

**Understanding the Pains of a Sapped Generation: African Youth and the Enduring
Legacies of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)**

By

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Abstract

This paper traces the well-spring of some of the current socio-economic circumstances, especially as they relate to high rates of youth unemployment and absence of quality social security systems in many African countries to the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) implemented during the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, using a political economy perspective, the paper argues that to understand some of the current pains of young Africans, a critical analysis and appraisal of SAPs, their failures and enduring legacies, are relevant. Hence, the paper maintains that for generations of young Africans born since the 1980s, the current pains being experienced are not unconnected to the vagaries of neoliberal capitalism's ill-conceived reforms. To overcome some of the problems associated with the present neoliberal capitalist order on the continent, the paper argues for socially democratic and developmental approaches that recognize the pains of a sapped generation of young Africans.

Keyword: SAPs, Africa, Youth, Nigeria, IMF, World Bank.

Introduction

As thousands of African migrants continue to brave the odds of migrating to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea, controversies on the causal factors driving such mass exodus of mostly young African migrants has increased. While some observers attribute the migration to problems of war induced humanitarian and refugee crises, other maintain the proportion of migrants seeking economic opportunities suggest the problem goes beyond the refugee crises. Still many others argue it is a mixture of both factors. As the controversies rage, it is noteworthy that within the first half of 2015 alone, more than 100,000 persons have attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Italy with the hope of eventually settling in Italy or other countries in the European Union.¹ The fact that more than 2000 people have died within the same period has not stopped many others from embarking on the dangerous perilous journey across the Mediterranean.²

Yet, the grim realities that often await many of these migrants in Europe is something many of them have already experienced at some point in their lives on the African continent. The Eurozone crises of the past decade has produced some of the most austere experiences for some European countries whose youth unemployment rates now compete with some of their African counterparts.³ But unlike these European countries – especially Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, (a.k.a. PIGS) – where austerity policies similar to the neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed in developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s are now being implemented, many African countries had been embroiled in the “age of austerity” for more than two decades.⁴ Explanations of how the enduring legacies and negative effects of SAPs contribute as major drivers of today’s mass exodus of young Africans from the continent is partly what this paper is about. The effects of such legacies and other effects on the youth who remain on the continent are also examined. In

contributing to filling gaps in the literature on what to do with Africa's teeming young population, whose future have become uncertain amidst rising socio-economic challenges, this paper traces such challenges to the SAP era dating back to the 1980s and 1990s.

To be sure, while not entirely attributable to SAPs, the current problems of high rates of youth unemployment and absence of quality social security and services, particularly access to quality education and healthcare systems, were exacerbated in many countries beginning in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of SAPs. Thus, in seeking to understand some of the harbingers of these problems, it is imperative to look closer at the SAP era. Consequently, from a political economy perspective, the paper argues that to understand some of the current pains of young Africans, a critical analysis and appraisal of SAPs, their failures and enduring legacies, are relevant. The paper maintains that for generations of young Africans born since the 1980s, the current pains being experienced are not unconnected to the vagaries of neoliberal capitalism's ill-conceived reforms that produced massive social dislocations amidst economic uncertainties and political turmoil. As such, in order to overcome some of the problems associated with the present neoliberal capitalist order on the continent, more socially democratic and developmental states that recognize the pains of a sapped generation are important in rectifying some of the generational damages currently plaguing African youths.

Conceptually, "African youths" as used in this paper refers mostly to people born during and after the 1980s who now constitute majority of the population in many African countries and old enough to take active part in the labour market but cannot find (decent) jobs.⁵ Following this introduction, this paper is organized in three sections. The first section provides a brief overview of what the main elements of SAPs were in Africa. The section also discusses the attendant consequences as they relate to the youth. The second section provides some contextual

illustration of the effects of SAPs on young people based on the Nigerian experience. The third section is an exploration of possible remedies to the current state of youth unemployment and related challenges in relation to what can be achieved through socially democratic and developmental approaches in many African countries. This section is followed by a brief conclusion of the paper.

Throughout the paper nonetheless, while SAPs are considered to have being detrimental to the development of the African continent in the past three decades, it is imperative to emphasize that other factors have equally being responsible for the challenges being experienced by young Africans.⁶ More so, although the Bretton Wood institutions spearheaded SAPs, some African politicians, policymakers and businesspeople willing collaborated with their foreign partners. The last sentence is offered to the reader as a caveat in interpreting the argument of this paper as laying sole responsibility of SAPs on the door steps of foreigners while absorbing Africans of any responsibility or agency. It merit emphasizing that the combined efforts of various willing parties contributed enormously to the current economic imbroglio that, amongst many others things, encourages mass migration of African youths in search of better economic opportunities outside the continent. Nonetheless, as this paper hopefully makes clear in the following paragraphs, the resilience of Africans home and abroad will no doubt be imperative in revamping the continent's economy within more socially and politically acceptable orders.

African Youths and the defenestration of hope: SAPs Revisited

SAPs have been much debated since they were introduced beginning in the 1980s in many developing countries. Following the global debt crises, itself an aftermath of oil crises of the 1970s, many countries became trapped in burgeoning debt profile that gradually created avenues

for the IMF and World Bank to advance their free market fundamentalist solutions without due consideration for the social dislocations such solutions entail.⁷ But what exactly constitutes the main purview of SAPs and why have they become one of the most criticized economic policies ever implemented by the IMF and the World Bank? Although answers to these questions remain highly controversial amongst critics and supporters of SAP, in their most simple elements, SAPs are widely believed to be policies that sought to shift or significantly reduce the involvement of governments in the control of the commanding heights of the economies in many countries.⁸ At the same, to implement these policies, political and social compromises that today represent major changes in the lives of many people had to be made. In the African context, during the 1980s and 1990s, SAPs were introduced by military dictators and autocrats, who in alliance with the IMF and World Bank blatantly ignored the cries of the citizens and forced SAPs on them without due consideration for the negative effects of these policies.⁹

Simply put, Structural Adjustment in the words of Engberg-Pedersen et al., “involves measures to reduce spending and direct economic involvement by the state, to move towards market allocation of the resources and provide an ‘enabling environment’ for private enterprise.”¹⁰ To describe the set of policies that came to define SAPs, John Williamson coined the phrase “Washington Consensus” in 1989. The Washington Consensus refers to how the IMF, World Bank and United States Treasury department put together policies deemed as remedies for economies in need of structural adjustment. As Dani Rodrik explains, the Washington Consensus policies revolved around policies stipulating fiscal discipline, reprioritizing public expenditure, tax reforms, adjusting interest and exchange rates, and ensuring trade liberalization, foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation, and reforming property right laws.¹¹ Considering many African governments were involved in directing the course of development in their

countries soon after independence in the 1960s, reducing state involvement was deemed necessary to ensure private enterprise to thrive under SAPs. Essentially, markets forces had to replace the state in directing the commanding heights of the economy. In other words, African governments and people should listen and follow the dictate of markets forces in the allocation of resources.¹²

Although coverage of the entire socio-economic consequences of SAPs in Africa goes beyond the scope of this paper, the effects of SAPs on various sectors from agriculture to manufacturing have been well documented by scholars.¹³ With regards to the effects on SAPs on young people born in the 1980s and 1990s, many of who are now trapped in the high youth unemployment debacle, the initial effects on their childhood development can through reduction in the public spending on education and health. The massive cuts in public spending on education and health and the subsequent introduction of unaffordable user fees ensured many families could not afford the costs of education and health for the effective development of their children. This forced a lot of people to drop out of school even as those who remained were subjected to low quality education given the bias towards encouraging the creation of private schools. Likewise, the health of young people was highly compromised with respect to access to quality healthcare induced by the bias towards private healthcare provisioning and the introduction of user fees in the public healthcare system. It should be noted that these cuts occurred at a time the HIV/AIDS epidemic was spreading fast across the African continent.

Put in perspective, as the effects of SAPs began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, attention was being drawn to its negative impact on children born in that era. Indeed, as the two volumes of UNICEF reports, *Adjustment with a Human Face*, were release in 1987 and 1988

respectively, many observers were aghast at the horrendous impacts of SAPs on children.¹⁴ In a review of these reports, one observer notes that,

How international Bankers and IMF Bureaucrats Kill Children would be a more appropriate title for a recent study by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), *Adjustment with a Human Face – Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth* (1987). This study was only published after more than a year's delay, probably to dilute some of the conclusions. The facts presented in this book are a clinical analysis of International Monetary (Fund) – imposed austerity measures on children's health. Complex sociological "analysis" is made of some shocking facts, the most simple of which is that after years of gradual decline in infant mortality in sub-Saharan Africa, thanks to modern medicine and improved nutrition, the number of deaths has increased substantially over the last five years.¹⁵

Furthermore, the end of the 1980s coincided with the end of the cold war and the balkanization of the former Soviet Union. This gave rise to a new set of demands for democratization in Africa. Former military governments whose collaboration with the IMF and World Bank brought unimaginable poverty to many Africans were soon required by the IFIs and donor governments to transit to democratic rule while continuing with the economic reforms. The combination of economic and political conditionality thus gave way to what Eyoh Dickson refers to as the "new political sociology for Africa" (NPSA).¹⁶

The NPSA as Dickson argues was the combination of neoliberal SAPs with political liberalization as the Bretton Woods institutions reformulated their agenda in Africa under the label of promoting "good governance."¹⁷ Along this line, the World Bank gradual shift to reframing Africa's economic problems as a "crises of governance" in its 1989 report, *From Crises to Sustainable Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa*, is worthy of note.¹⁸ Specifically, bad governance, according to the World Bank, was the cause of Africa's underdevelopment and the solution was to the promotion of a neoliberal inspired good governance agenda.¹⁹ In any case, the socio-economic problems persisted and young Africans whose access to quality education and health had been sapped considerably in the 1980s and 1990s increasingly grew up to become

unemployed as the millennium drew near. By year 2000, in view of what the editors of *The Economists* magazine in its 13 May 2000 edition considered the bleak future of the African continent after two decades of failed economic reforms; Africa was declared “the hopeless continent.”²⁰

To be sure, the new millennium witnessed a new dispensation in global history as the 21st century was ushered in. But it also raised doubts about the prospects of what will become of Africa’s many youths who by now had become of age as young adults with responsibilities for themselves without adequate opportunities to fulfill their responsibilities. Indeed, globally, it can be argued that many young people face similar challenges. As Douglas Kellner rightly notes, “For youth today, change is the name of the game, and they are forced to adapt to a rapidly mutating and crises-ridden world characterized by novel information, computer and genetic technologies; a complex and fragile global economy; and frightening era of war and terrorism.”²¹ For the African youth, however, it is important to note that although they are more educated than their parents in terms of numbers, it is not uncommon to read about their unemployability due to lack of necessary skills.²² More so, while Africa significantly has the largest numbers of young people in their twenties globally, the labour force participation of these young people is mainly dominated by precarious employment in the informal sector.²³

In addition, despite increases in economic growth rates, due mostly to increases in commodity prices and the demand for African products from China and India in the 2000s, job creation for Africa’s youth remains a herculean task. In fact, the emergence of the phenomenon of “jobless growth” and the ensuing crises of youth unemployment on the continent have combined to heighten the angst of many young people. As some flee the continent for “greener” (or at least green) pastures, some others have found solace in crime and terrorism. Quite

tellingly, the name of the Somalia based terrorist organization, *Al Shabab*, translates as “the youth” in Arabic. Likewise, the “harvest of violence” unleashed by another terrorist organization, the *Jama’at ahlis Sunnah lid Da’wat wal Jihad* [People committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and jihad] known as Boko Haram in Nigeria within the past decade, has drawn considerably from the poverty of young recruits, some of whom feel empowered to take their destinies into their own hands and fight for the establish of a Caliphate to cater for their needs. The widespread poverty in many parts of Nigerian, especially in the northern parts where the terrorists mainly operate therefore goes a long way in explaining the terrorism of Boko Haram. As the next section illustrates, having experienced almost three decades of failed economic reforms, many talented Nigerian youth are now involved in illicit activities in their bid to survive the challenges of life.

Connecting the dots: Mirroring the African youth experience under SAPs with the Nigeria experience

After three decades of neoliberal economic reforms, many African countries are still considered underdeveloped according to the annual reports of the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Index. Arguably, from north to south, east to west, the poor state of development on the continent has become a catalyst for uprisings against regimes that once supervised the impoverishment of Africans in the second half of 20th century. These uprisings unsurprising have being led by young people in many countries. Between and beyond the events of the Arab springs in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where dictators were ousted, including the protests in Burkina Faso that led to the removal of Blaise Compaore, the demands of young people for better conditions of living and freedom from oppression has been loud and clear; it is time for a total renewal of approaches to issues of socio-economic and political development on

the continent. Yet, overcoming these challenges requires understanding the root causes of the current economic crises in order to sustainably move forward. One country that has faced enormous challenges and one, whose youth have become popular globally for good and bad activities, is Nigeria.

Since the 1990s, the phenomenon of what is referred to as the “Nigerian scam” has become a global phrase employed to describe all forms of illicit fraud, ranging from promises of hidden treasures to be unlocked for profit, to love scams based on promises of affection to unsuspecting victims. The extortion of funds from victims across the world by fraudsters posing as businessmen, women, or genuine lovers, has become the stock in trade for a (significant) minority of Nigerians, earning a bad reputation for a country with so much potential for good. Mainly populated by young talented able bodied men and women who are known popularly as “Yahoo-Yahoo” boys and girls in local Nigerian parlance, the Nigerian scammers have proven to be quite dexterous in their game, often times to the amazement and bewilderment of law enforcement agents across the globe. Even when the scam is perpetuated by nationals of other countries, one of the easiest descriptions often offered for such scams carries Nigeria’s name in front of it. Nonetheless, considering how skillful and successful the few Nigerian scammers have been in the past two decades, the label has stuck. Rather unfortunately, the label of the Nigerian scam has become a label millions of Nigerian professionals across the globe whose contributions to the development of the societies they live in are often overshadowed by the activities of the ignoble minority. It is quite instructive to note that amongst the many positive attributes Nigerians in diaspora have is their avid love for education. According to a report released in 2014 by the United States Census Bureau, Nigerians are the most educated immigrants in the United States.²⁴

Significantly, however, the Nigerian scam and activities of the “Yahoo-Yahoo” boys and girls who often perpetuate them evolved mainly during the period of structural adjustment and afterwards, as young Nigerians, desperate for a better life turned their talents to crimes. The Nigerian experience with SAPs began in 1986 under the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida whose eight years military dictatorship (1985-1993) created economic and political crises that accelerated Nigeria’s decline as a postcolonial African state. As Attahiru Jega explains,

The Babangida regime pursued the implementation of the SAP ardently, with rapid and dramatic, if not profoundly devastating, consequences for the Nigerian political economy. The result was little, if any, curbing of waste in the management of the economy and in the operation of the government, with the manufacturing sector experiencing persistent decline in capacity utilization, and the economy recording large overall fiscal deficits.²⁵

In his summary of the effects of SAP on education in Nigeria, Said Adejumobi notes “education entered into severe crisis under SAP in various respects” as public expenditure declined in comparison to “less productive sectors like defence.”²⁶ As mentioned above, the demands by the IFIs and donors for African dictators to democratize caused some despots, including the Nigeria’s self-style military President Babangida as he preferred to be called, to design his own transition agenda. But attempts by the Nigerian military leader to create a transition programme that retains the contours of SAPs while dangling the prospects of democratic transition to civilian rule was fraught with failures and inconsistencies. After protracted periods of political rigmarole that culminated in the annulment of the results of the presidential elections in Nigeria in June 1993, General Babangida chose to “step aside” for an appointed interim national government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan with General Sani Abacha, a close ally of the Babangida as member of the interim government. Combined with economic and social chaos and the accompanying dislocations they entailed for Nigerians as a whole, the eventual ascension to

power of another Abacha not revealed Babangida's grand scheme, it also further plunged Nigeria and its youth into another era of draconian economic and political hiatus. Between 1993 until his sudden death in 1998, Nigerians endeared arguably their worst experience under any post-colonial government.

Abacha's rule was characterized by blatant disregard for human rights. Indeed, the murder of Ken Saro Wiwa – the erstwhile environmental activist from the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria – alongside eight Ogoni leaders in 1995 by the Abacha regime following their sentencing to death by a military tribunal, clearly signaled the end of any peaceful resolution of the Niger Delta crises. The youth of the region took note and soon after began a more militarized struggle once the opportunity arose. Drawing similarities between the experience of youths in the Niger Delta and their peers in Sierra Leone during the latter's civil war, in Paul Richards's words,

...there are parallels as well as differences, and these are striking. The Niger Delta and the diamond-rich forests of the Sierra/Liberia border are full of dispossessed young people, promised much by the smell and hum of global wealth creation taking place under their noses (and in the case of diamonds through their own labour), but bereft of education or long-term job prospects, and increasingly animated by a deep sense of grievance about their predicament as social outcasts.²⁷

The activities of Niger Delta militants in Nigeria since the return to civil rule have further brought attention to the marginalization of the region. Although the militancy has reduced following the introduction of the Amnesty Programme and related youth empowerment schemes in 2009 by the Nigerian government, the problem of poverty, environmental degradation and marginalization still persists. More so, Nigerian youths in general have been subjected to additional neoliberal reforms similar to those of SAPs since 1999 when democracy was restored. The legacy of SAP in destroying the education and healthcare systems, as well as manufacturing

and agricultural sectors, has ensured many youths remain unemployed in Nigeria. While the general unemployment rate in Nigeria is estimated to be 23.9 percent amongst all ages, the rate amongst the youth, ages 15-24, is officially 37.7 percent.²⁸ The fact that Nigerian youth feature prominently amongst migrants seeking to cross into Europe and are also amongst the list of fraudsters' and drug peddlers in various parts of Asia, bears witness to the staggering realities members of the youth population have to engage for survival. The economy has failed to lift many out of poverty and the evisceration of quality in the education system is considered a major source of poor quality of the skillsets some Nigerian youth now possess.

Paradoxically, despite claims of SAPs being necessary in order to tackle the debt crises of the 1980s, many African countries, including Nigeria, entered the 21st century with "odious debts."²⁹ With a debt overhang of approximately \$30 billion dollars as at year 2000, Nigeria's external debt profile was as high as it was during the late 1980s and 1990s when SAPs were introduced.³⁰ The billions of dollars paid to service the country's debts over the years prior to the turn of the new millennium did very little in denting the high debt rates. This is despite the fact that annual debt servicing fees at the end of the millennium was 9 times the amount of Nigeria's annual budget for the entire health sector.³¹

Instructively, even countries like Ghana and Tanzania, often hailed by the IMF and World Bank as good examples of reformers under SAPs ended up on the list of the IFIs Heavily Indebted Poor Countries at the end of the 20th century.³² Consequently, like other African countries whose debt overhang had become unsustainable, Nigeria had to seek debt relief under the Bretton Wood institutions' different debt relief initiatives in the 2000s.³³ By 2005 when Nigeria finally gained a debt relief of \$18 billion dollars from the Paris Club of creditors, it was required to buy back the remaining \$12 billion from the World Bank. This follows years of

deepening neoliberal reforms, including but not limited to continuous privatization exercises and cuts in public spending. Having grown up in an age of austerity, the implications of deepening neoliberal reforms for the development of the Nigerian youth cannot be overemphasized.

As noted above, the taproots of terrorism in Nigeria are related to massive impoverishment. Indeed, terrorism in Nigeria intrinsically stems from the interaction of Islamic fundamentalism, poverty and politics whereby various narratives of marginalization and socio-economic deprivation intersperse one another.³⁴ Several members of Boko Haram are persons born during the 1980s and 1990s. The economic and political crises engendered by SAPs in Nigeria worsened the prospects of living better lives without any support from the state. The fact that Boko Haram gradually established its own social welfare system for its members and would-be members illustrates the dire condition under which many grew up and were attracted to radical ideas given the failures of the state to provide any form of social assistance and welfare to the needy.³⁵

Likewise, in the case of the Niger Delta, having witnessed years of marginalization, taking up arms became attractive as a means of fending off oppressors, that is, corrupt Nigerian government officials and their multinational oil partners. At the same time, many of the militants and their leaders do not hide their participation in illegal oil bunkering as a means of enriching themselves. Youth militancy in the Niger Delta created numerous disruptions in the Nigerian oil sector prior to the Amnesty programme in 2009. What is nonetheless recognizable is the sheer amount of young people who became militants as a result of lack of productive opportunities to develop their talents.

Living in the age of austerity and deprivation is not a palatable experience for many. Nigeria's status as Africa's largest economy only appears a reality on paper. Worse still, the past 16 years of broken promises from different civilian governments at all levels in the federation has heightened the desperation of many young people. Yet, in their bid engage the Nigerian state, many Nigerian youth recently took the lead in ensuring the last general elections provided a new lease of hope for the renewed development of the country as illustrated in the defeat of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The historic election produced a leader from the opposition All Progressive Congress (APC) after 16 years of the PDP's rule. The active participation of Nigerian youths was based mainly on the need for the country to be repositioned for greatness and better opportunities. The next and final section advances suggestions on how that can be achieved through a socially democratic order with interventions that recognize the pains of the sapped generation of young Nigerians. But the discussion in the section is nevertheless relevant for the rest of Africa.

Towards a more just and socially democratic order for African Youths

In 2005, the World Bank published a report titled, *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reforms*, in which the World Bank reminisced over the lessons of SAPs. While some observers refer to this report as a major reflective one that tacitly admits responsible for some of the failures of SAPs – particularly in Africa – the extent to which much has changed in the World Bank's approach to Africa is debatable. This is partly because despite the much heralded “post-Washington consensus” amongst scholars and observers since the late 1990s, the IMF and the World Bank's neoliberal “good governance” agenda still influences economic policy formulation and implementation on the continent. Indeed, as Ray Kiely notes, the World Bank's approach and understanding of governance in development considers governance as

“synonymous with sound development management” in a neo-classical/neo-liberal economic sense.³⁶ For Kiely, therefore, the World Bank’s concept of good governance consequently “repeats the classical neo-liberal argument that state spending is unproductive and that it crowds out wealth creating activity of rational, individual entrepreneurs.”³⁷ In this sense, Kiely maintains for the World Bank, “the role of the state is to enable the private sector to lead economic activity – state activity, in other words, should be market friendly.”³⁸

It is not so much that markets and states/governments do not have separate roles to play in the development process but that the adversarial framework in which SAPs were implemented attacked state involvement in all areas, including the provision of social services in many African countries. From a political economy perspective, the introduction of the primacy/supremacy of market forces in the allocation of resources in reached its apogee in many African countries during SAPs. The implication was the gradual elimination of progressive education and healthcare system that African countries were gradually building after independence. Moreover, the insensitive manner through which both the World Bank and the IMF implemented SAPs in collaboration with dictators and tyrants on the African continent remains a festering sore on the approach to development on the continent.

What is more, the gradual repackaging of SAPs by the IMF and World Bank in the name of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that many African countries signed unto in the 2000s is a main source of concern. It arguably serves as a testament to a *plus ca change, plus ca meme chose*, old wine in new bottles approach to African development. Through the PRSPs, economic, and indeed development policymaking and planning, in Africa still remains highly influenced by the ideas of the Bretton Wood institutions. The supposed homegrown PRSPs have become so similar in content that to assume that the IMF and World Bank’s inputs are negligible

would amount to denying the evidence to the contrary. What this suggests is that given the current dispensation of PRSPs and the glaring inability of many changes to the lives of Africans, especially those of the youth, a more transformative approach is needed. While not been essentially a new idea, it has become imperative for African states to do away with PRSPs and develop more socially compatible policies for development beyond the adoption of repackaged neoliberal ideas.

Given the fact that many African youths were born under dictatorships, the implementation of SAPs worsened prospects for inclusive processes in the political, social and economic systems. Hence, a major shift in the emphasis in the nature of democratic rule must go beyond simple electoral democracies that still bear the fangs of military dictatorships in the economic sphere. In particular, it is imperative that beyond the occasional periodic elections to select leaders, more deliberative approaches that allows youths to have a say in the determination of their own destinies should be implemented in many African countries. These may include open debates and forums organized by governments and private sector officials for youths to put forward their ideas and innovation for the general improvement or betterment of the living conditions of African population in general.

More importantly, the social dislocations engendered by the lack of social security systems in many African countries needs to be urgently addressed. For instance, in Nigeria, with its teeming population of young people, many of whom are unemployed, no single social security system exists for the youths. This is a classic case of intergenerational abandonment amidst eviscerating opportunities and already sapped quality education for many. Notably, the massive reduction in funding for public education has equally produced reduction in the number of spaces available in university admissions, with annual over flows of qualified applicants being

refused entry into universities. Creating more publicly funded spaces will be necessary in this regard.

Equally important is industrial development and expansion of the manufacturing base of countries like Nigeria where manufacturing now contributes less than 4 percent to GDP. The almost complete obliteration of the Nigerian manufacturing sector during the hay days of SAPs meant the massive absorption of unemployed youths could not occur at the pace of population growth. Coupled with crumbling infrastructure and poor electricity supply for domestic and industrial purposes, manufacturing nosedived and many companies either closed shop, relocated to other countries, or continued production at low capacity and high costs. As such, unlike failures recorded under SAPs and the privatization of hitherto state owned enterprises, selective support to infant and other relevant industries is imperative for kick starting a process of economic renewal.

The model that socially democratic and developmental states will take in many African countries will vary from place to place and regions to regions based on the preferences and priorities of individual African countries. In the Nigerian case, there is ample space for innovation outside the oil industry, even though a lot of petro-chemical industrial outputs can be developed from the by-products of oil to maximize the benefits from the oil industry itself. The current government of Nigeria has indicated its readiness to invest in agriculture, but this will not be enough for the teeming population of Nigerian youths whose talents can be applied in many other areas if supported and encouraged by the government. The information technology industry is a mine field that the Nigerian government working in partnership with the private sector can encourage the youths to become more involved. Although the advent of social media, and indeed its deployment, in Nigeria has had mixed results as both good and bad activities have emerged,

drawing on the positive aspects can be helpful. The prospect for more productive uses abound and proper development of the potentials will go a long way in assisting many acquire the necessary skills to participate in a digital age. Put together, with the support of the state, many youth can actualize their dreams for the overall benefit of themselves and the African continent at large.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to draw links between the SAPs introduced in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s and some of the current challenges facing young people on the continent. Specifically, with regards to the problems of high youth unemployment presently confronting many countries on the continent, the massive reduction in manufacturing and educational skillsets during SAPs has contributed to this. As illustrated by the Nigerian experience with SAPs, many young people were born into an age of austerity with very little opportunities for properly developing their talents. This has caused a few to take to crimes, including terrorism and various forms of fraudulent activities. Consequently, in seeking to redress the problems engendered by SAPs, more socially inclusive and developmental approaches that recognize the pains of young people are highly suggested.

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