires. Nigerian employers have repeatedly documented their frustration with graduates who enter the workforce lacking the practical competencies needed to function effectively including the ability to communicate professionally, apply analytical reasoning, manage projects independently, or

use contemporary digital tools (Adawo, 2021). This gap is not incidental; it reflects decades of underinvestment and curricular stagnation. Subjects that are increasingly central to modern economies digital literacy, entrepreneurial thinking, and data-informed problem-solving occupy marginal space in Nigerian school programmes. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET), which in many high-employment economies forms the backbone of the skilled workforce, remains chronically underfunded in Nigeria and is socially regarded as a secondary option rather than a valued pathway (AfDB, 2022).

### 3.2 Rapid Population Growth

Demographic pressure constitutes another critical driver of the unemployment crisis. Nigeria's population growth rate consistently outpaces the economy's ability to generate new employment. Each year, a large cohort of young people becomes eligible to work, yet the number of new positions created across all sectors falls far short of what is needed to absorb them. The United Nations projects Nigeria's population will surpass 400 million by 2050 (UNDP, 2023), which means this imbalance will intensify rather than resolve itself unless sweeping structural economic reforms are undertaken.

### 3.3 Weak Private Sector

In most industrialised economies, private enterprises are the primary generators of employment. Nigeria's private sector, however, operates under conditions that severely constrain its capacity to create and sustain jobs. Elevated borrowing costs make capital inaccessible for many businesses. The country's chronic electricity deficit raises operational costs and reduces competitiveness. Inadequate road and port infrastructure complicates supply chains. Layered on top of these are a regulatory environment characterised by excessive bureaucracy and unpredictable enforcement, all of which combine to inhibit business formation, growth, and the employment that would follow (World Bank, 2023).

### 3.4 Oil Economy Dependence

A structurally narrow economic base is another defining feature of Nigeria's employment challenge. Petroleum export revenues account for the overwhelming majority estimated at between 85 and 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange receipts (Nwosu & Ugochukwu, 2020). This concentration is problematic on two counts. First, the oil sector is capital-intensive and generates comparatively few direct jobs relative to its contribution to revenue. Second, it has crowded out the diversification and investment that labour-intensive sectors particularly agriculture, manufacturing, and services would need to expand and absorb the growing workforce.

### 3.5 Skills Mismatch

Nigeria faces a pronounced skills mismatch that sits at the intersection of educational output and labour market demand. While universities produce large numbers of graduates in fields where vacancies are limited including general arts, humanities, and social sciences there is an acute shortage of technically trained workers in areas where demand is robust: electrical and mechanical trades, software engineering, healthcare technology, construction, and plumbing, among others (Ukwueze, 2021). The consequence is a paradox in which graduate unemployment coexists with unfilled skilled vacancies, reflecting a fundamental misalignment between what the education system prioritises and what the productive economy actually needs.

### 3.6 Corruption and Weak Governance

The corrosive effect of corruption on Nigeria's employment landscape cannot be overstated. When public funds intended for infrastructure, education, or enterprise support are diverted through corrupt practices, the investments that would generate jobs never materialise. Beyond direct theft of resources, corruption distorts the business environment by introducing arbitrariness and unfairness that deter legitimate investment. Young Nigerians who lack political networks or financial means to navigate corrupt systems find themselves effectively excluded from public sector opportunities, government contracts, and support programmes (Adawo, 2021).

### 3.7 Insecurity

Armed conflict and widespread insecurity have compounded the unemployment crisis in several regions of Nigeria, most acutely in the northeast and parts of the northwest. Agricultural activity has been abandoned, commercial enterprises have closed, and schools have been shuttered in communities directly affected by violence. The resulting displacement of populations and collapse of local economic activity has eliminated large categories of employment in these areas and created pockets of extreme vulnerability (Ogu, 2020). Investors and businesses are reluctant to commit resources to insecure environments, prolonging the employment deficit in affected regions.

**Table 2: Summary of Root Causes and Their Primary Impact Areas**

| Root Cause              | Primary Impact Area                      | Severity Level |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Poor education quality  | Skills gap / Graduate unemployability    | Very High      |
| Rapid population growth | Demand-supply imbalance in labour market | Very High      |
| Weak private sector     | Limited job creation                     | High           |
| Oil economy dependence  | Narrow economic base                     | High           |

|                         |                                                 |                 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Skills mismatch         | Vacant skilled positions / unemployed graduates | High            |
| Corruption / governance | Reduced investment and fairness                 | Very High       |
| Insecurity              | Disrupted local economies                       | High (regional) |

*Source: Author's compilation based on NBS, World Bank, and ILO reports (2020–2024).*

## 4. Effects of Youth Unemployment on Societal Development

The consequences of mass youth unemployment ramify across every dimension of Nigerian society. They do not simply represent an economic inefficiency; they represent an active threat to the country's social stability, political legitimacy, and long-term development trajectory.

### 4.1 Deepening Poverty

When young people cannot find employment, they are unable to support themselves or their dependents. Many remain financially reliant on parents or other family members who are themselves economically strained. This inter-household dependency pushes households deeper into poverty and entrenches cycles of deprivation that are difficult to break. In a country where the poverty rate already exceeds 40 percent, youth unemployment represents a sustained aggravating factor (World Bank, 2023).

### 4.2 Rising Crime Rates

Research consistently establishes a statistical association between youth unemployment and elevated crime rates. Obafemi and Aworinde (2022) found a positive and significant correlation between youth joblessness and rates of armed robbery, kidnapping, and cybercrime in Nigeria. When young people lack income, purpose, and forward-looking aspirations, a proportion turn to criminal activity as a means of survival or economic advancement. Rising insecurity, in turn, discourages private investment and compounds the unemployment problem.

### 4.3 Extremism and Radicalization

Extremist organizations in Nigeria, including Boko Haram and other armed groups, have systematically recruited unemployed youth by offering financial incentives, social belonging, and a sense of purpose (Ogu, 2020). Addressing youth unemployment is therefore directly connected to the national security agenda. Communities in which young people have stable employment are empirically less susceptible to extremist recruitment.

### 4.4 Brain Drain

Nigeria is experiencing a significant and accelerating emigration of its most skilled and educated young people including doctors, engineers, software developers, and academics to Europe, North America, and other parts of Africa. This departure, commonly called the "Japa phenomenon,"

represents a serious depletion of the human capital that Nigeria needs for sustainable development (UNDP, 2023). The country bears the cost of training these individuals, only for other economies to capture the benefits of their labour.

#### 4.5 Weakened Social Cohesion

When large portions of a population are excluded from economic participation, trust in government and in social institutions declines. The 2020 EndSARS protests in Nigeria drew direct attention to the role of youth frustration rooted substantially in unemployment and economic exclusion in generating social unrest (Obafemi & Aworinde, 2022). Social cohesion, which underpins political stability and civic participation, is damaged when millions of young people believe the system has no place for them.

#### 4.6 Mental Health Consequences

Prolonged unemployment carries severe psychological costs. Depression, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and a generalized sense of hopelessness are documented outcomes of long-term joblessness among youth (ILO, 2023). In Nigeria, where mental health services remain severely underfunded and social stigma around mental illness persists, these conditions frequently go undiagnosed and untreated.

#### 4.7 Suppressed Economic Growth

Every unemployed young person represents a net loss to the Nigerian economy in terms of foregone output, uncollected taxes, and unrealized consumer demand. When millions of young people are economically inactive, the aggregate demand for goods and services contracts, reducing the incentive for businesses to invest, hire, and expand. This creates a self-reinforcing downward cycle in which unemployment suppresses growth and limited growth perpetuates unemployment (World Bank, 2023).

**Table 3: Key Effects of Youth Unemployment on Societal Development**

| Area of Impact | Effect Description                        | Observable Outcome in Nigeria              |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Economic       | Loss of productivity, reduced tax revenue | GDP growth persistently below 3% per year  |
| Security       | Increased crime and radicalisation        | High robbery, kidnapping, insurgency rates |
| Social         | Family stress, social unrest, protests    | EndSARS, street crime, family breakdown    |
| Political      | Erosion of trust in government            | Low civic engagement, protests             |
| Health         | Mental illness, substance abuse           | Rising depression and anxiety among youth  |

|               |                                |                                           |
|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Human Capital | Brain drain to other countries | Loss of professionals via Japa phenomenon |
| Community     | Weakened social ties           | Breakdown of community support networks   |

*Source: Author's compilation based on NBS reports, World Bank Nigeria Economic Update (2023), and peer-reviewed literature.*

## 5. Current Government Response: Programmes and Gaps

Over the past two decades, successive Nigerian administrations have introduced a range of initiatives aimed at reducing youth unemployment and supporting economic inclusion. These efforts signal a degree of institutional recognition of the problem. However, their collective impact on aggregate unemployment figures has been modest at best, pointing to persistent design and implementation failures that must be addressed before any new programme can succeed.

### 5.1 Existing Programmes

Among the federal government's flagship interventions is the N-Power programme, which provides fixed-term stipended work experience to unemployed graduates across public institutions. However, it is important to note that between 2023 and 2026, the programme experienced significant disruptions, including high-profile payment backlogs, suspension of new enrolment cycles, and corruption investigations that raised serious questions about the integrity of beneficiary selection and fund disbursement. The Social Investment Programme similarly faced restructuring amid allegations of mismanagement. The YouWIN initiative has supported thousands of young entrepreneurs through competitive grant awards. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) maintains a network of skills acquisition centres in most states, while the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) provides micro-credit to petty traders and young entrepreneurs. The Renewed Hope Initiative, launched in 2023, articulates broader ambitions around job creation, housing, and social protection under the current administration, though its implementation record remains at an early stage and independent evaluation of outcomes is yet to be comprehensively conducted.

### 5.2 Persistent Gaps and Weaknesses

Notwithstanding these initiatives, Nigeria's youth unemployment figures have shown no sustained downward trend. A close examination of the programmes reveals recurring structural weaknesses. The vast majority are time-bound rather than permanent, meaning that when funding cycles conclude, participants revert to unemployment. Programme administration is frequently compromised by corruption and patronage, so that beneficiaries are not always those most in need. Rigorous independent evaluation is rare, leaving policymakers without reliable data on what is and is not working. Federal, state, and local government schemes frequently operate in isolation from each other, producing duplication and inefficiency. Geographic coverage skews heavily toward urban centres, leaving rural youth with minimal support. Most fundamentally, the programmes collectively reach only a small fraction of the unemployed youth

population pointing to the need for a transformative structural strategy rather than incremental programming.

## **6. Lessons from International Experience**

Several countries have achieved significant reductions in youth unemployment through deliberate, well-funded, and sustained policy interventions. Examining these cases provides Nigeria with concrete models that can be adapted to its specific conditions.

### **6.1 Germany: The Dual Vocational Education and Training System**

Germany has one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the European Union, recorded at 5.7 percent (Germany Trade and Invest [GTAI], 2021). A central pillar of this achievement is its dual system of Vocational Education and Training (VET), in which students alternate between classroom instruction and practical workplace apprenticeships. The system covers approximately 325 recognized occupations, and around half of all school leavers participate in it (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training [BIBB], 2023). Critically, around 74 percent of apprentices are offered employment contracts by their training firms upon completion (GTAI, 2021). Nigeria could adapt this model by mandating workplace-based training components in all degree and diploma programmes and incentivizing companies to participate through tax relief.

### **6.2 South Korea: Strategic Investment in Technology and Human Capital**

South Korea transformed from a low-income economy in the 1960s to a high-income, technology-driven nation within three decades through strategic state investment in education, export industries, and technological innovation. The government coordinated closely with the private sector to identify priority industries and direct skills training accordingly (ILO, 2023). Nigeria could pursue a comparable approach by designating and investing in sectors where it holds competitive advantages, including technology, agriculture, renewable energy, and entertainment.

### **6.3 Rwanda: Governance Reform and Business Climate Improvement**

Rwanda has earned international recognition for its governance reforms and improvements to the business environment. It ranks among the top performers in Africa on the World Bank's Business Ready (B-READY) index, having streamlined business registration, strengthened contract enforcement, and digitized public services (Rwanda Development Board [RDB], 2024). Between 2017 and 2024, the World Bank-supported Rwanda Priority Skills for Growth Programme trained nearly 24,000 youth and achieved a 90 percent employment rate among graduates (World Bank, 2026). Nigeria can extract important lessons from Rwanda's combination of governance reform and market-responsive skills development.

## 6.4 Kenya: Digital Economy and Youth Digital Employment

Kenya's investment in digital infrastructure and youth digital skills has created substantial employment opportunities for young Kenyans. The Jitume Digital Enablement Programme, implemented through Konza Technopolis and the Ministry of ICT, deployed digital skills labs across all 47 counties and benefited over 70,000 young people within its first year of operation (Konza Technopolis Development Authority [KoTDA], 2023). The Ajira Digital Initiative separately trained over 92,000 youth, with more than 1.2 million engaged in online work opportunities (Daily Nation, 2026). Nigeria, with its already vibrant technology ecosystem centred in Lagos and other cities, is well-positioned to pursue a comparable digital employment strategy.

**Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Youth Employment Strategies**

| Country     | Key Strategy                                | Result Achieved                                 | Applicability to Nigeria |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Germany     | Dual VET / apprenticeship system            | Youth unemployment below 6%                     | High                     |
| South Korea | Technology investment and export industries | Rapid economic transformation                   | High                     |
| Rwanda      | Governance reform, ease of business, skills | 90% graduate employment rate (skills programme) | Medium-High              |
| Kenya       | Digital economy and youth digital skills    | 70,000+ youth trained; 1.2M in online work      | High                     |

Source: World Bank Global Employment Trends for Youth (2023); ILO Country Reports; BIBB (2023); RDB (2024); KoTDA (2023).

## 7. Sustainable Solution

Addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria at the scale required demands a multi-level, coordinated strategy across education, private sector development, infrastructure, governance, and community support. No single intervention is sufficient. The following framework identifies the most critical solution areas.

### 7.1 Reform the Education System

The Nigerian government, in collaboration with industry and universities, should redesign school curricula to reflect the competencies demanded by the contemporary economy. Digital literacy, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, communication, and data skills should be integrated as core requirements across all levels of education. All undergraduate programmes should be required to include a minimum of one semester of supervised workplace training, with tax incentives offered to firms that host student interns (AfDB, 2022). TVET should be accorded equal status and funding to university education.

## 7.2 Expand Vocational and Technical Training

Nigeria needs a substantially larger pool of trained artisans, technicians, and skilled workers. The government should build and adequately fund vocational training centres in every local government area, offering free or subsidised training in high-demand trades, including electrical work, plumbing, solar installation, software development, welding, and construction. Graduates of these programmes should receive nationally recognised certifications that employers accept. International development partners, including the World Bank and the AfDB, should be engaged to help finance this expansion (AfDB, 2022).

Critically, any vocational training framework for Nigeria must be designed with the informal economy at its centre. The informal sector accounts for over 80 percent of total employment in Nigeria (ILO, 2023), and solutions that assume a structured corporate labour market will fail to reach the majority of working-age youth. Nigeria already possesses a rich indigenous apprenticeship tradition, most notably the *Igba-Boi* system practised predominantly among the Igbo, in which young people are placed under the mentorship of established master craftsmen or traders for a defined period, after which they are equipped and supported to establish their own enterprises. This indigenous model has proven highly effective at transmitting practical skills, building social capital, and facilitating economic independence. Formalising and scaling such systems, providing registered participants with government certification, access to credit, and market linkages, would extend vocational training into the informal economy in a culturally resonant and cost-effective manner.

## 7.3 Support Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

Employment creation does not require young people to find jobs in existing companies; it also requires enabling them to create enterprises of their own. The government should simplify business registration, reduce start-up costs for young entrepreneurs, and provide access to affordable credit through development banks. Mentoring networks, market access support, and business development services should be made available nationally, with dedicated attention to young women and rural youth (Ukwueze, 2021).

## 7.4 Invest in Infrastructure

Reliable electricity, road connectivity, internet access, and efficient logistics are foundational prerequisites for private sector growth and job creation. Every naira invested in infrastructure yields multiplier effects in private investment and employment. The government must prioritize infrastructure spending in areas that directly support industries with the highest job-creation potential (World Bank, 2023).

## 7.5 Promote Agriculture and Agribusiness

Nigeria possesses some of the most fertile agricultural land in Africa, yet continues to import large quantities of food annually. Developing the full agricultural value chain from production

and processing to packaging and distribution offers the potential to generate millions of employment opportunities for young Nigerians. Young farmers should be provided with improved access to land, credit, inputs, and markets (Yusuf, 2021). Agricultural extension services should be expanded to deliver technical support to young agribusiness participants.

## 7.6 Build the Digital Economy

The technology sector offers some of the fastest-growing employment opportunities globally. Nigeria already possesses a vibrant technology startup ecosystem centred in Lagos and other urban centres. The government should invest in digital infrastructure, establish coding and technology training programmes modelled on the Kenyan experience, and create regulatory frameworks that support technology enterprises. Connecting Nigerian digital talent to global remote work markets can provide immediate employment pathways for large numbers of young people (UNDP, 2023).

## 7.7 Address Corruption and Strengthen Governance

No employment strategy will achieve its objectives if corruption continues to divert public resources and deter investment. Anti-corruption institutions must be strengthened, accountability laws must be enforced, and government employment programmes must be transparently monitored and independently evaluated. Public reporting on programme outcomes should be mandatory and accessible (Adawo, 2021).

## 7.8 Invest in Mental Health and Youth Support Services

Supporting unemployed youth must encompass their psychological and emotional well-being. Community-based mental health services, career counselling, and youth support centres should be established and funded. These services help young people to sustain motivation, make better decisions about their futures, and weather the psychological costs of prolonged unemployment (ILO, 2023).

**Table 5: Sustainable Solutions Framework for Youth Unemployment in Nigeria**

| <b>Solution Area</b> | <b>Specific Action</b>                                              | <b>Lead Actor</b>             | <b>Expected Timeframe</b> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Education Reform     | Redesign curricula for market relevance; mandate workplace training | Federal Ministry of Education | Short to Medium Term      |
| Vocational Training  | Build and fund VTCs in every LGA                                    | State / Federal Government    | Medium Term               |
| Entrepreneurship     | Simplify registration; provide grants and credit                    | CAC / Development Banks       | Short Term                |
| Infrastructure       | Invest in power, roads, and broadband                               | Federal / State Governments   | Long Term                 |

|                 |                                                                 |                                         |                      |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Agriculture     | Support youth agribusiness value chains                         | Ministry of Agriculture / CBN           | Medium Term          |
| Digital Economy | Expand tech training; enable remote work access                 | Min. of Communications / Private Sector | Short to Medium Term |
| Governance      | Strengthen anti-corruption enforcement and programme evaluation | EFCC / ICPC / Legislature               | Ongoing              |
| Mental Health   | Establish youth counselling and support centres                 | Min. of Health / NGOs                   | Short Term           |

*Source: Author's framework drawing on ILO, World Bank, AfDB, and Nigerian policy documents (2020–2026).*

## 8. The Role of Key Stakeholders

Tackling youth unemployment at the scale Nigeria requires cannot be the work of government alone. The problem is too large, too deeply rooted, and too multi-dimensional for any single institution to resolve. Lasting progress will depend on meaningful contributions from a range of actors, each bringing distinct capacities and responsibilities to the effort.

### 8.1 Federal and State Governments

At the federal and state levels, governments carry the primary obligation to create the enabling conditions for employment growth. This means making and sustaining the policy commitments outlined in Section 7 including education reform, infrastructure investment, anti-corruption enforcement, and programme funding. It also demands that federal and state administrations move beyond parallel or competing agendas toward genuine intergovernmental coordination, so that national strategies are translated into coherent action at the local level where young people actually live.

### 8.2 The Private Sector

The private sector occupies an indispensable position in any credible employment strategy. Beyond its direct role as the primary creator of jobs in a well-functioning economy, Nigerian business has a broader responsibility to invest in the workforce it will depend upon. This means developing apprenticeship and internship programmes, working alongside universities to shape practically-oriented curricula, and creating structured entry-level pathways for young graduates. The government, in turn, should offer meaningful tax incentives to companies that demonstrably invest in youth training and employment.

### 8.3 Universities and Educational Institutions

Higher education institutions must fundamentally reconsider their role and purpose. The production of paper qualifications in isolation from labour market relevance is no longer a viable model. Universities need to build sustained relationships with industry, make experiential learning a non-negotiable component of every degree programme, and orient research activity

toward the economic and developmental challenges facing Nigeria. The individual lecturer through the quality of instruction, mentorship, and career guidance provided is a frontline actor in preparing young Nigerians for productive working lives.

#### 8.4 Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations

Civil society organisations and NGOs bring both proximity to communities and operational flexibility that formal government structures often lack. They are frequently the first point of contact for marginalised youth who have been bypassed by mainstream programmes. Through direct service provision including vocational training, business mentoring, psychological support, and civic education these organisations extend the reach of the employment support system. Equally important is their function as independent monitors of government performance, holding programmes accountable to the public interest.

#### 8.5 Young People Themselves

Although structural reforms are indispensable, the agency of young Nigerians themselves cannot be overlooked. The willingness to pursue vocational training, explore non-traditional career pathways, embrace technology, and approach entrepreneurship as a viable livelihood strategy will determine how effectively young people convert expanded opportunities into real outcomes. Shifting deeply ingrained cultural attitudes particularly the undervaluation of skilled trades and the overemphasis on white-collar employment is part of the cultural transformation that must accompany structural reform.

#### 8.6 International Development Partners

Multilateral institutions and bilateral development partners bring resources, technical knowledge, and global experience that can meaningfully accelerate Nigeria's efforts. The World Bank, the African Development Bank, ILO, UNDP, and others have demonstrated in Rwanda, Kenya, and elsewhere what well-designed skills and employment programmes can achieve when properly funded and rigorously implemented. Their engagement in Nigeria should be calibrated to build domestic institutional capacity, strengthen local systems, and generate lasting self-sufficiency rather than dependence on external support.

### 9. Policy Recommendation

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following specific recommendations are offered:

1. The Federal Government should commit to allocating at least 26 percent of the annual national budget to education, consistent with the UNESCO benchmark, with a substantial portion of that allocation directed specifically toward vocational and technical training (AfDB, 2022).

2. The National Universities Commission should mandate that every degree programme in Nigeria incorporate a minimum of six months of supervised workplace training.
3. The Corporate Affairs Commission should reduce business registration for first-time founders under the age of 35 to a single business day and waive registration fees.
4. State governments should establish at least one fully equipped vocational training centre per local government area, with free enrolment for unemployed youth.
5. The Central Bank of Nigeria should expand youth-targeted credit programmes with single-digit interest rates and dedicated provisions for women and those from underserved communities.
6. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture should create a structured national youth agribusiness programme providing land access, training, input subsidies, and guaranteed off-take agreements for young farmers (Yusuf, 2021).
7. Independent monitoring committees comprising civil society representatives, academics, and private sector participants should evaluate all government youth employment programmes annually and publish their findings publicly.
8. Anti-corruption enforcement should be intensified, with a focus on recovering and redirecting misappropriated funds toward verified developmental programmes.
9. The government should invest in national broadband infrastructure to connect rural and semi-urban communities to the digital economy, creating pathways for remote work and e-commerce (UNDP, 2023).
10. Universities and research institutions should establish dedicated centres for labour market research, producing regular, publicly available evidence to guide youth employment policymaking.

## 10. Conclusion

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is a complex, deep-rooted, and costly problem. It has grown from a manageable economic challenge into a structural crisis that threatens the country's stability, cohesion, and developmental prospects. The causes are multiple and mutually reinforcing: a weakened education system, rapid population growth, a fragile private sector, dependence on oil, inadequate governance, and persistent insecurity. The consequences are equally grave, spanning poverty, crime, social unrest, the depletion of skilled human capital, and suppressed economic growth.

This article has argued that the problem is nevertheless tractable. Countries with broadly comparable challenges Germany, South Korea, Rwanda, and Kenya have demonstrated that sustained, well-designed, and politically committed policies can produce substantial reductions in youth unemployment. Nigeria possesses vast human potential, fertile agricultural land, a

growing technology sector, and an entrepreneurial culture. What has been lacking is the institutional coherence and policy discipline needed to channel these assets productively.

The solutions proposed in this article are neither quick nor cheap. They require investment in education and training, structural support for entrepreneurship, serious and sustained governance reform, and genuine partnerships between government, the private sector, universities, and civil society. None of these solutions can succeed in isolation. All of them require sustained effort across electoral cycles and administrative changes.

Lecturers, academics, and educational institutions occupy a uniquely influential position in this process. By equipping young Nigerians with relevant skills, instilling in them a commitment to agency and social responsibility, and generating the research that informs better policy, educators contribute directly and materially to the solution. The classroom remains one of the most powerful instruments available for building the foundations of a more equitable and productive Nigeria.

The urgency of this challenge cannot be overstated. Each year of inaction deepens the crisis and makes it harder to reverse. Nigeria's young people deserve a government, an economy, and a society that give them a genuine opportunity to build their futures. The evidence, the frameworks, and the international models presented in this article provide a credible foundation for action. The time to act is now.

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