

# Poverty Alleviation Programs in Nigeria: A Study of Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) Under Jonathan Administration, 2011-2015

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**Abstract:** *Poverty is one of the forces militating against the social and economic development of Nigeria. The level of poverty in Nigeria is astronomically high and politically embarrassing considering the enormous human and material resources the country is endowed with and despite the huge resources successive governments have committed to alleviate and or eradicate poverty, it seems no success has been achieved. While so many attempts have been made by different governments to engage its teeming unemployed youths in public and private services, the Youth enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) was yet another employment generation strategy of the government but this time with the aim of igniting entrepreneurship potentials of the Nigerian youth population to enable them create job for themselves. This study attempts to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this laudable initiative of the Jonathan administration in order to find out if the program succeeded in achieving its major objective to create 80,000-110,000 jobs for the unemployed Nigerian youths ages 18-45 years. The method of study adopted by the study was historical/descriptive research while incrementalist theory was its analytic framework. The study discovered that the YOUWĪN program though noble and pragmatic did not succeed in achieving its major objective at the expiration of the Jonathan regime in 2015 because of near absence of infrastructural facilities that should have aided the achievement of long term objectives of the policy. The policy was also found to be politically overpromising and elitist in nature. However, it was discovered that the program satisfactorily trained 18,000 youth entrepreneurs age 18-45 years far above its promised number of 6,000 which was quite impressive. The study therefore, recommends that government should first of all fix the country's social infrastructure and ensure that future programs of poverty alleviation like YOUWĪN are well designed, evaluated and monitored before they are implemented in order to achieve their objective for national development.*

**Keywords:** Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, youth empowerment, entrepreneurship and YOUWĪN.

## Introduction

Poverty and poverty alleviation in Nigeria is one of the most difficult challenges facing Nigeria today, poverty is deep and pervasive in Nigeria, 70 percent of its population are living in absolute poverty, (Soludo, 2005).

However, poverty and poverty alleviation is not only a Nigerian phenomenon, poverty is a global phenomenon. It affects citizens of different countries and continents with varying degrees of responses by their leadership. It is today a globalized concept because of the threat it poses to world security and peace. Poverty indeed has become a major concern for development experts and international donor agencies. As a result of its persistence and aggravation in spite of programs designed to alleviate it by different countries of the world, the United Nations became concerned about this monster ravaging most people of the world. This is because it poses a serious challenge to humankind.

Though, poverty alleviation programs seem to be producing results elsewhere, the same cannot be said of Nigeria. The state of poverty in Nigeria made the World Bank in (1996) to describe her as a paradox. According to the World Bank, Nigeria possesses the human and material resources to make her one of the richest States in Africa and a major actor in global economy but she is lagging behind. This is precisely because Nigeria is the world's sixth largest oil producer, a member of the powerful organization of petroleum exporting countries (OPEC), and has highly valued sources of energy, especially a global reserve of oil and gas. She is the largest producer of oil in Africa, producing about an average of 2.3 million barrels a day of crude oil for export and domestic uses.

From 1999 to 2011, the country netted nearly \$300 billion in oil and gas alone. But despite this oil revenue, Nigeria is currently ranked among the poorest countries in the world (World Bank 2010). Available records from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that poverty level among its population has risen from 17.1 million in 1980 to 112.47 million in 2010, representing an increase of over 55.7% (NBS, 2010). Paradoxically, vast majority of Nigerians are as of today living in abject poverty despite all the oil and gas revenues accruing to its treasury. Nigeria has the third highest number of poor people in the world after China and India. Approximately, 54.4% of the country's population live on less than one dollar (US & 1) a day.

Development Assistance Committee, 2001 and Nwaobi (2003), opined that the recognition of poverty as a common denominator in the global Community, and complementing efforts by poor countries to alleviate poverty is quite fundamental one. African leaders were not left out in presenting a united front in the fight against poverty; hence, the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as a framework for African leaders to alleviate poverty. In the year 2000, 192

countries of the world gathered under the auspices of the United Nations and planned a strategy to free people of the world from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations. This pledge came to be known as the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) with eight major goals: (1) To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2) Achieve Universal Basic Education (3) Promote gender equality (4) Reduce child mortality (5) Improve maternity health (6) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases (7) Ensure environmental sustainability (8) Develop a global partnership for development (MDGS and ANIDS, Anambra state, 2008).

In recognition of the role of poverty as a clog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria, successive governments in Nigeria were committed to alleviate poverty in the country. The strategies that have been adopted to alleviate and or eradicate poverty include: National accelerated food production programs 1972, Operation Feed the Nation 1976, this was set up with the aim to teach rural farmers how to use modern farming tools, Green Revolution Program, 1979, this was aimed at reducing food importation and increase local food production, Directorate of food, roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI), 1986, the aim was to improve food production through enhanced rural infrastructure, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), 1989, aimed at creating employment for the youths generally, Better Life for Rural Women 1989, aimed at improving the life of poor rural women, Family Economic and Empowerment Program and family Support Program (FSP), 1993, National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), 2001, this was primarily to replace previously failed poverty alleviation programs by reducing absolute poverty, with goals of training youths iii vocational trades as well as creating employments (Mbah and Obiora 2015: 134-135) and Wohlmuth, Alabi nd Burger (2008). The Yaradua administration continued with NAPEP, while the Jonathan administration implemented the YOUWĪN, program and currently the Buhari administration is implementing its pet program on youth unemployment and poverty alleviation tagged N-Power.

The Yaradua administration outside from continuing with NAPEP program inherited from the Obasanjo administration went ahead to introduce the famous amnesty program in the Niger-Delta region, which saw unemployed irate youths being granted state pardon and given various kinds of formal education including skills acquisition training to render them useful both to themselves and to their communities but all to no avail.

Following the inadequacies and failure of previous attempts at addressing the unemployment situation especially among the youth population, former president Goodluck Jonathan administration launched the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) initiative with the intent that it will create 80,000-1 10,000 jobs with great multiplier effects to Nigeria ages 18-45 years. But at the end of the day, this laudable initiative went the same way other previous poverty alleviation programs of his predecessors were abandoned or failed. The Buhari regime that took over power from Jonathan administration terminated the life of YOUWĪN, program and introduced the N-Power for youth empowerment of ages 18-35 years.

The major task of this study is therefore, a postmortem of YOUWĪN program under Jonathan administration to determine the success or otherwise of this entrepreneurship program.

### **The Problematic**

But before elimination of the program by the Buhari regime, Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN), it would be recalled that YOUWĪN was a national business plan competition run by the Nigerian government to encourage enterprise, help grow small business and create jobs. A panel of judges assesses the business ideas received from government website to find the most promising and those applicants are trained to prepare a business plan. The panel will judge which business plan is most likely to succeed and the best receive grants of, \$1,200 each a year, to help them grow.

It was confirmed by the ministry of finance that 18, 000 young entrepreneurs' ages 18-45 years were trained in various aspects of small and medium enterprises management and skills, 3,900, including 1,200 women were each given non repayable take off grants for businesses of their choice ranging from #1 million up to a maximum of #10 million.

At the end of the Jonathan administration in 2015,26, 000 jobs were generated by YOUWĪN program (YOUWĪN platform 2013).

The contributions of YOUWĪN in reducing youth unemployment notwithstanding, the current Buhari administration eliminated it, it therefore did not solve the problem of vigorously confronting youth unemployment ages 18-45 by generating 80,000-110, 000 jobs which was its major objectives.

However, the other objective of training 6000 business entrepreneurs of youths ages 18-45 years, succeeded in getting 18,000 youth entrepreneurs trained in different business skills. But today, over 26 million Nigerian youths ages 18-45 years are still unemployed (The Economist 2013: 1118).

This study is therefore an attempt to find out the impact of the program under Jonathan administration in youth employment by assessing its success or otherwise.

### **Conceptualizing Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Youth Unemployment and Entrepreneurship**

A lot has been written about Youth Empowerment and poverty alleviation strategies with the final aim of achieving national development in Nigeria to the extent that this paper cannot afford conceptualizing all of them. Again, the concern for poverty is as old as society itself. Scholars from different schools of thought and intellectual strands have written based on their own thinking and

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intellectual orientation concerning the social problem of poverty and poverty alleviation schemes world over, from the classical writers through the liberal and then the neo-Marxist scholars as well as politicians and policy makers of different ideological leanings. Poverty reduction and national development have been addressed, but continues to receive attention because of the problems it poses to the society generally and the political system in particular.

### **Concept of Poverty**

The concept of poverty can be viewed from two broad perspectives: relative poverty and absolute (Webster, 1993; Rocha 1998; World Bank, 2000 and Adawo, 2011) linked poverty with situations where people are experiencing outcomes that deviates from their expectations. They further opine that absolute poverty is a misery linked to an insufficient resource base, lack of income, narrow margin, high risk of failure, hunger, disease etc.

In an attempt to give a concise definition of the term poverty, Watt (2000) opines that poverty is a state of being in which we are unable to meet our needs while Adeleke (2012) poverty refers to lack of basic resources, lack of political power, personal and physical deprivation and other socio-economic deprivations. Still on the meaning of poverty, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) (1995), states that poverty is often described as a state or condition of living in which people have little or no money, assets or means of support. On another scale Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus (1997) wrote that poverty is a plague affecting people all over the world, it is dehumanizing by its very nature, it is the condition that denies individuals the rights to exercise their full potentials.

But the most common definition of poverty is a condition where people are below a specific minimum level of income that is an imaginary international poverty line. It is determined by the ability to afford an adequate diet and other minimal necessities (World Bank, 1990). The poverty line knows no national boundary, it exists in Nigeria, Calcutta, Jakarta, Cairo, and even in New York. However, the World Bank (1995) has stated that in Nigeria poverty was found to be a rural phenomenon with 8.4 million of the 10 million extreme poor people being from rural areas. The World Bank further in (2003) revealed that 65% of the population in sub-Sahara Africa still lived under \$1.25 per a day while Weil (2009) notes that more than 1 billion people worldwide survive on the income of less than \$ 1 per day of which significant population are in Africa.

Bowden (2002:4) contends that poverty is measured by comparing peoples income. Peoples whose income is too low to meet basic needs such as food and shelter or health and education are said to be poor, this low level of income is called "poverty line".

Jeroh and Obi (2015:113) see poverty in its cause and manifestation as a multi-dimensional concept usually experienced by the poor and observed by the rich. According to them, this is why discourse and definitions of poverty are multifarious and highly extensive.

For them, the concept of poverty is relative to the life situations of people and a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation.

As a result therefore, they posit that poverty can be viewed from four dimensions: (a) lack of basic resources, (b) lack of power, (c) personal and physical deprivation, (d) socio-political deprivation. Accordingly, they argue that poverty as a concept hinges on three core issues empowerment, opportunity and security. This is because according to them, opportunity comes as a result of empowerment, thereby guaranteeing enhancement of security of lives and properties.

In conceptualizing poverty Alao (2017:141-142) defined poverty as simply "the condition or quality of being poor, unproductiveness, deficiency or inadequate supply of something. He argues that despite the multi-dimensional approach to the concept of poverty, one common theme is the lack of command of resources to meet essential needs.

Equally, he argues that poverty perception varies from one clime to the other and according to culture, population and subgroups such as a religion of residence or sector of employment. Hence, he states that the African perception of poverty for instance, vary from that of Europeans or North Americans. He submits that this notion has given rise to class system in different societies.

After all said and done, there are three dominant conceptual views of poverty. The first view sees poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. The second view defines poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities, such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possessing skills to participate in economic and social life etc. while the third conceptualization of poverty came into lime light in the 1990s upwards. The core of this view of poverty is that poverty must be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in. this is otherwise known as the voices of the poor approach (chambers).

### **The Concept of Poverty Alleviation**

Alleviation generally means to make pain or difficulty less severe, from the socialist point of view, poverty can only be alleviated through complete overthrow of the capitalist system. But for the capitalist system and the mixed economy ideology frameworks poverty cannot be completely wiped out but can be alleviated through a number of measures. Okeke (2001: 15) contends that individuals, groups or governmental organizations adopt from time to time a number of measures in an attempt to avoid falling into the poverty trap set by challenging socio-economic conditions. According to him, this can be through institutional framework of poverty alleviation like social security benefits through non-formal financial institutions among others.

While (Ejiofor, 2018:5), defines poverty alleviation as a set of measures both economic and humanitarian that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty.

Alao (2017:157), notes that the United Nations target of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is to half between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. He equally listed other inter-governmental interventions towards poverty alleviation to include: the new partnership for African Economic Development (NEPAD), The Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) among others. The United Nations Millennium development goals of solving unemployment as a way of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in the World are to "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people". According to Alao (p.158), poverty, unemployment and inequality have been identified as the major challenges to developing economies.

There are different approaches in dealing with poverty alleviation generally. (Ejiofor, 2018:20-22), identifies about four approaches —, Economic growth approach, basic needs approach, rural development approach and target approach. She states that in the economic growth is usually encouraged as a result of low labour absorptive capacity. That this approach focuses on capital formation as it relates to capital stock and human capital. That to ensure growth that takes care of poverty, the share of human capital as a source of growth in output has to be accorded the rightful place. While the basic needs approach calls for the provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, healthcare, basic education and transportation among others.

In the rural development approach, she states that this approach sees the rural sector as a unique sector in terms of poverty reduction. This is because majority of the poor in developing countries are living in the rural areas. Also, she argues that the level of paid employment in this area is very low. She notes that emphasis in this approach to poverty alleviation has focused on the integrated rural development modeling. Equally, she opines that the approach recognizes a multi-dimensional approach.

Finally, the target approach favours the directing of poverty alleviation programs at specific groups within the country e.g. the youth, women etc.

### **The Concept of Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment generally is taken to mean a state of joblessness. But Fajana (2000), refers to unemployment as a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find a suitable paid employment.

But Fairchild (2013) notes that unemployment is forced and voluntary separation from remunerative work on the part of the normal working force during the normal working time at normal wages and under normal working condition. While the Central Bank of Nigeria in Gbosi (2005), defined unemployment rate as the percentage of persons among the labour force (15-65 years), excluding students and those medically unfit available for work, but did not work. From the fore-going it can be seen that the Youths YOUWİN had in mind ages 18-45 are mainly within this bracket defined by the Central Bank of Nigeria. The Youths constitute more than forty percent of the over 140 million total population of Nigeria. They are the worst hit in the unemployment problem in Nigeria today. To buttress this obvious fact further the National Bureau of statistics (NBS), in (Ajufo, 2013) notes that young people aged between 25 and 44 years account for 94% of the total unemployed persons in Nigeria.

Youths, particularly in Nigeria, are the driving force for economic development. This is because they possess the potentials which if properly harnessed will promote economic, political and social development. Job creation has been a centre theme in the economic policies of every administration in Nigeria Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWİN) was one of the job creation policies of the Jonathan administration, 2011-2015.

It was targeted at job creation and youth empowerment for youth's ages 18-45 years (YOUWİN platform, 2013).

In summary, therefore Youths unemployment is the conglomerate of youths with diverse background willing and capable to work but cannot find any.

### **The Concept of Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is simply the capacity and willingness to undertake a productive venture with all attendant risks while seeking profit as reward. Odiji (2014), no doubt linked it with firms that qualify as small business meaning that entrepreneurship has to do with virtually all aspects of small or new business management.

Ogundele and Abiola (2012), noted that the hope of any meaningful development that will produce great and dynamic economy in Nigeria in all aspects of its peoples endeavours lies in rigorous and massive entrepreneurship education and development. Various attempts have been made in the past to address development challenges, by addressing the general level of unemployment especially among youths population but none achieved substantial success, hence, the introduction of YOUWİN program by the Jonathan Administration.

YOUWİN program was introduced by the Jonathan administration to provide entrepreneurial skills to teeming unemployed Nigerian youths. It was aimed at supporting Nigerian youths who have viable business ideas with the financial strength to carry out their ideas, thereby reducing poverty and unemployment within youth population.

The program believes that the strength of any business enterprise is usually highly dependent on the resilience of entrepreneurial activity often measured by an extra-ordinary predisposition to business venturing, the manifestation of high spirit for exceptional financial risk appetite and a natural interest to the pursuit of productive investment.

According to (Ejiofor, 2018:59), entrepreneurship is the process of creating value by pulling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity. Such a process requires a series of choices which must be consistent and externally appropriate to the market, since the market drives entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship can therefore be seen as a catalyst that is highly innovative along with market needs.

According to her, the world today is on a fast lane towards entrepreneurship of which skill acquisition is the control panel.

The above contribution is in line with what we are investigating in our main objective of this study, which is to investigate the impact of YOUWĪN towards employment generation for youth's ages 18-45 years under Jonathan administration 2011-2015.

### **Assessing Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) Under Jonathan Administration, 2011-2015**

In 2011 the Jonathan administration in partnership with the World Bank, Department for international Development and the organized private sector had projected Youth Enterprise with innovation in Nigeria. The YOUWĪN program allows young individuals with business initiatives to access loans of between 1 to 10 Million Naira to develop and deploy ideas that will employ people thereby creating jobs for them. This program was advertised nationally and some persons won based on the criteria and were given the soft loans to develop their business idea to ultimately become self-reliant and create jobs for others. The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) Program is a collaboration of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication Technology (CT), the Ministry of Youth Development and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development which launched annual Business Plan Competition (BPC) for aspiring young entrepreneurs in Nigeria. This no doubt was in tune with the Nigerian state's drive to create more job opportunities for the citizenry. A major objective of the Program was to generate jobs by encouraging aspiring entrepreneurial youths in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas that will lead to job creation. The specific objectives of the Program as stated on the government's official website were:

- a) Attract ideas and innovations from young entrepreneurial aspirants from Universities, Polytechnics, Technical colleges, and other post-Secondary institutions in Nigeria;
- b) Provide a onetime Equity grant for 1,200 selected aspiring entrepreneurs to start or expand their business concepts and mitigate start up risks;
- c) Generate 80,000 to 110,000 new jobs for currently unemployed Nigerian youths over the three years during which the three cycles will be implemented;
- d) Provide business training for up to 6,000 aspiring youth entrepreneurs spread across all geopolitical zones in Nigeria;
- e) Encourage expansion, specialization and spin-offs of existing businesses in Nigeria;
- f) Enable young entrepreneurs to access a wide business professional network and improve their visibility.

Former President Goodluck Jonathan under whose watch YOUWĪN was initiated equally unveiled the *raison d'etre* for the initiative in his opening speech during the launch of the third edition of the program at the Presidential Villa. There he attested to the fact that the program came "on board following his administration's desire to vigorously confront the growing unemployment rate among the vibrant youth population in Nigeria. "He observed that youth unemployment in the country as at 2011 stood at a staggering 35%. Hence the launching of YOUWĪN to help the youths create jobs for themselves and others. The promise then was that at least 80,000 jobs will be produced. Former President Jonathan in 2013 enunciated major achievements of the initiative in these words:

I am happy to report that so far, over 26,000 direct jobs have been created across our six geopolitical zones in various sectors of the economy. This includes 22,000 from YOUWĪN 1 and nearly 5,000 from YOUWĪN 2 (YOUWĪN Women) which commenced disbursement just in September. Let me reiterate that I believe strongly in the youth of this country. They are not only vibrant; they are intelligent, resilient and hard working. When provided the right environment, tools and opportunities, they will transform the economic future of our great country. ...With targeted support, the products and services on display here will compete with the best in the world. They will not only serve our domestic needs, they are potentially export revenue earners for this country. I am exceedingly pleased to learn that some of our youths who received only training and capacity building support, without financial grants, have proven their entrepreneurial skills by starting their own businesses and employing others. These commendable efforts challenge us to do more for our youths in the areas of entrepreneurship and job creation. I implore all young Nigerians who fall within the ages of 18-45 years to apply.

Applicants were however admonished to take note of the following rules of engagement:

- i. YOUWĪN is an equity contribution to businesses. It is hence not a loan but a grant.
- ii. Award recipients will be paid according to the needs of the business and specific milestones stated in the business plan.
- iii. Award recipients must be registered with Corporate Affairs Commission before disbursement of funds even though they do not need to be registered to apply.
- iv. YOUWĪN will support the registration process.
- v. Award recipients will operate accounts using their registered companies with any of the participating commercial banks prior to disbursement.
- vi. Award recipients must sign a grant agreement with the managers of YOUWĪN before disbursement of funds (Akpedji, 2015).

While the initiator of the YOUWĪN program were excited over the creation of 26,000 direct jobs as cited above, information garnered from officials explain that the first edition of the program tagged YOUWĪN 1 was launched to sensitize aspiring entrepreneurial Youths on job creation by funding their business plans, and the second edition (YOUWĪN2) a Mono-gender version that rewarded over 1,200 female youths, the third edition (YOUWĪN3) which was Poly-gender had a record awardees of just over 2,500 Youths.

However, poverty is currently one of the most serious problems in the world. Poverty reduction has remained a key development challenge facing most developing nations of the world. Social Sciences literature is replete with attempts by Economists and other Social Scientists to conceptualize the phenomenon. Poverty has economic, social and political ramifications. The poor are materially deprived, socially alienated and politically excommunicated. Poverty as lack of access to basic needs/goods is essentially economic or consumption oriented. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services. Basic goods as used here include; food, shelter, water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skill and tools, political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions (Gbosir, 2004).

The eradication of absolute poverty is the central objectives of contemporary poverty alleviation policy. Poverty has remained a problem in Nigeria. In particular, since independence successive governments have tried different efforts to address it with a view to reducing, or alleviating or eradicating it. Today after over fifty years of independence, this demeaning life style has not only remained prevalent among the people but also is believed to be intensifying. YOUWĪN program as a collaboration of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Youth Development aimed at encouraging aspiring, young entrepreneurs in Nigeria to own their own business thereby generating jobs was yet another attempt at poverty alleviation. This is in line with the Federal Government's drive to create more jobs for Nigerians.

The program was implemented in partnership with the private sector that provided the funding support (Momoh, 2012, Agbanus, 2012, Ndumanya, 2012). YOUWĪN program has been very instrumental in poverty alleviation in Nigeria to youths ages 18-45 years. This is evident in the various empowerments received by the beneficiaries of the program during Jonathan administration.

These beneficiaries in the course of entrepreneurial activities created jobs for the unemployed youths which invariably reduced the level of poverty in Nigeria to some extent, as at least 26,000 jobs were generated under Jonathan administration, but not up to the program's projected number of 80,000-110,000 jobs.

Unemployment remains one of the major problems confronting Nigeria, despite the above progress made today. This deprives the economy of vital assets that would contribute to economic growth and national development. Not only does the problem of unemployment deny the individual the opportunity to earn a living, it also pushes them towards poverty, which has adverse effects on economic growth. Heavy social costs are also involved; the community is burdened and deprived in many ways when its workers and their families suffer repeated or prolonged joblessness. The individuals and families involved are hurt, not alone in terms of depressed living standards, but by damage to the dignity of the human spirit, which is a matter of great concern in a free, democratic society. In the broadest terms, too, unemployment is a measuring rod in the eyes of the world, of our nation and our economic system's concern for its least fortunate people and its ability to provide them with a genuine opportunity to participate in the country's general well-being.

Youths particularly in the developing countries, are the driving force for economic development. They possess the potentials which if properly harnessed promotes economic, cultural, social and political values of society. Job creation has been a central theme in the policies of every administration in Nigeria. In recent times, several intervention programs have been initiated by government

in order to ameliorate the malaise of youth unemployment. Government has also created an enabling environment for the private sector to drive economic activities that will in turn create jobs. Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) was an example of an initiative which involves partnership of government, private sector and donor agencies. YOUWĪN entrepreneurship program was one of the latest empowerment initiatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aimed at developing youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria. It was targeted at job creation and youth empowerment (YOUWĪN platform, 2013). Youths between ages 18 to 45 years competed for award of ₦1 million to execute their business ideas. The first competition was held in 2011, with 1,200 successful businesses. The second involved only women; while the third featured both men and women entrepreneurs in Nigeria within the age bracket of 18-45 years (YOUWĪN, 2013). Youth empowerment is central to youth development and impacts positively on the Nigerian economy. In this program the youths were offered some cash to start-up businesses under this canopy, youths under the ages of 18-45 were given money from ₦1 million to ₦10 million, to engage in businesses that ultimately led to wealth creation and employment opportunities for the youths and other people. Financial youth empowerment program is a viable option to reducing unemployment amongst the Nigerian youths but needs to be executed with utmost policy commitment and monitoring details.

The main objective of (YOUWĪN) Program was to generate jobs by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurial youths in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas that leads to job creation. The program provided aspiring youths with a platform to show case their business acumen, skills and aspirations to business leaders, investors and mentors in Nigeria. More so, to provide business training for up to 6,000 aspiring youth entrepreneurs spread across all geo-political zones in Nigeria; encourage expansion, specialization and spin-offs of existing businesses in Nigeria; and to enable young entrepreneurs to access a wide business professional network and improve their visibility. The competition ran for three years and a total of close to 4,000 participants were awarded the grant. The YOUWĪN program has generally been applauded and this can be attributed to its meticulous design and implementation. It has been adjudged to be merit-based as well as having a multiplier effect for job creation. There was also a high level of transparency in the selection of winners, and adequate publicity given to the program.

YOUWĪN program was designed to create job opportunities specifically, again, for graduates of tertiary institutions that elect to go into business as entrepreneurs. Simply put, participants were required to develop and execute their own business ideas that will provide jobs for themselves and other unemployed youths who may or may not be graduates.

The reality staring us today reveals nothing but the fact that being a graduate is a good thing but the University does not teach us how to succeed after school, and our University certificate is not an instant ticket to success. Today's world is fast changing and dynamic that our certificates are no longer enough to give us jobs. After certificate, you still need a skill or skills. Fifteen years from now, only men of skills would be in control and stand the test of time. The tragedy today is that Nigeria's educational system has succeeded in breeding a large army of dependent persons whose survival instinct is hinged on government sustenance because they are trained to get or expect from the society most at times.

Government has made concerted effort over the years to encourage and establish our teeming young unemployed people and young graduates to be self-employed. Since Government cannot employ everyone, to this end, many programs and schemes were carried out to assist school leavers and the unemployed to acquire the necessary skills that will help them to be self-employed and to be entrepreneurs of their own businesses. One of such program is YOUWĪN program. YOUWĪN program was introduced to provide entrepreneurial skills to teeming unemployed Nigerian youths YOUWĪN is a youth empowerment program began by the Jonathan administration to support Nigerian youths who have viable business ideas with the financial strength to carry out their ideas, thereby reducing poverty and unemployment. The aim of this initiative was to support young entrepreneurs who possess innovative business ideas through a business plan competition. The program included providing training on writing business plans, selection/short-listing processes and provision of one to ten million naira grants to successful awardees.

The program believes that the ebb and flow of any meaningful business enterprise is usually highly dependent on the resilience of entrepreneurial activity often measured by an extraordinary predisposition to business venturing, the manifestation of high spirit for exceptional financial risk appetite, and a natural interest to the pursuit of productive investment. Entrepreneurship is the process of creating value by pulling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity. The entrepreneur never controls all the necessary resources, pursuing the opportunity requires bridging the resource gap. Such a process requires a series of choices, which must be made in a manner, which is both internally consistent and externally appropriate to the market. Since the market drives entrepreneurship, the entrepreneurship can therefore, be seen as a catalyst that is highly innovative along with market needs.

The world today is on a fast lane towards entrepreneurship of which skill acquisition is the control panel. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is a process whereby a person acquires or learns a particular skill or type of behavior needed for business through training or education in order to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunity for self-employment. There was a time in the developmental process of our society that it seemed as if skill acquisition was an exclusive reserve of the poor or less privileged, a time that a child couldn't stand sight of his/her guardian telling him to acquire a skill, say Welding and fabrication, shoe making, or auto mobile mechanic, etc. But the reality staring us today is that only those with skills would stand the test of time in a country such as Nigeria highly susceptible to economic unpredictability. The awareness of the need for entrepreneurial skill training and supports in order to stimulate entrepreneurial activity and reduce business failure has informed the initiation of YOUWĪN program by the Jonathan administration.

From 2012 to 2015 the government gave away over \$100 million to over 3,000 entrepreneurs as part of the YOUWĪN competition. More than \$50 million was disbursed within this period. The winning entrepreneurs received grants averaging \$50,000 to start or expand a business, and thus create jobs. Only people ages 45 and younger were to apply (Economist November, 2013).

According to the World Bank, where many other attempts to increase employment and thereby alleviating poverty have failed, YOUWĪN made very impressive success. Many businesses it funded grew into sizeable and profitable operations and over 7,000 jobs were created at its inception. The Bank went on to say that "the business plan competition seems an effective tool for identifying entrepreneurs with much greater scope for growth than the typical microenterprise" (World Bank, 2016).

The YOUWĪN business plans submissions were anticipated to come mainly from agriculture and industry, but in fact those kinds of businesses only made up half of the winners. The winners were mainly in education, as a number of private schools won grants. Before the abandonment of YOUWĪN program in June 2016, the program under Jonathan administration was reported by the government to have created 26,000 direct jobs across the six geo political zones in various sectors of the economy. These included 22,000 from YOUWĪN 1, and the second edition YOUWĪN 2, a mono-gender version that rewarded over 1,200 female youths, the third edition YOUWĪN 3, which was poly gender had a record awardees of just over 3,500 youths. Be that as it may, the above statistics of YOUWĪN performance from the government itself when compared with the specific objectives of the program as stated on the government's official website (<http://www.statehouse.gov.ng/index.php/news>), one would thumb down the program.

Specifically, objective no iii stated that the program will generate 80,000 to 110,000 new jobs for currently unemployed Nigerian youths over the three years during which the three cycles will be implemented. While objectives iv of the program stated that it will provide business training for up to 6,000 aspiring youths entrepreneurs spread across all geo political zones in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the strength of the benefits derived from the policy was too low considering the proportion of youths that benefited, which is just within the realm of 26,000 out of over 26, million that are unemployed in Nigeria (Mahmood, 2014).

In terms of duration of the program, the political will to continue the program by Buhari regime was not there as the awardees under Jonathan administration decried president Buhari's disinterested posture toward the program. The Buhari regime finally jettisoned the program in June, 2016 and formulated a new one christened N-Power, which according to it was an amalgam of previous youth empowerment poverty alleviation policies.

Be that as it may, at the end of Jonathan administration in May 29, 2015, the program could not live up to its billing of generating jobs for 80,000-110,000 youths ages 18-45 years, the regime admitted enthusiastically that 26,000 jobs were generated at the end of the day. The other bad news was that the last awardees during Jonathan administration were abandoned by the Buhari regime that took over from Jonathan administration and in June 2016, the program was scrapped and replaced with N-Power.

Furthermore, the benefit of the program was not in doubt under Jonathan administration even though the number of beneficiaries were minute when compared to the total number of unemployed youth population that stood at 26 million, the program did not succeed in achieving fully its six stated objectives at the expiration of the Jonathan administration in 2015. As such some Nigerians see the program as a failure as it did not reach its lofty projections of creating 80,000 to 110,000 jobs; these pundits have slammed it for not doing so, while other Nigerians see this as the fault of political over promising rather than blight upon the program. In some other quarters, the program was seen as "elitist", because it was oriented to people with college degrees and the wherewithal to pay for crafting their business plans.

But the impact on the other hand, in fairness to the Program Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN) on business training of youth entrepreneurs ages 18-45 years under Jonathan administration 2011-2015 was satisfactory as 18,000 youths were trained far above the promised number of 6,000.

YOUWĪN (platform, 2016:2), stated that ministry of finance confirmed that 18,000 young entrepreneurs were trained in various aspects of small and medium enterprises management and business skills, and 3,900 including 1,200 women were each given non repayable take off grants for business of their choice.

The fore-goings were in keeping with the fourth objective of YOUWĪN to "provide business training for up to 6,000 aspiring youth entrepreneurs spread across all geo political zones in Nigeria.

Former president Jonathan, in 2013, tumped up the program in these words "I am exceedingly pleased to learn that some of our youths who received only training and capacity building support, without financial grants have proven their entrepreneurial skills by starting their own businesses and employing others".

According to the (World Bank, August 2015), and its David Mckenzie, who analyzed survey data on the 1, 920, firms three years after the program began, and found that the grant and business training had a larger impact than he expected. He states that the selected firms and individuals who participated in YOUWĪN business training were substantially more likely to launch, survive, make profits and most importantly generate new jobs of the firms evaluated, approximately 60% were new and 40% already existed.

The main impact of the program according to Mckenzie was that it seemed to have helped firms get off the ground and survive. Three years after launching the competition, 91% of entrepreneurs who launched their business after winning the grant and participating in business training were still in operation compared to 54% of the losing entrepreneurs. For existing businesses, 96% of the grant winners survived, while only 76% of the losers continued to operate. On the average, Mckenzie explains that the new businesses that received the grant and training employed 5.2 more workers than those that did not receive; that for existing businesses, the randomly selected winners employed 4.4 more workers. He equally explains that this is partly due to firm survival. The program's success in this respect was impressive.

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Mckenzie writes that "the business plan competition seems an effective tool for identifying entrepreneurs with much greater scope for growth than the typical microenterprise. All in all, the intent of YOUWĪN was to really empower as many Nigerian youths ages 18-45 years as possible.

But on the program's ability to produce off spring especially in large numbers as was conveyed in the programs objectives v to "encourage expansion, specialization and spin-off of existing business in Nigeria" we must stress here that YOUWĪN program met serious challenges in the process of its implementation and this objective became unrealizable. There was no good road networks across the six geo political zones of Nigeria, equally there were poor and dwindling power generation and distribution across the country. Again, the communication network services were expensive and inefficient and youths were unable to link together to achieve this fifth objective of the policy.

This was because YOUWĪN was relatively complex project with several inter-connected systems. There was the custom built PHP website which applicants used to submit their business plans. There was a system for the judges to review and mark business plans. Equally there was a separate post award management application to manage the monitoring and grant approval.

To cope with high demand close to the dead-line for applications, the website, registration and submission system on multiple local balanced servers with a shared database were created. But creating and maintaining these systems were faced with challenges of poor infrastructural development across the six geo-political zones of the country, which affected negatively, the achievement of the objectives of YOUWĪN.

Adamson (2012) noted that infrastructural development creates the enabling environment to stimulate business and industrial activities, thereby enhancing productivity, reducing operational cost, increasing job opportunities, enhancing income generation and wealth creation as well as reducing poverty and improving the lives of citizenry.

We have to observe that the state of infrastructure in Nigeria by the time YOUWĪN was implemented were very inadequate. Usman (2013), noted that the stock of infrastructure in Nigeria remains below the international benchmark of 70 percent of GDP, but that as at 2012, Nigeria core infrastructure stock stood between 35 percent-40 percent GDP.

As a result therefore, poverty has remained a paradox in Nigeria despite several efforts made by successive governments to alleviate poverty to the barest minimum. YOUWĪN was yet another employment generating measure aimed at poverty alleviation among youth's ages 18-45 years which was badly hit by poor infrastructural development in the country. Most youths within the age bracket targeted by the program could not access data from YOUWĪN server because of poor electricity supply, poor road networks to travel to the urban areas, high cost of communication networks among others.

To compound the problem of sustainability of the program since its fourth round began, former president Goodluck Jonathan, a major proponent of YOUWĪN lost the presidency to Muhammadu Buhari. This political transition impacted negatively on the future of the program as it was eliminated by the Buhari regime and replaced by N-Power, a sister program aimed at youth empowerment through the creation of 500,000 jobs a year for youths ages 18-35 years.

From the assessment of YOUWĪN under Jonathan Administration we can infer that the impact of Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWĪN), on business training of youth entrepreneurs ages 18-45 years under Jonathan administration 2011-2015 was satisfactory as 18,000 youths were trained which was far above the promised number of 6,000.

## Summary

1. Having taken a detailed examination of YOUWĪN entrepreneurship program which was a policy of the Jonathan administration that professed its intention to radically solve the unemployment quagmire in the country, it was discovered that the program was introduced as a result of the failure of previous youth employment schemes to vigorously combat the scourge of youths unemployment in order to alleviate poverty amongst them.
2. It was also discovered that the program could hardly survive particularly in the long run because there was no adequate feasibility and viability analyses conducted on the prospects of YOUWĪN by consulting the army of the unemployed youths in the country before the implementation of the policy.
3. As a result therefore, the program was jettisoned like other youth employment schemes before it by the Buhari administration and replaced with a sister program the N-Power, in line with the nation's culture of policy inconsistency.
4. The study equally found out that the number of youths the policy proudly aimed to cover within its short and long run projections was minute (80,000-110,000) when compared with the total population of youth's unemployed in Nigeria which keeps on skyrocketing as the day rolls by.
5. It was equally discovered that the program budgeted 6,000 youth entrepreneurs ages 18-45 years for business training but ended up training 18,000 youths under Jonathan administration 2011 -2015, which was quite impressive.
6. Another major discovery of the study was that the program could hardly survive in the face of infrastructural deficit like the absence of good electricity supply, poor and expensive communication networks as well as poor transportation facilities to connect the unemployed youth population, as the implementation of the program required good road networks and robust and secure independent information technology (ICT) support. But these were not readily available to the policy target group, the unemployed youth population in the country ages 18-45 years.
7. YOUWĪN program was equally found to be "elitist" in nature, as it demanded the crafting of business plan before an awardee can be considered. This required good capital outlay which the already impoverished unemployed youths lacked.

The program was equally found to be oriented to people with tertiary education certificates as it left behind the vast number of non-college graduate youths.

8. Above all, it was ostensibly discovered that the Jonathan administration left the monitoring and evaluation of YOUWĪN program in the hands of outside agencies, the World Bank and its foreign consultants who could hardly come to terms with the harsh conditions of Nigeria's business environment as well as its associated security risks.

### Conclusion

The study examined poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria with particular focus on YOUWĪN, youth empowerment program of the Jonathan administration. The study saw through its literature review and discussions of various scholars' views on the subject the embarrassing paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in Nigeria, which suggests the compelling need for a vigorous policy pursuit to objectively tackle the alarming rate of youth unemployment leading to poverty in Nigeria. As a result therefore, the Jonathan administration introduced YOUWĪN as a panacea to this monster ravaging the country. The program nevertheless made its own contributions towards youth's empowerment, but its contributions were not enough and the monster poverty is still rearing its ugly head in the country. To compound the problem further, the program was confronted by a lot of infrastructural deficits and its laudable objectives were not realized. The Buhari administration that took over from the Jonathan administration discontinued that well thought out program that benefited some youths in the six geo political zones of the country.

But in line with the country's culture of policy discontinuation, Buhari administration went ahead to introduce the regime's N-Power, whose fate is yet to be determined as many youths in Nigeria with tertiary institution certificates have remained unemployed and therefore poor, with no hope in sight.

### Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study and our concluding statements in the following recommendations are hereby made for the benefit of any future poverty alleviation program in Nigeria especially as it patens to the youth population:

1. A vigorous policy to tackle the alarming rate of youth unemployment is urgently needed as previous ones have failed to stem the tide towards this direction. YOUWĪN was in fairness to truth, a good program that was beset with a lot of problems that if they were corrected could have addressed the problem of youth unemployment, through entrepreneurship and reduce poverty amongst them but instead it was abandoned for N-Power, a new policy to combat youth unemployment to boost the ego of the new regime in power.
2. Before any government in Nigeria embarks on future poverty alleviation program especially the ones targeting the youth population, it should embark first of all on adequate feasibility and viability analyses of the policy, by consulting with the group that will benefit from the policy to actually know their needs and the problems that might follow if the policy is eventually implemented. The inability of Jonathan administration to carry out adequate feasibility and viability analysis was a major setback to the program as all options particularly factors that stands to possibly undermine the laudable policy were not explored.
3. The habit of policy discontinuation by successive Nigerian governments is a bad one and therefore should not be emulated by future governments. The abandonment of YOUWĪN program in June 2016 by the Buhari regime became controversial as it traumatized the new awardees who were not paid by the new regime following the exit of the Jonathan administration. The Buhari administration failed to see the benefit of the scheme, which was quite obvious but has to discontinue it, at the detriment of the youth population and the nation at large.
4. Future youth related poverty alleviation program should budget for a manageable number; it can carry with the available resources within the coffers of government. What happened with YOUWĪN was that it was politically overpromising by budgeting for 80,000 to 110,000 jobs creation and ended up handling only 26,000. Future programs can carry on its implementation plans in phases in order to arrive at the promised figure or a new government can continue from where the last government stopped since development is a long term process.
5. Government should always keep its promise to the people for its legitimacy to be guaranteed. The promise of the program (YOUWĪN), to offer business training to up to 6000 youth entrepreneurs and ending up to train 18,000 under Jonathan administration 2011-2015, was satisfactory and impressive.
6. Government should fix infrastructural facilities that will enhance robust business operations in all sectors of the economy. The billions of dollars spent on YOUWĪN entrepreneurship program if they were used to fix some of the country's dilapidated infrastructure and government allying industries, more youths than those projected to benefit from YOUWĪN could have found gainful employment with greater multiplier effects across the six geo political zones of the country. Infrastructural deficit in the country was a major hamstrung on the YOUWĪN program.
7. Future youth employment scheme should be made to cover all the unemployed youths not only those with tertiary education certificates as all citizens are equal before the law no matter your educational background. Sources of selection of beneficiaries of future youth related poverty alleviation program should be made less cumbersome or not too technical for the non-college graduates. The elitist nature of YOUWĪN, eliminated many unemployed youths especially in the rural areas where the bulk of the country's youths reside. Most of these rural youth dwellers had no access to business consultants who

mount their offices in the urban areas and charge exorbitant fees for their services which most of the unemployed youths could not afford during the period of YOUWĪN competition.

8. Effective implementation of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria is required urgently. This is because Nigeria's experience with poverty alleviation programs generally and youth empowerment scheme particularly has been one of formulating good policies and then failing to achieve their objectives, arising from ineffective implementation or non-implementation.

To sustain any poverty alleviation program like the YOUWĪN program under Jonathan administration a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation has to be put in place and sustained. The pitfall of YOUWĪN was that this task was handed over to outside agencies, the World Bank and its foreign consultants who lacked good knowledge of the hard conditions of Nigeria's business environment and its associated security risks. Local experts should take over these functions as he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches.

If the recommendations we have made above are adhered to by Nigerian government, youth unemployment and poverty amongst them will be a thing of the past and all will be better off.

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