

## Facilitating Transparency, Equity and Accountability of Youth Employment and Empowerment Programmes in Kano State

### Background

The multitude of youth wandering or idling away on the streets is a common sight in the ancient city of Kano. Educated and uneducated alike, many young persons can be seen hawking wares, cleaning windscreens for a fee or simply roaming the streets in search of elusive odd jobs to make ends meet. With the second largest percentage of youth in Nigeria<sup>1</sup> (next to Lagos) and an unemployment rate of 21.3%<sup>2</sup>, Kano state remains at risk of rising violence in view of the existing correlation between youth unemployment and disposition to violent conflict.<sup>3</sup>



Stakeholders deliberate on the Code of Principles and Standards

Despite several youth employment and empowerment programmes introduced by successive government administrations, unemployment remains significantly high in the state with dismal consequences on the local economy. Lack of communication and coordination amongst relevant government agencies, politicisation of programmes and lack of transparency in the distribution of employment and empowerment opportunities are significant factors inhibiting the success of these initiatives. A recent study found that over 70% of Nigerian youth interviewed believe that government-funded employment and empowerment opportunities are only accessible to close relatives and associates of politicians in power.<sup>4</sup> This perception points to a lack of confidence in the process amongst youth but more importantly, it points to the need to entrench transparency, accountability and inclusion in the process of distributing youth employment and empowerment opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> 2012 National Baseline Youth Survey Report (Published March 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Nigeria Data Atlas (2013). <http://nigeria.opendataforafrica.org/wwlmyyf/nigeria-data-atlas-03-january-2013>

<sup>3</sup> Osakwe, C. (2013) Youth, Unemployment and National Security in Nigeria. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science. Vol. 3 No. 21

<sup>4</sup> NSRP (2014) Winners or Losers: Assessing the Contribution of Youth Employment and Empowerment Programmes to Reducing Conflict Risk in Nigeria (P.8)

## **Bringing Stakeholders to the Table**

Over the years, both the federal and state governments have established various agencies to address youth unemployment in Kano state. Federal government agencies include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF). The state government agencies include the Directorate of Youth Development (DYD), the Community Reorientation Committee (CRC), and the Kano Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA). To maximise the potential for significant reduction in youth unemployment that these agencies offer, the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED) with the support of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), embarked on an initiative to develop a Code of Principles and Standards (CPS) to guide the design and implementation of youth employment and empowerment programmes in the state.

The initiative began with a baseline study which sought to understand the constraints of existing programmes in Kano. Advocacy and consultative sessions with relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Youth Organisations, labour organisations, Civil Society Organisations, Faith-based Organisations and the Council of Ulama pointed to the need for a Code of Principles and Standards embodying best practices for employment and empowerment programmes. This was followed by the drafting and adoption of the Code of Principles and Standards through a consultative and participatory process. The document which aims at enhancing transparency, equity and accountability of relevant government-run programmes includes detailed recommendations to:

- Guide relevant government agencies in providing inclusive platforms for engaging youth and key stakeholder groups in the development, administration, control and evaluation of youth employment and empowerment programmes
- Ensure that all unemployed youth resident in Kano state have equal access to the benefits of youth employment and empowerment programmes irrespective of gender, faith, ethnicity, ability/disability status, health status and educational status.
- Facilitate the publication of regular reports of youth employment and empowerment programme activities including a list of beneficiaries showing distribution by gender, educational/skill level, faith, ability and ethnicity.

## **Results**

The initiative of bringing youth, government and key stakeholder groups together to develop principles to guide the design and implementation of youth employment and empowerment programmes has yielded results. The Code of Principles and Standards has strengthened advocacy and engagement activities by Unemployed Youth Network (UYN) groups in Kombutso, Bichi and Dogwa Local Government Areas of Kano State to MDAs implementing employment and empowerment programmes.

Significant improvement in confidence levels have been recorded amongst youth who previously believed that employment and empowerment programmes were accessible only to persons affiliated with political figures. Saratu Usman, representing the youth from Panshekara community in Kumbotso Local Government Area, stated as follows:

*“...I am optimistic that this CHRICED project with time will increase access for unemployed youth to entrepreneurial skills and employment opportunities for self-reliance and income security”*

The boost in confidence is not limited to the youth. Some officials of relevant government agencies have expressed their renewed optimism that youth employment and empowerment programmes are now poised to maximise their potential for reducing youth employment in Kano state. Mr. Aliyu Abubakar, the state Coordinator of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) said:

*“As a policy implementer, I’m optimistic that with the adoption of the CPS we can now have a youth-specific policy-guideline that focuses on increasing employment chances for youth..... In a job-scarce environment, joining the world of work is particularly difficult for youth in Kano state.”*

One of the most significant result of this initiative is the improved communication, collaboration and coordination among MDAs responsible for youth employment and empowerment in the state. The initiative provided a forum for dialogue and relationship building amongst these key stakeholders and resulted in the identification of areas where efforts had been duplicated. The dialogue forum has also contributed significantly to improved synergy and effective use of state resources.

### **Challenges**

A key challenge the initiative faced while conducting the baseline studies was the absence of a database on unemployed youth in Kano state. This lack of comprehensive data on potential beneficiaries of youth employment and empowerment programmes made it difficult to ascertain the number of unemployed youth in the state thus rendering efforts at measuring the proportional success of current government-run programmes difficult. Moreover, the lack of legislative framework guiding the design and implementation of youth employment and empowerment programmes meant that stakeholders had to begin from scratch and relied solely on their personal knowledge in the design of the Code of Principles and Standards.

### **Lesson Learned**

The tedious process of ensuring government officials buy-in for the initiative, points to the need for clear identification and articulation of potential benefits to all parties involved during advocacy engagements. There were indications that actors and institutions are more likely to engage in initiatives where they perceive incentives and potential benefits from the outset.