

## Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in South-East Nigeria (2010-2022)

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### Abstract

Youth restiveness is a very disturbing and topical issue that requires proactive and concerted efforts to nip in the bud especially as it is being carried out by a category of people with uncommon vigor, energy and technological competence. This article is therefore designed to investigate the correlation between unemployment and youth restiveness in the South-east Nigeria (2010-2022). It adopts both descriptive and analytical research designs for collection and analysis of data. The findings of this article reveal among others that there is a significant relationship between unemployment and various forms of youth restiveness happening in the South-east such as kidnapping, vandalization of public facilities and violent attacks against security personnel. The article therefore recommends that: there is need for governments in the South-east to involve the young people and relevant Civil Society Organizations at the inception of youth empowerment policies/measures so as to get more reliable information as well as make the processes more transparent thereby addressing the issue of nepotism and lack of coordination; political leaders in the South-east and country at large must agree with actions that government is a continuum by showing adequate commitment to inherited youth empowerment policies and programmes of their predecessors; and governments in the region should get seriously involved in the apprenticeship system (Igba boy) which is common in the region with a view to making it a great source of employment in the area.

**Key words:** Youth; Kidnapping; Violent attack and Vandalization

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### INTRODUCTION

The youth phase of life is a very interesting and most productive phase full of energy, zeal, determination, doggedness, innovativeness and creativity among others. The youths are backbone of every society as they are full of potentials and skills needed for development of any nation. As inferred by Hamzat (2013), youths are the pillars of any nation, hence, must neither be relegated nor neglected in the scheme of things. Youths are at the forefront of the technologically driven world as they are the most physically and intellectually capable set of people that fit into today's digital world. They are the foundation upon which every nation is built as well as blessings and strengths of every nation without which no nation can stand. This is why African Youth Charter (2016) aptly averred that Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and that their active and full participation would make Africa to surmount its challenges.

However, these young people in Nigeria precisely South-east are being confronted with multiple challenges especially unemployment as many of them roam about the street in search of jobs to make ends meet. Both educated and uneducated ones among them especially in urban areas find it extremely difficult to get engaged either formally or informally. Ezech C., Ezech O. & Otuagbo (2019) while citing the unemployment figure from National Bureau of Statistics observed that the trend of unemployment rather than abating, has continued to rise in that the unemployment rate in the country rose to 23.10 percent in Q3 of 2018 up from 22.70 percent in Q2 of 2018. This assertion is not different from the submission

of International Labour Organization (2020) which stated that Africa is the only continent where the youth bulge will continuously grow in the foreseeable future, presenting both an opportunity to reap the demographic dividend and an imminent time bomb and threat to social cohesion together with migration of this category of people en masse if effective and workable measures are not put in place to harness the dividend.

Consequently, there is youth restiveness in Nigeria especially in South-east characterized by kidnapping/hostage taking for ransom, violent demonstration, and vandalization of public facilities etc. Drawing on the above, this article seeks to investigate the correlation between unemployment and youth restiveness in South-east Nigeria from 2010-2022. It equally aims to provide a critical review of key variables such as unemployment, youth and youth restiveness. Also, it is the objective of this article to interrogate various efforts put in by South-East governments against unemployment and challenges confronting those efforts.

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## METHODOLOGY

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This article adopts descriptive design which is conceived as a method which naturally provides clear depiction of a situation so as to enable a researcher make informed judgment on current practice of the subject under study (Bruns & Grove, 2009). The design therefore allows the researcher to clearly explain as well as summarize unemployment as it concerns youth restiveness in the South-East. This article equally adopts analytical design which is viewed as a method that allows a researcher to examine facts and information pertaining to a study (Oni, Oni, Ibietan & DeindeAdedeji, 2020).

The foregoing informed the choice of secondary source of data used in this study which includes journal articles, newspapers and government publications etc. The literature were carefully considered and reviewed in order to establish their relevance and currency to the subject under study.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Unemployment

Ernest (2013) defined unemployment as a situation where individuals who are ready to work at a current wage rate could not secure jobs. To Frimpong (2012), unemployment is a situation where people do not have jobs and are energetically making effort to get jobs. According to International Labour Organization (2012), any person aged more than 15 years is unemployed if during a specified reference period of time (usually more than six months continuously), that person has been without paid employment; available for salaried work but cannot get it; seeking for work by taking active steps to

get employment or self-employment but failing.

This suggests that unemployment exists when people who are qualified, capable for jobs and make themselves available but unable to be employed. It is imperative to observe that this category of people must meet the criteria for employment, present themselves to be engaged but unsuccessful before the state can be considered unemployment.

### Youth

The age bracket that determines youth varies from one country to another as there are discrepancies between an individual's level of maturity and his/her age in terms of years, months and days. According to Louize & Dhruv (2021), youth is defined as a time of transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood, and the important aspect of this transition which is economic independence is often achieved through employment. National Youth Policy (2001) cited in Emerole et al, (2018) viewed youths as individuals between the age brackets of 18-35.

### Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness is a burning national issue especially in African countries that have continued to witness violent protests among other tensions from the young people in recent times. According to Igho & Ikpa (2013, p.131):

restiveness among youths globally and those in Nigeria has become a behaviour pattern which has degenerated into a topical global issue. Youth restiveness portrays man's negative side of social development. This negative development is rather unfortunate and has become one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society. In many occasions, lives and properties worth millions of naira have been lost or vandalized and some razed down by restive youths. Human society and in fact the entire universe is simply and squarely a complex entity. In view of this, individuals and groups have their complexities, needs, aspirations, hopes, goals, opinions, views and values which could be social, economic, religious, psychological or political. Consequently, there is bound to be restiveness among different groups of people especially youths who are at their prime age.

Igho & Ikpa (2013) conceived youth restiveness as activities, actions and attitude among the young people that are unhealthy and unacceptable in the society. To Epelle in Uriah, Egbezor & Olorube (2014), youth restiveness is excessive actions demonstrated in kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, illegal bunkering, setting public places ablaze and peaceful or violent demonstration. Similarly, Otunu-Ogbisi & Tedjere (2014) viewed youth restiveness as the consequences from non-engagement of the excessive strength and energy of young men and women for creative and constructive works.

Fundamentally, youth restiveness entails activities carried out by young people which are at variance with peaceful conduct and disposition needed for the growth of a society. It engenders tension, apprehension and general state of uncertainty with its resultant effects of manpower

and economic loss which in turn retard development of a community, region or country at large.

### **Interface Between Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in South-East Nigeria**

Globally, unemployment is a serious national challenge which every responsible government is working round the clock to address so as to prevent its damaging consequences. As averred by Louise & Dhruv (2021), the pattern of unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa is not totally out of place as its rate tends to be highest in middle-income countries but unemployment among the young people is typically higher than the country-wide average. Contributing to the discourse of unemployment especially among the young people, Risenetwork cited in Adedokun (2014) revealed that Nigeria's youth unemployment was over 50% of the total unemployment rate (23.9%) in 2011. Former Minister of Youth Development, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi in Osakwe (2013) stated that 67 million young people in the country were unemployed as at 2012, when the total national population was about 140 million people. The youth population increased to about 80 million in 2016 and more than 70 percent of this population was unemployed (Gonyok, 2016). The joblessness among the young people in the country is unbearably undesirable to the extent that more than 100, 000 youths could jostle for just 25 vacant positions (Bakare cited in Adedokun, 2014). According to Anyanwu & Duru (2020), statistical report from Nigeria indicates that the phenomenon of youth unemployment has reached a worrisome state. For instance, NBS (2018) showed that the unemployment rate in the country in 2017 and 2018 were 20.42% and 23.13% respectively. However, the number of youths that were unemployed in 2017 constituted 26.58%. It increased to 29.72% in the third quarter of 2018.

Narrowing it down to South-east, Ndukwe (2016) observed that unemployment is evident in Ebonyi State in that it was ranked 15th State with unemployed persons across the country and 1st in South-East in 2018. Its manifestation is a high number of young people clustering from morning to noon around Spera-in-Deo Junction, Kpirikpiri opposite Abakaliki Township Stadium and Opposite Affia Ofu market among others. These unemployed youths are always ready for menial jobs such as mixing of sands and cement for building and clearing of grasses etc. meanwhile, the country's unemployment rate currently stood at 33.3% with the young people having 42.5% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). South-east as a whole has a reasonable share of this challenge as a state (Imo) in the region currently has the highest rate of unemployment in the country. Putting it in a specific and wider context, unemployment rate for Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states currently stood 50.07%, 44.22%, 40.16%, 31.62% and 56.64% respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The unemployment in the region knows no boundary as it is

found both in urban and rural areas. Chioke et al cited in Okoh, Onwe & Ofoma (2022) observed the high level of unemployment in the rural communities of Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu state in the South-East.

As a result, there is youth restiveness in the region characterized by kidnapping, vandalization of public facilities, killing of security personnel and violent demonstration among others. According to Ajufor (2013), the frustration and desperation faced by unemployed youths creates a fertile ground for criminal activities to flourish. A consequence of unemployment among young people is particularly exemplified by increasing kidnapping, restiveness and political instability. In a similar vein, Gonyok (2016) observed that a situation where young people after several years of acquiring education are unable to secure jobs, necessitate some of the social vices the country has continued to witness such as armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, drug addiction, hostage taking and gangsterism etc. To Eze (2012), unemployment in Nigeria is responsible for most of the criminal activities carried out by young people. There are so many young people whose energy is still seeking for work to dissipate and earn with it. They are poor and idle and this is responsible for the prevailing kidnapping in the country (Thom-Otuya, 2010). More so, Zakaria (2006) inferred that absence of employment opportunities in developing countries such as Nigeria is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences. The increase in criminal activities such as kidnapping and thuggery by the young people is an indication of lacuna in the society (Ajaegbu, 2012). There are expectations for individuals as well as established means of achieving them but when there are limitations as youth unemployment stood at 46.5% (Sanusi, 2012), people especially the young ones become compelled to realize the objectives illegally thereby fulfilling the societal expectations.

This foregoing is the nature of restiveness among the young people in the South-east. As aptly revealed by Nwanunobi in Okorie, Aja & Okpan (2018), one of the prominent cases of victims of high-profile kidnapping in Southeast is the kidnapping of the father of a famous novelist. Also, Ukoki & Okolie (2016) posited that in Nigeria, apart from River and Delta states, Abia, Anambra and Imo states are the states that have highest number of recorded cases of kidnapping. In Ebonyi state, Punch (2021) revealed that a village head and three others were kidnapped. It was also reported that two Chinese expatriates working in a mining site in Ihietutu, Ishiagu in Ivo Local Government Area of the state were kidnapped by unknown gunmen (Daily Post, 2020). In a similar development, an eight-month-old pregnant Internally Displaced Person at Effium Community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State was abducted (Punch, 2021). The aforementioned cases of kidnapping

are not different from the ones revealed by Thom-Otuya (2010) which are stated in a tabular form below.

**Table 1**  
**Some of the recorded cases of kidnapping in the South-east**

S/N	State of Kidnapping	Status of Victim
1	Abia	Traditional ruler of Nkwere Autonomous Community
2	Abia	Chairman of Enyimba Football Club
3	Abia	Chairman of Enyimba Football Club
4	Abia	Judge
5	Anambra	Business Mogul
6	Anambra	Chief Executive Officer, Tonimas
7	Anambra	Chairman of NMA, Anambra State
8	Anambra	Governorship Aspirant of PPA
9	Enugu	State coordinator, UNDP
10	Imo	Retired school principal
11	Imo	Deputy Director, Accounts, Government House, Owerri
12	Imo	Daughter of a former deputy governor of the state
13	Imo	Catholic Priest
14	Imo	Member, Imo State House of Assembly

Thom-Otuya (2010)

Additionally, the 2020#EndSars# protest in the country which later took violent dimension is an aspect of youth restiveness which apart from police brutality can be blamed on unemployment among the young people. As asserted by Ezeji (2020), 2020#EndSars# in Nigeria is a form of youth restiveness. In the South-east, public facilities were set ablaze, security personnel killed with economic activities greatly disrupted. Daily Post (2020) reported that police divisions in Amichi, Osumeyi, Enifite and Ukpokor, all in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra state were burnt while the Osumeyi DPO and two other officers were fatally wounded leading to the death of the DPO and one other. It was also recorded that Nworieubi Police Divisional Headquarters in Mbatoli Local Government Area of Imo state was set on fire following the violent dimension of the #Endsars# protest. Furthermore, Daily Post (2020) revealed that two police stations (Ekeaba and Kpirikpiri Police Divisions) in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State were burnt down by hoodlums in the guise of #EndSars# protest. A police officer was killed and office of the Divisional Police Officer and Administrative building burnt at a police facility in Obiozara, Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. On 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, Ohaneze Youth Council (OYC) while reacting to the #EndSars# protest in Ebonyi state pointed out that the #EndSars# movement was the tipping point adopted by the young people to register their anger, dissatisfaction and frustration against police brutality and unemployment among others; lamenting the

nature of youth restiveness in Ebonyi state and urging the State Government to avoid its future occurrence by immediately commencing the rehabilitation and dredging of Ozizza River in Afipko that will connect Ebonyi and its environs to the Atlantic Ocean so as to create jobs and business opportunities to numerous Igbo youths (Elombah, 2020).

We now have faceless violent young people tagged “Unknown Gunmen” going about looting people’s properties, attacking security formations, killing security personnel and even other citizens in the South-east. It was reported that about 175 persons including soldiers, police officers and civilians were killed within six months in 2021. Specifically, in Imo State, 49 policemen and civilians were killed and about 11 vehicles burnt, Anambra State had about 24 security agents, including Police, Navy, army, DSS and NSCDC, and about 52 civilians killed with 15 buildings and 28 vehicles set ablaze, in Enugu State, 23 persons were gunned down with four Independent National Electoral Commission Offices and two police stations burnt. Ebonyi State recorded 32 killings with three arson cases and Abia State witnessed seven attacks (Punch, 2021). More so, on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2022, raiders invaded Mgbidi Divisional Police Headquarters in Imo State killed an inspector and injured another officer. Similar incidence had happened in the State a week to the attack when gunmen stormed Ideato South Local Government Area police Headquarters in Dikenafai destroying the building with explosives and setting free detained persons (Punch, 2022).

The above picture illuminates the relationship between unemployment especially among the people and youth restiveness in the South-east. The youths in the region have aspirations as well as ambitions and are determined to actualize them. Therefore, any frustrating atmosphere to the actualization of these aspirations compels them to use illegal means to change the status quo. When the young people are not meaningfully engaged to utilize their skills for their individual development and that of society at large, they come out to the street to register their frustration and disappointment in a manner that is inimical to the society. The result of such a scenario in the South-east is general unsafe environment ranging from kidnapping to vandalization of public facilities.

### **Efforts Made by South-East Governments Against Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment especially among young people has disastrous consequences that are capable of taking a society backward if left unchecked. In a bid to bring the alarming rate of youth unemployment in Imo State under control, the State government in 2013 initiated and executed “Youth Empowerment Trust Fund” wherein sum of Five Hundred Million Naira was distributed to young people of Oguta and Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Areas so as to address restiveness resulting

from joblessness in these areas. In its further palliative measure, the Government appointed some young people into government who were believed to be connected and influential to the restive groups in the areas (Emerole, Chikwe & Joel, 2018). A study by Nweke, Onyeoku, Eze & Nwankwo (2018) revealed that Abia State Government executed empowerment programmes aimed mainly at taking the young people off the street among other objectives. The programmes include provision of sewing machines and vehicles (tricycle and mini buses) to the young people in the State. In Ebonyi State, the government went into partnership with National Directorate of Employment and trained 2000 young people in electrical works, welding, agriculture, hair dressing, tailoring/fashion design, metal works and fabrication, soap and pomade making. At the conclusion of the programme, the participated youths were given equipments and materials to start up what they had learnt (Ndukwe, 2016). Also, Ebonyi State Government through Ministry of Sports and Youth Development sponsored 10 young people on a 5-day National Training Workshop on Skills Development, Leadership/Citizenship and Value re-orientation for youth entrepreneurs in Sapele, Delta State. After the training, each of the 10 youths that participated was given ₦200, 000.00 as grant for their individual projects in farming (Ebonyi State Ministry of Sports and Youths Development cited in Ndukwe, 2016). Equally, the Government undertook the sponsorship of 12 young people from Youth Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative Societies across the 3 Senatorial Districts in the State to a national capacity workshop in the area of diversified agricultural production, processing and marketing which was held in Nkwere, Imo State. Consequent upon this, the participated cooperative societies were given ₦40, 000.00 each as start-up capital together with materials. Similarly, there is Enugu Youth Empowerment Scheme (e-YES) under Enugu SME Center (a State Developmental Finance Institution) aimed at empowering young people living in the State with training in digital skills such as advertising, marketing, Web Design, Internet Promotion and Search Engine Optimization among others. The broad objective of the scheme is to empower the young people to flourish in today's world that is driven by digitalization thereby making them innovative entrepreneurs as well as great assets to the State and world as a whole.

As beautiful as these measures appear, it is instructive to submit that they have failed to achieve the primary objective of their existence as youth unemployment has continued to surge in the region. This precarious situation further elucidates the motive of the various governments that initiated them whether the governments were driven by the desire to take the young people off the street or to score cheap political goal as well as empower political loyalists, associates and family members. It also lightens up other challenges of the initiatives in the region which the next part of this article centres on.

### **Challenges Confronting Governments' Efforts Against Youth Unemployment in South-East**

The cardinal objective of the above governments' programmes is to drastically reduce the high level of youth unemployment together with restiveness among other social vices in the zone. However, this objective has not been met owing to certain impediments. Most of the youth empowerment initiatives executed in the South-east have been characterized by nepotism. A high number of youth empowerment scheme in the South-east has been used to compensate political loyalists, associates and family members who are meaningfully engaged already at the detriment of the cardinal objective. There are indept studies on nepotism witnessed in the programmes executed to empower the young people in the country including the region. As averred by Okonkwo, Nwokike & Nwafor (2021), N-power scheme is a home-grown youth empowerment programme in Nigeria which has been characterized by nepotism, favoritism and corruption both at the federal, state and local government levels.

More so, poor coordination among the relevant authorities is a serious hindrance to youth empowerment efforts in the South-east and Nigeria at large. The absence of synergy between relevant government Ministries, Department and Agencies and youths who are targeted beneficiaries makes the realization of the stated objective very difficult. According to Ofem & Ajayi (2008), governments both at different federal, state and local levels of governance had embarked on various uncoordinated youth empowerment programmes over the years which resulted to little or nothing in real terms. Similarly, Kalagbor & Harry (2018) observed that some of the youth empowerment initiatives by successive governments in the country have not yielded the desired results due to poor and uncoordinated efforts in implementation. For instance, the inputs of young people who are major beneficiaries as well as stakeholders are not usually sought at the point of policies and programmes initiation and formulation. As supported by Isa & Vambe (2013), during youth empowerment initiatives in the country, the young people are not being involved in data collection, information and research on challenges confronting them. Consequently, the policies and programmes designed in line with such data and unfounded assumptions are products of unscientific research which is commonly described as "the rule of the thumb" (Harry, 2017). This has resulted to random selection of the young people during implementation among other issues. Akande (2016) posited that during youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria, the young people are being lumped together without regard to their differences in education, skills, capabilities, experience and willingness to learn. Similarly, Kalagbor & Harry (2018) observed that youth empowerment policies and programmes in the country including South-east are randomly initiated and

implemented, mostly to the exclusion of the young people who are major targets and stakeholders.

There is also a problem of policies and programmes inconsistency on the part of government. Most successive governments in South-east have abandoned youth policies and programmes inherited from the past governments due to partisan politics, selfishness, corruption and lack of proper understanding that government is a continuum. This has given rise to duplication of youth empowerment programmes at various levels of government. According to Akande (2016), failure of government efforts in youth empowerment is attributable to policies inconsistency, poor governance and policy implementation. Additionally, Oseni et al (2012) highlighted the problems of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria to include lack of entrepreneurship, unavailability of fund from government, irregular distribution of materials and equipments to trainers at the centres, lackadaisical attitude to technical and vocational education programmes, lack of fund to motivate already trained youths and bastardized traditional value system such as hard work, honesty and accountability among others. Drawing inference from ongoing N-power programme of federal government for Nigerian youths, Okonkwo, Nwokike & Nwafor (2021) observed that the scheme is being confronted by irregular payment of stipend and inadequate plan for transition of the beneficiaries into more meaningful ventures after training.

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article adopts relative deprivation theory which was first coined by an American Sociologist, Samuel Stouffer. In *Why Men Rebel*, Gurr cited in Ejifor (2022) argued that relative deprivation is a situation where there is a discrepancy between what people have and what the people perceive they should have as their entitlements. Therefore frustration which in turn results to aggression occurs when people feel that their expectations cannot be met if the status quo is maintained. This theory is therefore significant to the study as it clearly depicts a state of youth restiveness in South-east resulting from inability of the young people to secure jobs which they consider their entitlements. The theory strongly establishes the correlation between joblessness among the young people in the South-east and their uncivilized approach to change the narrative which has manifested in restiveness. As viewed by Sanusi (2012), there is a sense of joy and great expectations when a student graduates from a tertiary institution. But after some years of inability to secure employment, these expectations gradually fade away and being replaced with feeling of frustration. As this frustration lingers, the perception of deprivation of what is expected sets in thereby making the graduates to resort to illegal means of actualizing these expectations in the society.

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## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This article interrogates the effect of unemployment on youth restiveness in South-east Nigeria (2010-2022). The literature reviewed in the study includes journal articles, government and newspaper publications on unemployment and youth restiveness both at the national and regional levels. Consequently, only forty eight reviewed articles were found relevant and current to the study.

Findings of this article reveal that unemployment among the young people is responsible for the alarming rate of youth restiveness in the South-east. This result is in congruence with the opinion of Kelvin-Iloafu, Igwe & Enemu (2019) that South-east Nigeria is being challenged with problem of kidnapping which is linked to aggrieved unemployed and idle young people. This finding is equally in consonance with the submission of Onah & Okwuosa (2016) that in Nigeria, unemployed youths are the major threats to peaceful atmosphere in the society and this has manifested in the manner in which criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy, oil bunkering, cultism, abduction, drug trafficking and prostitution are pervading the country. In a similar vein, Onwubiko & Okonkwo (2013) cited in Ogbisi & Tedjere, (2014) submitted that the problem of chronic youth unemployment is very evident in Nigeria and has resulted to challenges like street violence, bomb blasts and kidnapping in our society. In fact kidnapping of royal families or clergies/religious leaders is now common in the country as it is always captured in the dailies. Also, Onwubiko & Okonkwo (2013) maintained that the chronic youth unemployment has manifested in attack against military and security outpost or barracks in the country.

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, it is evident that there is a significant relationship between unemployment among the young people and youth restiveness in the South-East Nigeria. The youths in the region are very vigorous and energetic set of people with high aspirations seriously searching for where to be engaged for productivity and actualization of these aspirations. So, their inability to secure employment opportunities and become productive as well as useful to the region and country at large made them to resort to restiveness so as to change the status quo as discussed in this article.

The efforts demonstrated by the governments of South-East in a bid to surmount this pervasive challenge have yielded little or no positive result thereby further justifying the importance of this particular study. Therefore, it is the hope of this study that this problem can be overcome with the application of the measures suggested below.

- There is need for governments in the South-East to involve the young people and relevant Civil Society

Organizations at the inception of youth empower policies/ measures so as to get more reliable information as well as make the processes more transparent thereby addressing the issue of nepotism and lack of coordination.

- Political authorities in the South-East and country at large must agree with actions that government is a continuum by showing adequate commitment to inherited youth policies and programmes of their predecessors.

- Governments in the South-east should seriously get involved in the apprenticeship system (Igba boy) which is common in the region in order to make it a great source of employment in the area.

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