

Youth  
Aspiration  
Report

Nigeria

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CHALLENGE  
FUND  
FXR  
YOUTH  
EMPLOYMENT

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<https://fundforyouthemployment.nl/>

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# 1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from research conducted among four categories of youth across Nigeria. The main goal of this research was to identify how young people in Nigeria experience and relate to employment and to ask how and if youth are equipped with the skills that are required for emerging jobs.

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) aims to create a prosperous future for 200,000 young women and men in the Middle East, North Africa, Sahel & West Africa, and the Horn of Africa. We aim to achieve this by supporting private sector driven youth employment initiatives in these regions. Initiatives supported by the Fund will offer youth, and particularly young women, opportunities for decent work. By decent work, we mean work that delivers better prospects for personal development, is productive, offers a stable income, social protection, and safe working conditions.

The level of youth unemployment in Nigeria is very alarming, especially among recent graduates, making up about 20 percent of youth unemployment and often remaining unemployed for upward of five years after graduation.<sup>1</sup> Many youths cannot access emerging (technological) jobs as they simply do not have the skills or training to even gain access to offerings or apply to them. Across Nigeria there is a clear gap in employment and skills mismatch. Respondents helped to identify the lack of employment relevant skills taught in schools. This also includes an imbalance of scholastic knowledge (academic qualifications and training) versus skills based (vocational) training in emerging sectors. Many respondents identified providers, government and private, who are making attempts to bridge this gap with varying degrees of success.

The objectives of this research were threefold: (a) to find out how young Nigerians look at decency in employment, (b) to understand their employment aspirations and barriers to reaching those aspirations, and (c) to gather youth views on how they can be supported to access employment. Data was collected by youth researchers in Nigeria through online surveys and face to face interviews.

The research provided some valuable insights. Young Nigerians stated current school curricula simply did not prepare them for the changing labour market, very few graduates emerged with either digital skills or technological know-how and even less with a sense of digital and technology ethics and awareness of the potential dangers. Nearly all graduates confirmed that access to mentorships, internships and apprenticeships would increase employability among them. Those with entrepreneurial ambitions identified heavy government control as a barrier to initiate successful start-ups and stated that funding and support programs would go a long way to nurturing such young minds in the employment sector.

Some respondents noted that an understanding of regional, national and international employment markets and some basic guidance and support in how and where to apply would also benefit those who are actively looking for work. Upskilling is critical and nearly all those interviewed stated that government should play a role in providing hubs that are accessible to all young job-seekers, be these through virtual training rooms, workshops or short courses, in specific skills that would increase employability value in young people: customer service, computer competency and accountancy.



1 NISER (2013): *Analysis and Design of Safety Nets and Capacity Empowerment Program for unemployed Youth in Nigeria*

## 2. Quotes: Youth Perception of Employment Challenges

*"When I don't end up getting the Job, I push myself into learning more skills. Finding the time to do this with little financial backing is challenging"*

*"The school curriculum lets us down and challenges personal development: Skills needed for emerging Jobs should be included in the school curriculum"*

*"One challenge is finding the right place to get the correct training, especially for skills required in the private sector."*

*"It is challenging to find youth empowerment programs with realistic skills trainings or loans with little or no interest that allows a person to advance skills on their own without waiting for the government"*

*"The employment market is daunting and challenging to anyone with an impairment. As a person with visual impairment, I dedicate most of my time to my education, to get a degree because it gives me the confidence, I need to get a job."*

## 3. Quotes: Proposed Solutions

*"Youths should be provided with free online training of skills by the private sector"*

*"Uneducated youth should be taken to adult education schools for formal learning of skills and knowledge that is related to emerging jobs in Nigeria"*

*"Government should support youth through empowerment program with trainings and loans with little or no interest, establish vocational training institutions in communities and provide infrastructures for easy access"*

*"The government and the private establishments can provide the youths with the necessary skills needed to navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century society. This will boost their competency and increase their chances of getting emerging jobs"*

*"There should be access for youth to workshops, seminars and paid internships that allow them to identify the skills needed for emerging sectors and to learn the ones they are good at."*



## 4. Introduction and Approach

A goal of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) is to ensure that the employment interventions are relevant to the lives of young people in the focus regions. CFYE collaborated with a global network of youth champions to lead the way as an innovator in the direct inclusion of youth voices in its program design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. For the past 3 months, CFYE supported 12 youth champions to design and lead their own youth action research (YAR) pilot across 3 CFYE countries: Nigeria, Uganda and Ethiopia, all in different stages of the challenge fund programme cycle. YAR is an essential tool to collect and amplify the voices of youth, and eventually helping to build employment solutions that really work for youth. YAR is a research method used to ensure the views of youth are more representative than traditional methods, with youth researchers using their own networks and communities to reach larger sample size of youth and target more marginalised youth. YAR focuses on the lived experiences of the youth researchers. Ultimately, the goal of this YAR research pilot was to increase accessibility and encourage higher participation levels, through peer led activities, based on previous learning, ultimately capturing and amplifying more diverse youth voices.

Each country team, made up of 4 youth researchers, designed their own research questions and conducted their own data gathering using methods that they felt relevant and accessible to youth in their countries. This particular report focuses on how young people in Nigeria experience and relate to employment. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Rapid population growth has resulted in a youthful population with 29% between the ages of 15 and 29 and expected to grow by 200 million people by 2050. Unemployment rates are consistently increasing for young people and as of 2020, youth unemployment (15–34 years old) rate stood at 35% with a further 28% considered underemployed.<sup>2</sup>

The country specific research question, *How are youth going to be equipped with the right skills that are required for emerging jobs?*, was broken down into key sub research questions helping to better answer the overall research question:

1. What are Emerging Jobs in your opinion and what sectors in Nigeria do we have these emerging Jobs?
2. What skills do you possess for emerging Jobs? And what skills do you require for emerging Jobs?

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---ilo-abuja/documents/publication/wcms\\_819111.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/---ilo-abuja/documents/publication/wcms_819111.pdf)



3. What is decent Employment to you and what kind of Employment would you want? (Government or Private or Self-employment)
4. What are the Challenges you face when searching for employment?
5. What reason do you think is the cause of high unemployment rate?
6. What role can the government/Private establishment play in helping youths access these emerging Jobs?
7. How do we provide the necessary skills required to engage uneducated youths to fit into emerging Jobs?

The youth researchers interviewed a total of 192 youth, using both quantitative and qualitative data gathering methods; online social media and messaging platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were used to gather survey responses and face to face and telephone interviews were conducted. Online methods were used to reach wider networks of youth whereas offline methods helped with accessibility for youth from more marginalised and/or vulnerable backgrounds. These youth either didn't have access to internet or needed translation into the local language, rather than English. The Interviews were conducted with more open-ended questions to gather attitudes and human experiences.

Research was conducted over a number of regions in Nigeria, where the youth researchers were based and where CFYE is focusing their call for solutions.

Through these data gathering exercises, we gained direct insight into the aspirations of Nigerian youth, their views on decent work, the sectors with a healthy demand and opportunities for youth employment. These insights will be used directly to verify and shape the proposed CFYE Call for Solutions in Nigeria.

▶ **Physical Interviews:** The youth researchers met one-on-one with respondents and through telephone using open-ended questions to gather attitudes and human experiences. They used the language the respondent felt most at ease with. This method provided a personable, more direct, detailed and exploratory engagement.

▶ **Online Survey:** Specific questions relating to were shared through a google form on social media and online communication platforms. Although not as personable as one-on-one interviews, this allowed researchers to capture responses from a much larger sample of respondents.

**Table 1. Research method characteristics**

	Physical Interview	Online Survey
<b>Benefits in Research Method</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Timely responses</li> <li>▶ Clear answers to questions</li> <li>▶ Gender gap in responses could be avoided</li> <li>▶ Ability to clarify with the respondent what exactly is being asked.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Timely responses</li> <li>▶ Clear answers to questions</li> <li>▶ Survey reached a large amount of people</li> <li>▶ High interest generated in follow-up one-on-one interviews</li> <li>▶ Youths from a variety of situations and backgrounds were reached</li> </ul>
<b>Constraints in Research Method</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Less reach to youths in a variety of situations and from different backgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Lack of access to technology prevented some marginalized youths from accessing the form.</li> <li>▶ Gender gap seen in online survey responses</li> <li>▶ Understanding the questions asked</li> </ul>



# 5. Characteristics of Respondents

## Who are the Nigerian youth?

The Nigerian constitution generally defines youth as individuals between the ages of 18 to 29, with over 50% of respondents between 25-29. For the purpose of the research, the youth were clustered into four categories:

- ❖ **Category One – Employed Youth:** These were youth who were either employed full time or were self-employed (38%). The majority of these respondents were from urban or peri-urban areas and are university level educated. This group is usually able to sustain themselves/family to a decent degree.
- ❖ **Category Two – Unemployed:** These young people generally live in peri-urban areas and often engage in agricultural activities. The highest level of education for most of them is either secondary school or certificate-level courses. (27%)
- ❖ **Category Three – Underemployed Youth:** These were youth who were either working in the informal sector with technical vocational skills they learnt at college or at home, have part time employment or volunteer work but are not usually earning enough to support their basic needs. (17%)
- ❖ **Category Four – Students:** This category represented youth still in full time education. (18%)

Youth that could be found in any one of these categories may also represent one or more of the following backgrounds:

- ❖ Marginalized, vulnerable youth with a distance to the labour market
- ❖ Youth with little to no formal education
- ❖ Young mothers from poor backgrounds
- ❖ Persons living with a disability
- ❖ Youth with high aspirations and the ability to aim for goals with varying degrees of success.
- ❖ Youth with technical educations that have formed businesses based on their vocational employment.
- ❖ Young graduates who are university educated and have migrated to urban areas in search of job opportunities creating vast competition for the few available opportunities.

Figure 1. Percentage representations of the 192 respondent's employment status

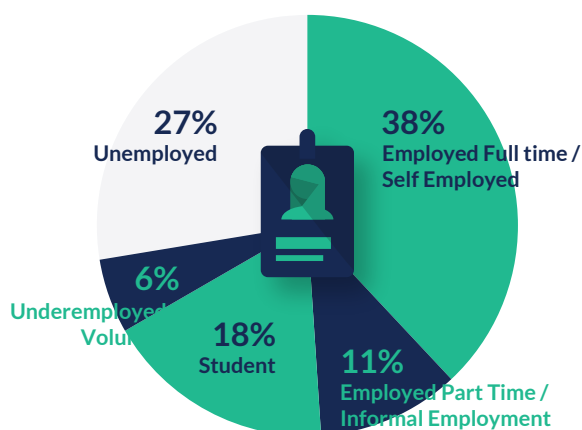
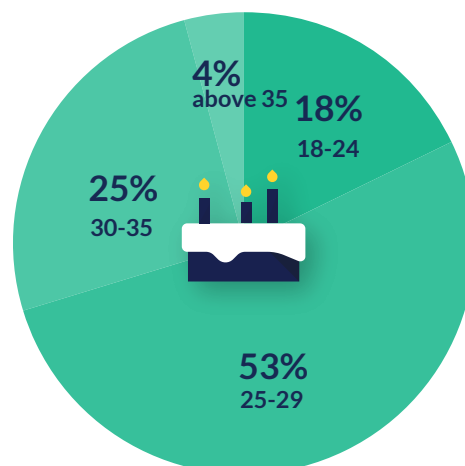


Figure 2. Age ranges of the 192 respondents



Out of the 192 young people who participated in the survey, 27.6% were female, 72.4% male. Even with intentionally reaching out to female youth to take part, females are highly underrepresented in this research. Out of the 181 participants who answered the questions about disability, 7% were youth with disabilities that fell into the categories of cognitive, emotional, hearing, mental, physical and visual, another 7% answered as maybe or 'prefer not to answer'.

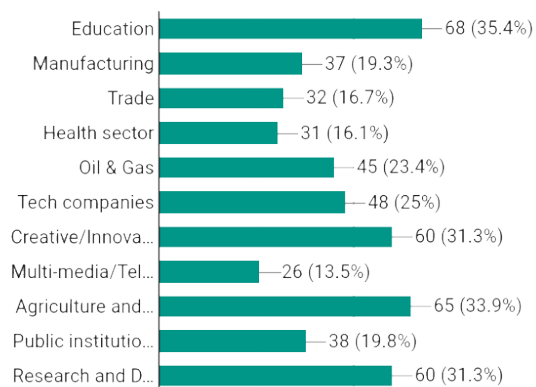
From all 192 respondents just over 49.4% were in either formal or informal employment, self-employed, employed part-time or volunteering their time to upskill (underemployed). The remaining respondents, or 50.6%, were either unemployed and currently seeking employment, still in school or some form of education.

## 6. Youth Opinion of Job Sectors

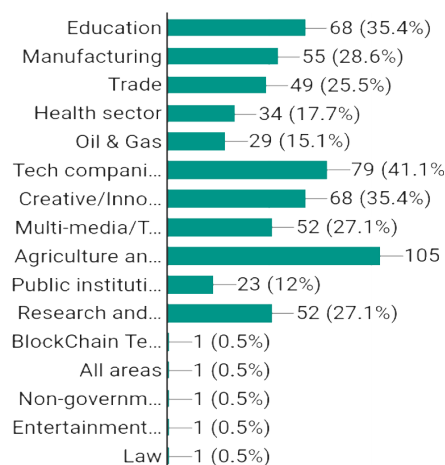
Respondents were asked their views on which sector they would like to work in and what they think are the emerging jobs in Nigeria. The most popular sector to work in, for over 35% of respondents was education, followed closely by agriculture and agro-processing at 33.9% and both research and development (e.g. NGOs) and creative industries at 31.3%. There were similarities between the sectors respondents aspire to work in and their views on what they think are emerging jobs in Nigeria. Education, agriculture and agro-processing and creative industries all fell within the top four. The technology industry, at 41.1% of respondents, and the agricultural industry, at 54.7% of respondents, were identified as the top two industries with emerging jobs.



**Figure 3. What sectors respondents want to work in.**



**Figure 4. Respondents identified which sectors they think have emerging jobs.**



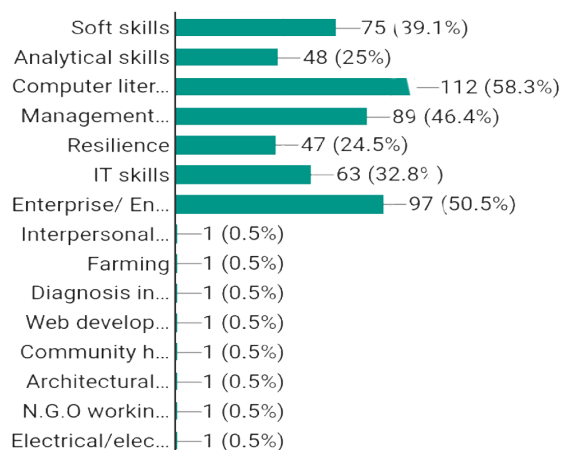


Respondents were also asked to identify the skills they held and the skills that would help to access employment. Leadership and management skills, entrepreneurial skills and computer literacy & IT skills were all within the top six skills that respondents already held and also would be useful to increase their employability.

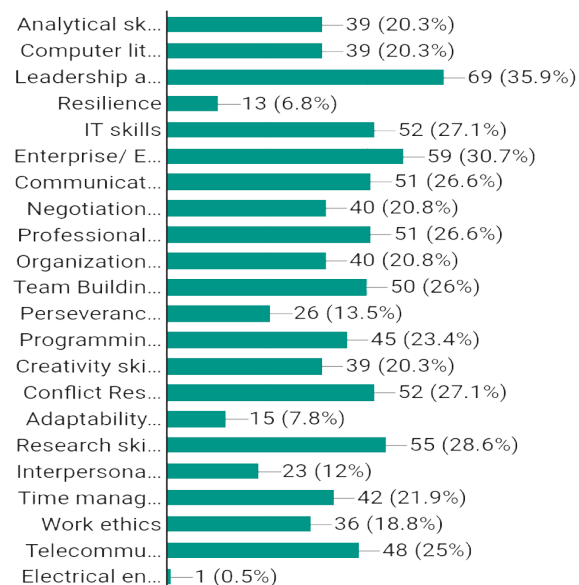
**Table 2. Top six skills already held by respondents against the top six skills they felt would be useful or required to enable them to access employment.**

Top six skills already held by respondents	Top six skills that would be useful to access employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Computer Literacy / IT skills</li> <li>Enterprise / Entrepreneurial Skills</li> <li>Leadership and Management Skills</li> <li>Soft Skills</li> <li>Analytical Skills</li> <li>Resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership and Management Skills</li> <li>Enterprise / Entrepreneurial Skills</li> <li>Research Skills</li> <li>Conflict Resolution</li> <li>Computer Literacy/ IT Skills</li> <li>Communication Skills – Team Building and Professionalism Skills</li> </ul>

**Figure 5. What skills do you possess for emerging Jobs?**



**Figure 6. What skills would you like to gain or feel would be useful to employment?**

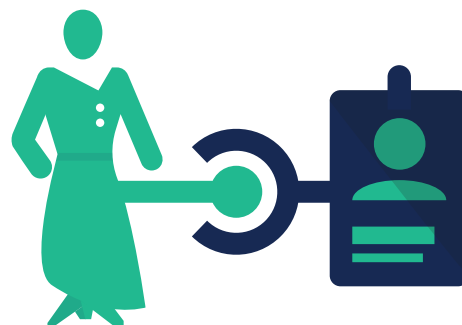
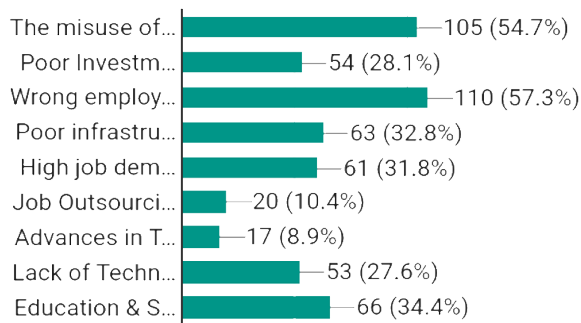


Respondents were asked to identify the potential causes of the high unemployment rates in Nigeria. Over half of the 192 respondents (57.3%) put unemployment down to wrong employment policies of the government, followed closely by misuse of the country's resources. These two are categorised as mismanagement and corruption – two facets that respondents did not identify as being part of their ideal employment. As shown in figure 7, education and skills mismatch scored high too. It appears that this mismatch is as much reflected in youth perceptions of the job market as it is in government perceptions of the job market. Poor infrastructural development was identified as another cause of unemployment. The latter was elaborated upon during the one-on-one interviews and included:

- Access to internet services that can be used to search for jobs and for online training and upskilling
- Road and rail networks to reach job interviews in timely manners from rural or peri urban areas. Commuting from further distance to work is simply not possible so one needs to live relatively close to a place of employment.
- The prohibitive costs of internet and/or phone credit to buy data as well as of laptops and smart phones with which to make use of the internet

Finally, the poor investment climate within Nigeria coupled with the high job demand (high number of unemployed youth) means that not enough new jobs are being created and those that do exist are over-subscribed.

**Figure 7. Causes of High Unemployment**



## 7. Skills and Aspirations

Most respondents felt that the education they received in school did not adequately prepare them for the labour market. Others were unsure whether their skills would be sufficient. The skills that were identified as being important included:

- ✦ Digital tools and technological proficiency
- ✦ Skills and knowledge awareness around the ethics and dangers of technological and digital skills (where, when and how to use these skills in the right place at the right time).
- ✦ Computer competence in a range of programs
- ✦ Marketplace understanding
- ✦ Professionalism: How to attend, organise, hold and chair seminars, workshops, meetings (live and virtual)
- ✦ Professionalism: How to dress, behave, address and engage with another at job interviews, when being questioned or in workplace situations with those in higher positions
- ✦ Up-skilling: How to apply for, act on and work within internships, mentorships and exchange programs
- ✦ Up-skilling: How to search for jobs, avoid the dangers of internet job recruitment, write and send off CV's.

Multiple respondents highlighted that support for learning the skills outlined above is low and schools are not able to or do not provide adequate training in the digital sector, but the demand for employees within the digital space is high. There is little direction, government financial support, or school curriculum support given to youth in how to find or apply for seminars, workshops, internships, mentorships or exchange programs where youth could access upskilling opportunities for emerging jobs. Many youths suggested entrepreneurship programs, highlighting the importance of government job creation policies, and touched upon matchmaking organizations. The latter, match uneducated and marginalized youths to decent employment by creating skills databases that show overlap between skills required for government, NGO and CSO positions.

Many respondents also identified that government made no provisions to support those in emerging start-ups – they explained that heavy taxation remained, there is little access to technical support or mentorship.

## 8. Access to Available Jobs and Decent Work

Youth were asked to give their view on what they would define to be 'decent work'. The key elements mentioned across the categories of youth included:

- ▶ Fair income and security in the workplace
- ▶ Employment that recognises skills, talents and contributions and gives back to the growth and success of the employee
- ▶ A workplace free of discrimination, harassment and workplace abnormalities and devoid of segregation whether on bases of gender, ethnicity or impairment
- ▶ Employment with decent working hours and fair remuneration for work hours done
- ▶ Jobs that respect the fundamental rights of the human person and respects your dignity as an individual
- ▶ Employment that offers a safe working environment that offers equality and prospects for personal development
- ▶ Employment that respects opinions and where skills and creativity can be explored and that encourages participation in the growth process of the organisation

Most respondents felt that a better understanding of how to use the virtual world was critical to them finding decent employment. This included:

- ▶ How to search for advertised jobs, how to apply online, how to successfully and ethically use social media platforms in developing an online presence (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram), how to differentiate between and among relevant and fraudulent job adverts.
- ▶ Where to find the required skills training in case it was being advertised online.
- ▶ When to use online applications and when to apply in person.
- ▶ Why some virtual behaviours are condoned, some are unethical and why some people manage to form huge virtual presences and others do not – what are the tools and processes needed to become an online influencer and to build a personal brand to attract employment.

The identification of 'online' as an employment market in itself, was also evident among respondents. This included employment as product influencers, in website building, graphic design, digital media creating and design, online advertising and promoting, digital data analysis, being able to read and write a programming language, understanding databases and online product management, app development, marketing and digital research.



## 9. Barriers to finding Aspired Employment

Participants were asked to identify and differentiate between personal and structural barriers to finding the aspired employment. The below table gives an overview of the barriers in both categories.

Personal Barriers	Structural Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Graduating school or college without the qualifications being asked for in the job market</li> <li>▶ Experience</li> <li>▶ Credentials</li> <li>▶ Limited ability in English</li> <li>▶ Lack of hard skills</li> <li>▶ Psychiatric diagnoses and disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Transportation or access to transportation for interviews and commuting</li> <li>▶ Available income to pay for rent or transport if the job require relocation</li> <li>▶ The structure and the system of employment and disability services</li> <li>▶ Lack of a comprehensive employment system or hub of information</li> <li>▶ Mismatch between market demand and education curricula to prepare youth for employment</li> </ul>

We could also differentiate between barriers related to gender, a specific category of youth and 'other'.

Gender Related Barriers	Specific to certain youth categories	Other Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The gender division of job sectors such as lawyers (men) nurses and carers (women)</li> <li>▶ Working hours for mothers / Access to childcare or children limiting working hours</li> <li>▶ Sexual harassment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ethnic identity (tribalism)</li> <li>▶ Access to funds for training</li> <li>▶ Family cohesion and perspective on employability and job sectors</li> <li>▶ Ability to migrate and live in urban areas</li> <li>▶ Discrimination against certification type and experience</li> <li>▶ Nepotism and corruption</li> <li>▶ Lack of information or access to information on available job opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Unrealistic expectation of the job market</li> <li>▶ Health</li> <li>▶ Technological changes and advancement</li> <li>▶ Lack of soft skills (skills that aid individuals in navigating their environment smoothly)</li> </ul>

# 10. Stories

**Ezinne, Maria Onyekamezie:** *I'm a Linguistic graduate of Unizik in the year 2015. Since 2015 till date, I've been applying for jobs. Either I get response from hiring companies/ organizations that my qualification didn't meet their requirements, or the job has been giving to another. Life hasn't been easy, I had to leave my place of service (NYSC) after two years and moved down to the East. There I met some persons who introduced me to a volunteering job. Even though I don't get paid, I derive joy in seeing people happy after they encounter us. There and then, I realized that I could change the world if given the chance to touch lives, while I fulfil my lifetime passion of service to humanity. Life after school with no source of income is tough. I also had plans of furthering my studies, but no source of income and sponsorship. After my service, I applied for a contract job with an international NGO. I didn't get the job because I had no one give me a recommendation. Yet, I keep getting invited to come for interviews when I know my qualification didn't meet their requirements. I asked the Human resource team head why I keep getting invites, his response; 'You did well in the first interview, so we kept your record'. Since then, I lost interest in applying for jobs. I have been volunteering for years now and wish to work with an international NGO to expand my knowledge.*

**Abur livinus Ternenge:** *After my graduation in 2014, I was on the streets of Abuja for 3 years. I could barely feed myself. It remained for me to take a plate and start begging. Begging was the order of the day for me, until I used my computer skills to start doing freelance work. I gathered money and started out my own but it wasn't easy.*

**Emmanuel Dalyop Gyang:** *I graduated in 2012 and since then I've never had employment. I went into irrigation farming, but I lost everything to adulterated seedlings. I'm still paying debts.*

**Poloma Hannatu:** *Unemployment has been a major issue in the Nigerian economy. I have lost counts of how many applications I have sent in search of a job and interviews attended with the 'almost-there' syndrome. From the issue of underemployment to a thousand unemployed applying for a single job to jobs that have already been slotted for certain class of people who could pay for it or who have connections. In between I have gone for training building my soft and hard skills and earning certificates for future jobs. I also started my business to foot the bills before a proper job comes my way. Job searching is one herculean task in Nigeria that even your educational status may not help.*

**Hamza Hassan Wagini:** *When I finished my diploma back in 2015, I was at home doing just errands in my household, struggling almost every hour to find something to be doing so that at least if I'm not helping my family I won't be liability to them, but nothing worked then. Luckily, I started learning shoe making which I had little experience from the practical entrepreneur program organised by my school, it helps a lot in getting myself ready for the real struggle of life after graduation, but in the end I got admission to university where I will complete my degree program, so I have to leave everything for school, I'm now about to register for my final year and level 500.*

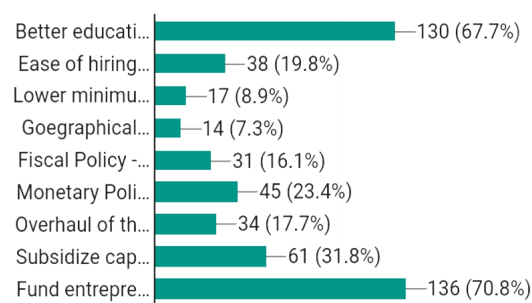
# 11. Conclusions & Recommendations

The main theme of this report was to identify how young people in Nigeria experience and relate to employment and to ask how youth can be equipped with the right skills that are required for emerging jobs. Respondents identified their frustrations with corruption, nepotism, and tribalism, as well as with the experienced government inability to match skills and workplaces, to provide upskill training to the youth or to work with schools to create curriculums that allow youth to graduate with skills that will support them into employment. While there is a definite gap in hard skills, the youth respondents also identified a range of soft skills that government could easily collectively teach through seminars and workshops country wide.

The research shows four overarching conclusions and recommendations that are critical to support youth into employment in Nigeria:

- ▶ Funding entrepreneurs to reduce unemployment: 70.8% of interview respondents agree that provision of funding or opening the way for young entrepreneurs will both reduce unemployment and allow youths to develop into the job market in their own way.
- ▶ Provision and implementation of fair employment policies: Current youth employment policies need to be reviewed with a focus on how these policies can support youth into employment and implemented well.
- ▶ Overhauling of school curricula to ensure digital skill proficiency and competency: if the school curriculum ensure that all students go through a mandatory course that will expose them to the use of digital tools, a lot more graduates will be employable in the emerging job sector and as well become job creators themselves.
- ▶ Enabling new business growth: Government policies should ensure that taxes are not too high. There should be a subsidy or tax reduction policy for certain businesses to ensure they can thrive.

**Figure 8. How can the rate of youth unemployment be reduced?**



It was also identified that the business community should come together (with or without government) and standardize employment contract ethics between employer and employees and then create a monitoring tool to ensure that these are fulfilled.

Lack of certain skills and job opportunities are seen as the main barrier to employment. But in the Nigeria case we have clearly identified some hostilities in the road to work for young people. One may not underestimate the impact a fraudulent or abusive experience can have on a young person and their future career path. It is of the greatest importance to create an enabling and respective environment. This enabling environment needs to be created by employers or by the business community as a whole. It is feared that for the government to enact any laws or policy changes will be quite a wait and this will not solve any of the issues that are being seen and felt now.