

## Urbanization and Youth Employment in South East of Nigeria: 2015 – 2023

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the relationship between urbanization and youth employment in South East of Nigeria from 2015-2023. The study was carried out in five major urban areas in south east , which include Enugu, Awka, Abakaliki, Aba, and Owerri. Data were elicited using questionnaire, in-depth interview and focus group discussion guide. The findings of the study revealed that there is no positive correlation between urbanization and youth job placement in South East Nigeria and there is no positive correlation between urbanization and youth empowerment in South East Nigeria. The study advocates that though employment opportunities may exist in the urban areas, it is also likely that the youths who migrate to the urban areas in search of better jobs may not be able to secure employment, due to increased competition for the few available jobs in the urban areas secondly urban areas often have higher living costs, which can make it difficult for the youths to support themselves and may resort to social vices such as arm robbery, prostitutions, drug trafficking etc in a bid to survive. The study recommends that Social and infrastructural amenities should be provided in the rural areas*

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*to curtail the rate of Youth migration into the urban areas to search for non-existent job.. The government should provide youth empowerment scheme to equip the youths with necessary skills to be relevant in the labor market*

## **1. Introduction**

Youth in Africa constituted 19% of the global youth population in 2015, numbering 226 million (United Nation, 2015). By 2030, it is predicted that the number of youths in Africa will have increased by 42% (United Nation, 2015). Africa's population as a whole is very young, with 60% of the entire continent aged below 25, making it the youngest continent in the world, in relation to its population makeup. All of the world's top 10 youngest countries by median age are in Africa, There is contention among critics and analysts over what this demographic dividend could mean for African nations; some believe that, with effective governance, the economy could significantly benefit and develop, whilst others have argued that a large, poorly-managed youth population may lead to greater instability and civil conflict resulting from youth unemployment.

According to ILO (2022) youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was at almost 13.44 percent, with poverty levels projected to increase to 38.8% in 2024 coupled with the low unemployment rate in the country, low consumer spending and purchasing power remains an issue, especially in the absence of commensurate increase in minimum wage to mitigate the inflationary growth in the economy. The Nigeria youths who suffer more the negative consequence of unemployment are therefore susceptible to crime hence the need to articulate what could be done to salvage the situation. It has been reported that youth unemployment in Africa has a geographical dimension as it is generally higher in the urban areas than in rural areas. Several factors have been adduced to account for higher youth unemployment rate in Africa, most notably low economic growth, low economic activity and low investment. these related factors contributed to low job creation and because of sustained population growth the mall labour market is unable to absorb the emerging jobless youths. In search of greener pasture, there has been a monumental migration of these youths from rural areas to urban centers resulting in sporadic urbanization across the country most especially in South East of Nigeria where the youths seems no longer to be comfortable dwelling in the rural areas. They believe that the urban areas offer better prospect for employment.

Urbanization is referred to as the influx of people into the urban areas, it is a major trend in modern societies in South East of Nigeria as people move to cities in search of better jobs, education, healthcare and other opportunities. This can lead to a number of changes, including land use patterns and growth of urban infrastructure. Some of the impacts of urbanization include increased economic growth, improved access to services, and greater cultural diversity. However, urbanization can also lead to a number of challenges, such as increased traffic congestion, air and water pollution, social inequality and increase in crime rate.

The relationship between urbanization and youth employment is a complex one. In general, urban areas tend to have more job opportunities than rural areas, which can attract majority of the youths to cities. However, the availability of jobs does not always mean that the youths will be able to find employment (Chen et al., 2014). Unemployment among the youths is often a major issue in urban areas, as many young people lack the skills and experience needed to compete in the labour market. Additionally, urban areas often have higher living costs, which can make it difficult for the youth to support themselves.

Consequently, urbanization can also have a number of other impacts on youth employment. For example, the growth of cities can lead to changes in the types of jobs available. In many cities the traditional industries that employed large number of young people such as manufacturing and agriculture, have been replaced by service sector jobs, which often require higher levels of education and training. This can make it difficult for the youth with lower levels of education to find employment (Mashiet al., (2021). Urbanization can also lead to increased competition for the few available jobs in the cities as young people from different rural communities across the country move to urban areas in search of employment (Mashi et al., (2021). The relationship between urbanization and youth employment is complex and multi-faceted, and hence requires empirical evaluation and that is the focus of this research study. Specifically the study sought to; determine the effect of urbanization on youth job placement, examine the effect of urbanization on youth empowerment and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

In Nigeria, the federal government in 2008 acknowledges that about 80 percent of Nigeria's youth are unemployed and 10 percent underemployed (Daily Trust, 2008). In 2011, the Minister of Youth Development, Bolaji Abullahi reported that 42.2 percent of Nigeria's youth population is out of job. Depo Oyedokun, the Chairman of the House Committee on Youth and Social Development revealed that of the over 40 million unemployed youths in the country 23 million are unemployable and therefore susceptible to crime hence the need to articulate what could be done to salvage the situation. The pace is increasing because most graduate lack relevant marketable skills. In search of greener pasture, there has been a monumental migration of these youths from rural areas to urban center resulting in sporadic urbanization across the country most especially in South East of Nigeria where the youths seems no longer to be comfortable dwelling in the rural areas. They believe that the urban areas offer better prospect for employment. However, the availability of jobs does not always mean that the youth will be able to find employment. Unemployment among the youth is often a major issue in urban areas, as many young people lack the skills and experience needed to compete in the labour market. Additionally, urban areas often have higher living costs, which can make it difficult for the youth to support themselves. It is based on these observable problem confronting the youth migration to urban center in search of employment that aroused the researcher interest to investigate the relationship between urbanization and youth employment in South East Nigeria from 2015 – 2023.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **Concept of urbanization**

Urbanization is the movement of people from rural to urban areas. According to Arouri et al. (2014), urbanization and investment in human capital are shaping economic growth in Africa, to the extent that governments have prioritized budgets to economic sectors such as manufacturing and services. Urbanization unveils how rural agricultural populations emigrate to urban production facilities to take advantage of industries and service sectors that are in big cities (Sancar and Sancar, 2017). Mashi et al., (2021) asserts that migration takes place due to the change in demand and supply of labour from the rural to the urban sector.

Push factors such as agricultural modernization (the use of technical machines) and rural poverty influence people to migrate Jedwab et al. (2017) further states that lack of employment in the agricultural sector, a poor health care system and a lack of infrastructure amongst others are contributing factors. Pull factors such as industrialization and urban-biased policies are elements that attract people to emigrate to towns and cities (Wazza and Bedeke, 2022). Urban areas are known for their abilities to provide better education, employment, and developmental opportunities, which in most cases lead to improvements in people's living standards (National Planning Commission, 2021).

Urbanization is a global phenomenon that has now become a reality, especially for developing countries, although some studies highlight the negative effects and other studies highlight the positive impact on economic growth (Chen et al., 2014). The growth of the international capitalist system and how rural populations are marginalized are the primary factors that drive people from rural to join the urban proletariat (King et al., 2021). Ritchie and Roser (2018), asserts that over 50% of the world's population live in urban areas and that was not the case in earlier times. Therefore, the prevalence of this new global phenomenon prompted a lot of studies on the impact it might have on development, growth, and socio-economic issues.

### **Urbanization and youth job placement in South East Nigeria**

Based on the transformation in its midsize and mega cities, the Nigerian urbanization level is notably high. Globally, it is one of the fastest-growing urbanized nations, with half its 1.8 million citizens currently residing in urban areas (NPC, 2021, Ojo; and Ojewale, 2019). Urban opportunities employ the largest number of people by far, in contrast to agriculture, which has previously been the primary source of livelihood for many years (UNCTADstat 2014; World bank, 2016). Urban expansion rates have certainly increased in recent years, despite the low economic growth and limited employment opportunities in the urban areas (NPC 2021, UNCTADstat, 2014). As such, Nigerian urbanization negates conventional urban theory, which shows a positive correlation between urban growth and economic growth (Mahendra and Seto 2019; Mendonça et al, 2020; Sapena et al, 2020). The research literature provides different explanations for Nigeria's

exploding urban growth. Some viewpoints suggested that this resulted from an increased demand for human labor due to the ongoing construction work despite the dwindling economic growth (Sean et al, 2018; Essien, 2021). Others point to the low accommodation costs in suburban areas that allow migrants to easily commute to the urban areas on a daily basis (Essien, 2021). Rural–urban migration has been attributed as the primary driver of urban growth (UNCTADstat, 2014; Bloch et al, 2015; Kyle, 2018) due to the lack of basic utilities such as water, electricity, and telecommunication in the rural areas. Furthermore, the major threat to these environments is the significant loss of agricultural land. Urban studies in Nigeria have shown that over the last twenty years, sixty million people have changed their source of income from agrarian work to a non-agricultural income (NPC, 2021; UNCTADstat, 2014). Nevertheless, some still cannot find another better source of income. The demise of agriculture occurs despite the lack of alternative urban job opportunities, leaving many households with an uncertain future. This is primarily ascribed to the lack of farm mechanization, low crop yields, and low agriculture wages (World bank, 2016). These studies offer an important framework for investigating the perspectives of economic growth and urban growth in the emerging cities in Nigeria. This stands as a guide for our empirical study, and in designing an appropriate conceptual framework, we will provide an in-depth assessment of the four cities in our case studies.

### **Urbanization and youth empowerment in south east, Nigeria**

A linear debate in urban literature shows that economic growth and urban growth are normally linked (Seto and Kaufmann, 2003; Henderson, 2010; Ivan and Gordon, 2013; Mahendra and Seto, 2019; Mendonça et al, 2020; Sapena et al, 2020). According to the United Nations, the urbanization process is generally associated with economic growth and social transformation that has brought about urban migration, life expectancy changes, and poverty reduction (United Nation 2019). Life in urban areas is associated with the availability of social amenities, access to better health care, education, good road networks, and better job opportunities (United Nation 2019). Furthermore, studies also show there is a positive correlation between urban growth rate and GDP per capita (Ivan and Gordon, 2013; Mahendra and Seto, 2019). Studies in economic geography argue this assertion of a positive correlation between economic growth and urban growth. However, these studies focus primarily on cities in the global south, where rapid urbanization has not transformed or triggered an increase in the standard of living (Collier and Venables, 2017; Henderson and Turner 2020). Glaeser (2014) attributed this to the adverse effects of diseconomies of scale in metropolitan cities in the global south, while other studies have mainly emphasized the negative effects of low economic growth in urban areas, which is urbanization devoid of industrialization (Jedwab and Vollrath 2015). This is noticeable in national economies that seem to be dependent on natural resource exports, which results in many of the big cities having economies that are based on consumption instead of production (Gollin et al, 2016). According to the World Bank (2015), cities need to offer generative urbanization, which involves cities providing an enabling environment for resilient, productive, and inclusive economies. This type of urbanization is lacking in our study area and other African cities.

However, as highlighted above, the contention about urbanization being devoid of industrialization does not appear to be applicable in Nigeria. Nigerian urbanization indicates the opposite. In recent years, a relative economic growth has influenced and accelerated urban migration in many cities across the country. Nigeria's urban growth and the share of urban population growth are far above many other African countries. It is potentially unsurprising, therefore, that Nigeria does not feature in most studies on urbanization devoid of industrialization

Ocho, (2005) added his voice when he averred that Nigerian youths face daily series of problems, ranging from poverty, unemployment, conflicts and diseases. Tackling them is not an easy task. These problems therefore demand that the youths be empowered with creative problem-solving skills. The training of educated individuals who can function effectively in the society for the betterment of self and the society will require special attention as the system will be deliberately set to concern itself with the development of sound human capital required for national development (Ocho, 2005). But through well planned and executed entrepreneurship education, Oviawe (2010) observed, the Nigerian youths will learn to be happy and fulfilled, as they will be productive and committed as employees or employers of labour. They will allow their unique abilities to be used for the development of the national and global goals rather than abandon their country for greener pastures (Oviawe 2010).

## **2,1 Theoretical Framework**

### **Keynesian Growth Theories**

Keynes school of thought is centred on the government's intervention to stimulate economic growth. The theory asserts that government should trigger aggregate demand (consumption spending, businesses and households) which is fundamental to economic growth. Furthermore, Keynes theory asserts that free markets framework do not lead to full employment, instead government interventions policies are fundamental for price stability and full employment. In applying this theory to this study, it could be inferred that urbanization alone do not guarantee employment rather government's intervention in provision of the necessary infrastructure mostly in the rural areas will help guarantee youths employment

### **Empirical review**

Few studies have empirically investigated the relationship between urbanization and youth employment. This section briefly reviews the empirical literature.

In a study to investigate the relationship between urbanization and unemployment across the world (keeping other factors constant), Haq, *et al.* (2012) employed non- probability sampling correlation techniques for analysis of cross country data of 2010 for countries across the globe. Result from the nonprobability sampling technique showed positive relationship between the variables, implying that urbanization was associated with higher rate of unemployment. The correlation analysis showed positive correlation between the variables in underdeveloped and developing countries, and negative correlation between them in developed countries. These suggest that the effect of urbanization on unemployment is dependent on the level of development of the economy.

Fagbohunka (2018) employed primary data to examine the effect of urbanisation on employment and other variables in Ikare Akoko, Ondo State Nigeria. The analysis involved simple descriptive

statistics. The study found that urbanization adversely affects employment in the area. Also adversely affected by urbanization are infrastructural and housing facilities. The study also found that high pace of urbanisation is associated with increase in crime rate. A major weakness of this study is the employment of descriptive statistics which in my opinion do not adequately measure cause-effect relationships among variables.

Miltra (2019) examined the effect of urbanization on women employment in Odisha, Eastern India using district level data for 2010-12 period. The methodology involved factor analysis. The study found negative relationship between the variables, suggesting that urbanization adversely affects women employment in the state. Major weaknesses of the study include the length of period covered by the study which is only two years, and may be considered inadequate to draw a general conclusion on the effect of urbanization on female employment. The suitability of the methodology employed is also questionable as the method is designed to investigate relationships for complex concepts that are not easily measured, and variables such as urbanization and employment do not perfectly fit in that category of immeasurable concepts.

Other economic activities including production, consumption and exchange therein, leading to expansion of the GDP. This is envisaged to engender reduction in unemployment as predicted by the Okun's Law. Thus, urbanization can be related to unemployment through its linkage with real output.

Gutkind (1968) noted that rural-urban migration (in Africa) is not new, but what is new is the intensity of the migration which has some implication for unemployment. The Beckmann's (1976) and Mossay and Picard's (2011, 2013) urban models with global social interactions (both cited in Sato and Zenou, 2014) explain the relationship between urbanization and employment which may result from social interaction in urban centres. Peer effects and social networks resulting from (weak and strong) social interactions in urban centres could impact labour market outcomes (Sato & Zenou, 2014). Whereas rapid urbanization has the advantage of economies of scale and numerous social and economic externalities such as skilled workers, social and cultural amenities, etc., these may however be dwarfed by the cost of urbanization which include emergence of slums, overstretched health facilities and other public utility facilities, and environmental pollution with adverse health consequences (Todaro, 1997; Boadi, *et al.*, 2005; Aliyu & Amadu, 2017). These could affect productivity of, as well as supply and demand for labour.

Aikaeli, *et al.* (2021) employed correlation and three-stage-least squares (3SLS) techniques to examine the relationships among rural-urban migration, urbanisation and urban unemployment in Tanzania's Mainland using 1988, 2002 and 2012 census surveys. The study found that urbanization and urban unemployment are strongly positively correlated. Urbanisation was associated with higher unemployment rates in the Mainland. The 3SLS estimates reveal that both variables were driven significantly by propensity of urban in-migration and differentials in rural-urban per capita income.

The effect of rural-urban migration on inflation and unemployment in urban areas of Lagos State, Nigeria was examined in Saheed *et al.* (2018) using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Data used for the study were primary data collected through informal interview and

structured questionnaires. The study found that rural-urban migration was associated with increase in urban unemployment in the state.

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out in five major urban areas in South East of Nigeria, which include Enugu, Awka, Abakaliki, Aba, and Owerri. The population for the study comprised 969 females and 734 males which were gotten from the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON) Register. A sample of 324 Respondents was sampled for the study using Taro Yamane sampling techniques. A questionnaire developed by the researcher served as the instrument for data collection. The study made use of simple percentage for data analysis while chi-square was used in testing of the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

### 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

This is the statistical presentation of the respondents' view to the research questions.

#### Research Question 1

**Table 1.1: The effect of urbanization on youth job placement**

The effect of urbanization on youth job placement	Frequency	Percent
Urban areas provide access to better job opportunities	75	23.15
Youth in urban areas are more enlighten than youths in rural areas	55	16.97
The chance of getting job in the urban areas is high	62	19.14
Urban areas offers a better living condition	67	20.68
Employment opportunities in rural areas are restricted to agricultural sector	65	20.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Researchers, 2024**

The findings of the table revealed that 23.15% of the respondents agreed that urban areas provides access to better job opportunities, 16.97% agreed that youth in urban areas are more enlighten than youths in rural areas, 19.14% concurred that the chance of getting job in the urban areas is high, 20.68% were of the view that urban areas offer a better living condition and finally 20.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that employment opportunities in rural areas are restricted to agricultural sector. From the findings of the table it could be inferred that urbanization has significant effect on youth job placement.

#### Research Question 2

**Table 1.2: The effect of urbanization on youth empowerment and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills**



<b>The effect of urbanization on youth empowerment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Urban areas provide access to myriad of youth empowerment programs	63	19.44
Urban areas offer greater opportunities for educational and skills acquisition training	59	18.21
Rural areas lack the basic social and infrastructural amenities necessary for youth empowerment	72	22.22
Youth empowerment programs in the rural areas are most often restricted to the agricultural sector	64	19.75
There is free flow of information about youth empowerment programs in urban areas than in rural areas	66	20.37
<b>Total</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Researcher, 2024**

The findings of table 1.2 above revealed that 19.44% of the respondents were of the opinion that urban areas provide access to myriad of youth empowerment programs, 18.21% believed that urban areas offer greater opportunities for educational and skills acquisition training, 22.22% agreed that rural areas lack the basic social and infrastructural amenities necessary for youth empowerment, 19.75% concurred that youth empowerment programs in the rural areas are most often restricted to the agricultural sector, and finally, 20.37% were of the view that there is always free flow of information about youth empowerment programs in urban areas than in rural areas. The implications of the findings of the table above is that urbanization has significant effect youth empowerment.

### **4.3 Test of Hypotheses**

The hypotheses were tested using the chi-square as the statistical tool

#### **Hypothesis I**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** urbanization has no significant effect on youth job placement in South East of Nigeria

**Table 1.3: Chi Square table for testing hypothesis I**

<b>O</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>(O-e)</b>	<b>(O-e)<sup>2</sup></b>	<b><math>\frac{(O-e)^2}{E}</math></b>
<b>75</b>	64.8	10.2	104.04	1.60
<b>55</b>	64.8	-9.8	96.04	1.48
<b>62</b>	64.8	-2.8	7.84	0.12

<b>67</b>	64.8	2.2	4.84	0.07
<b>65</b>	64.8	0.2	0.04	0.00
<b>324</b>				<b>3.27</b>

Table value = 5.991, calculated value = 3.27

**Decision:** Since the calculated value (3.27) is less than the table value (5.99), the  $H_0$  (null hypothesis) is accepted. This implies urbanization has no significant effect on youth job placement.

### Hypothesis II

**H0:** urbanization has no significant effect on youth empowerment and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills in South East of Nigeria

**Table 1.4: Chi Square table for testing hypothesis II**

<b>O</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>(O-e)</b>	<b>(O-e)<sup>2</sup></b>	<b><math>\frac{(O-e)^2}{E}</math></b>
<b>63</b>	64.8	-1.8	3.24	0.05
<b>59</b>	64.8	-5.8	33.64	0.52
<b>72</b>	64.8	7.2	51.84	0.80
<b>64</b>	64.8	0.8	0.64	0.00
<b>66</b>	64.8	1.2	1.44	0.02
<b>324</b>				<b>1.39</b>

Table value = 5.991, calculated value = 1.39

**Decision:** Since the calculated value (1.39) is less than the table value (5.99), the  $H_0$  (null hypothesis) is accepted. This implies there is no positive correlation between urbanization and youth job empowerment and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills in south east of Nigeria

### Summary of the findings

The findings of the study could be summarized as follows;

1. There is no positive correlation between urbanization and youth job placement in south east of Nigeria
2. There is no positive correlation between urbanization and youth empowerment in south east of Nigeria

### 5. Discussion of findings

The findings of table 1.3, chi square table for testing hypothesis I revealed a calculated table value of 3.27 at 0.05 level of significance, since the calculated value (3.27) is less than the table value (5.99). The  $H_0$  (null hypothesis) is accepted. This implies urbanization has no significant effect on youth job placement. The findings of the study is in line with the assertions of Chen et al, (2014) that the

relationship between urbanization and youth employment is a complex one, as he reiterated that urban areas tend to have more job opportunities than rural areas, which can attract majorities of the youth, however the availability of jobs does not always mean that the youth will be able to find employment.

The findings of the study is also in agreement with the observation of Mashiet al, (2021) that urbanization can also lead to increased competition for the few available job in the cities as the youths from different rural communities across the country move to urban areas in search of employment, this make it difficult for the youth to secure employment. On the same vein Mashiet al, (2021) went further to explain that the traditional industries that employed large number of young people such as manufacturing and agriculture have been replaced by service sector jobs, which often require higher levels of education and training and this also makes it difficult for the youth with lower level of education to find employment in urban areas. On the other hand, the findings of the study corroborated the findings of Fagbohunka (2018) that urbanization adversely affected youth employment.

From the findings of table 1.4, chi square table for testing hypothesis II, revealed a calculated table value of 1.39 at 0.05 level of significance, Since the calculated value (1.39) is less than the table value (5.99), the  $H_0$  (null hypothesis) is accepted. This implies urbanization has no significant effect on youth empowerment and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills. The findings of the study confirmed the observation of UNCTADstat (2014) that some youths after leaving the agrarian work in the rural areas to migrate to the urban centers are unable to find a better source of income, which implies that urbanization does not guarantee youth empowerment and development. The findings of the study also buttressed the assertions of Chen et al (2014) that majority of the youths in urban areas lack the skills and experience needed to compete in the labour market, this is also a glaring indication that urbanization does not ensure youth development and empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

This present empirical study draws the conclusion that though employment opportunities may exist in the urban areas, it is also likely that the youths who migrate to the urban areas in search of better job may not be able to secure employment, due to increased competition for the few available jobs in the urban areas. Secondly urban areas often have higher living costs, which can make it difficult for the youths to support themselves and may result to social vices such as arm robbery, prostitutions, drug trafficking etc in a bid to survive in urban areas. Hence this study offer the following recommendations to avert or cushion the adverse effect of urbanization in south east of Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made;

1. Social and infrastructural amenities should be provided in the rural areas to curtail the rate or youth migration into the urban areas to search for non-existence jobs.
2. The government and all stake holders should take agriculture seriously, and provide facilities to achieve mechanized farming. This will help create employment for the youth and sustainable economic development across the country
3. The government should provide youth empowerment scheme to equip the youths with necessary skills to be relevant in the labour market

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