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Looming Large:

An analysis and evaluation on the growth of the Urban Informal Economy in
Nigeria.

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Tamunotonye A. Sekibo III

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University of San Francisco

*Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been
accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.*

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Acknowledgments and Dedication

First and foremost, I thank God Almighty for giving me the courage, fortitude and strength to surpass the stark challenges, trials and tribulations experienced during the course of conducting this research.

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Last but not the least, I am forever indebted to the youths in Gishiri. This exercise would have have been possible without your trust in me and your willingness to share your personal experiences with me! In spite of all the adversities and hardship you are forced to wrestle with on a daily basis; your determination, endurance, optimism and perseverance remains a source of inspiration to me.

I thank you!

For Imran, Mohamed Bouazizi and Jesse:

*Three exceptional young men with so much promise, taken away for this world way too soon.
Thank you for inspiring me to write this thesis, geared towards shedding light on the injustice experienced by young people in nations situated in the Global South.
I humbly dedicate this thesis, in its entirety to your memories.*

Continue to Rest in Perfect Peace

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Introduction

The Informal Economy looms large! The importance, magnitude and significance of the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place within and across diverse spaces of informality, particularly in nations situated in the Global South; can neither be overstated or underestimated. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2018 p.v), approximately 60% of the world's employed population - 2 billion people - obtain their source of income through their engagement in informal spaces.

On the African continent, where the informal economy is described as “backbone of economic activities in urban Africa” (Guyen & Karlen, 2020), it is reported that informal economic activities accounts for over 80% of jobs within the continent. Furthermore, it has also been noted that the main participants operating along the terrain of informality are the youths (95.8% ages 15-24) and women (92.1%) on the continent, “and is an important contributor to poverty alleviation” (ibid, 2020). In Nigeria, which maintains a prominent position in the world as the most populous and richest nation on the African continent, approximately 65% of the nation's GDP is derived from the informal economy (Medina, Jonelis & Cangul, 2017 p. 5). Furthermore, it has also been reported that the informal economy “accounted for about 90% of new jobs in the country, about 80% of all non-agricultural employment and about 60% of urban jobs created” (Uko, Akpanoyoro & Ekpe, 2020 p. 66).

In spite of the crucial and pivotal role which the informal economy have proven to play in nations such as Nigeria, the vast range of activities and transactions taking place across diverse spaces of informality are facing severe challenges, stemming from policymakers from

international institutions, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank; which often associate pervasive informality with “significantly lower government revenues and expenditures, less effective policy institutions, more burdensome tax and regulatory regimes, and weaker governance”. Additionally, it is also argued that informality makes it difficult for the State to invest and provide necessary public services (Ohnsorge and Yu, 2021 p. 134).

As a result, national governments have been advised to restrain the economic activities occurring across diverse spaces of informality; and begin the process of enacting and implementing policies geared towards the “formalization” or transition towards the formal economy. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2007 p. 76), the rationale for this is that the formal economy would “provide higher quality, better paid, more suitable jobs; build investor confidence (and increase investment); and broaden the tax base (potentially permitting lower tax rates)”.

In response to the issues raised by those advocating for the “formalization” of the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality, this thesis is of the opinion that the chief reason why the informal economy remains prominent in resource rich nations, such as Nigeria; stems from the profound failure and negligence of the myopic and small-minded crop of political elites governing the nation. Lacking foresight, these individuals have consistently failed to invest in key sectors, such as, education, communication, healthcare, transportation, amongst other critical infrastructures; multitudes of peoples would be provided

with the opportunity, not just to gain meaningful employment; but also improve, refine and upgrade their socio-economic livelihood and welfare.

In Nigeria, those bearing the brunt of this staggering incompetence and negligence of those in positions of authority are the youths, particularly those in rural regions, which are often devoid of any form of socio-economic empowerment or access to most basic of infrastructures. opportunities. To ensure their survival, they make the rational decision to migrate to urban spaces, where they undertake a wide range of informal economic activities - both legal and illegal - as they attempt to escape from the claws of poverty.

This thesis seeks to explore the ways in which the Informal Economy provides a safety net for the youth population in Nigeria. Although Nigeria has the biggest economic and population based on the African continent, the tumultuous socio-economic and political predicaments which continues to confound the nation has made it almost impossible for the Nigerian State to respond to the needs of the population - particularly the youths. In response to the challenges they face, multitudes of people have chosen to engage, integrate and situate themselves within spaces of informality in order to ensure and guarantee their survival in an environment lacking of any form of empowerment.

In order to back up this line of argument, this thesis shall draw upon a wide range of academic and scholarly literatures, alongside articles and publications authored by policymakers, particularly those emanating from international institutions broaching on the discourse of the informal economy. The secondary research of this thesis would focus on the conceptualization of

the informal economy, drawing attention to origins of the concept, the schools of thoughts governing the informal economy, alongside the characterizations of the activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality.

Furthermore, this thesis shall also draw upon the fieldwork research on the informal economy conducted in Gishiri, a community resettlement village in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. This fieldwork research is based on the engagements, interactions and observations with individuals operating along the terrain of informality in this community. The findings from this fieldwork research is based on the individual and group interactions with the youths, alongside observations of the the socio-economic and political activities they undertake in informal spaces. The reason why the youths were chosen as the focus for this study stems from the recognition that whilst they are the majority population in the nation (over 60% of the population are below 25 years of age). The main objective is to analyze and examine the circumstances which informs their decision to situate themselves in space of informality. This is of significance because it provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the literature and rhetoric of the informal economy with the activities and situation on the ground.

Literature Review

It must be recognized that our knowledge of the informal economy continues to evolve owing to the publication of several written works - both historical and contemporary - by esteemed and respected individuals, from various professional fields; whose contributions to this discourse continues to influence and shape our opinions and understanding of this enigmatic concept.

This review is divided into three (3) main sections. The first section analyzes the informal economy from a theoretical point of view, by drawing attention to the perspective of various academic scholars and policymakers on what this concept means. Additionally, this review shall examine the origins of the informal economy concept; how to define the informal economy; and the main schools of thoughts which continues to influence our understanding of this concept. The second section of this review shall focus on how to characterize the informal economy. Furthermore, we shall also explore the size of the informal economy alongside; and also analyze the reasons as to why the informal economy continues to grow, particularly in nations situated in the global south; and examine the various policy instruments proposed by various institutions, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on how to suppress the informal economy by ensuring the ‘transition’ to the formal economy. Using the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a country of reference, the third section shall seek to explore how the socio-economic and political conditions of a nation state influences the decision of peoples to engage and integrate themselves within spaces of informality. Furthermore, in order to illustrate this point, this review shall pay special attention to the circumstances of the youth population in order to gain an insight to the push and pull factors contributing to the growth of the informal economy.

Origins of the Concept:

Academic scholars and policymakers began paying close attention to vast range of socio-economic (and political) activities taking place across and within the diverse terrain of informal spaces, when Keith Hart, a British anthropologist, coined the term “the informal sector” to describe “the economic activities of the low-income section of the labor force in Accra, the urban sub-proletariat into which the unskilled and illiterate majority of migrants are drawn” (Hart, 1973 p. 61). Hart stumbled upon this term during the course of the fieldwork research he conducted in Accra, Ghana, between 1965 to 1968. The finding of this research was first present to the Conference on Urban Unemployment in Africa, hosted by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex in 1971; and was subsequently published in 1973, under the title, *Informal Opportunities and Urban Unemployment*, in which he detailed “this world of economic activities outside the organized labor force” (ibid, p.68).

Following on from Hart, the International Labor Organization (ILO), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published “*Employment, Incomes and Equality - A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment*”, which was based on its mission to Kenya in 1972. This main objective of this report was to shed light on the issues associated with employment, which “has now become chronic and intractable in nearly every developing country” (ILO, 1972 p.xi). This report (ibid, p.1) highlighted three main issues associated with employment in developing countries such as Kenya. The first issue brought to the forefront concerned “the frustration of job seekers unable to obtain the type of work or the remuneration which they think is reasonable, or which their education has led them to expect”; another issue

which the report made note of was “the low level - in fact the poverty level - of incomes obtained by many producers and their families as the return on their work, whether in self or family employment or in wage employment”; and finally, attention was drawn to “the underutilization and low productivity of the labor force, both male and female, which reflects inefficiency in the way labor is trained, deployed or supported with other resources”.

This report (ibid, p.1) also drew attention the challenges faced by youths, seeking avenues for employment, by noting that “for young persons, whether educated or not, to enter the labour force either with a frustrating round of job seeking or animated by resentment at missing opportunities which they feel they deserve is hardly a good way for them to acquire the experience and work attitudes required for a productive life, nor does it augur well for social stability”.

As explained by Bangasser (2000 p.5), “in the thinking of the 1960s, the center stage of attention was capital formation, export promotion and the like. The conventional wisdom considered that employment would grow as a result of advances in these areas. Leave the labor market alone to function ‘efficiently’; and supply and demand will ‘clear’ at the equilibrium wage rate. Any concern about the low level of this ‘equilibrium wage’ should be addressed by making sure that this labor is, on the supply side, well and appropriately skilled and, on the demand side, productively used”.

However, the ILO’s report didn’t subscribe to this point of view, by noting, “previous analyses have identified unemployment problems in Kenya. Our report is based on a broader analysis. We

identify the main problem as one of employment rather than unemployment. By this we mean that in addition to people who are not earning incomes at all, there is another - and in Kenya more numerous - group of people whom we call 'the working poor'. These people are working, and possibly working very hard and strenuously, but their employment is not productive in the sense of earning them an income which is up to a modest minimum" (ibid, p.9).

Inspired by Hart's characterization of the activities taking place along the terrain of the informal, during his presentation at the University of Sussex, the ILO report drew attention to the actuality that "the bulk of employment in the informal sector, far from being only marginally productive, is economically efficient and profit making, though small in scale and limited by simple technologies, little capital and lack of links with the other ('formal') sector" (ibid, p.5). Owing to the expansive fieldwork research conducted in Ghana and Kenya - which continues to influence and shape our collective understanding of the informal economy - Hart is credited for his "discovery" (ILO, 2013, p.2) of the informal economy; whilst the ILO is viewed as "both the midwife and the principle international institutional home for the concept" (ibid, 2000 p.1). However, it is important to bear in mind that the activities taking place within across the realm of informality "doubtless existed already" (Rimmer, 1992 p.36).

A strong argument can be presented that the origins of the informal economy as a concept, can be traced back to 1954, following the publication of "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labor", written by Sir Walter Arthur Lewis, in which he speculated that the economies of developing and under-developing nations situated in the Global South was largely made up of two different sectors; the closed economy (the traditional sector) and the open

economy (the capitalist/modern sector) co-existing simultaneously with each other. According to Lewis, the closed economy is “associated with rural life, agriculture, and ‘backward’ institutions and technologies”; whilst the open economy corresponded with “urban life, modern industry, and the use of advanced technologies” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012 p. 258). Pertaining the closed economy, Lewis was of the opinion that “an unlimited supply of labor may be said to exist in those countries where population is so large relatively to capital and natural resources, that there are large sectors of the economy where the marginal productivity of labor is negligible, zero, or even negative” (Lewis, 1954 p.2).

Furthermore, Lewis argued that in “backwards economies knowledge is one of the scarcest goods” (ibid, 1954, p.6); the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place along this terrain, such as “the whole range of casual jobs - the workers on the docks, the young men who rush forward asking to carry your bag as you appear, the jobbing gardener, and the like” (p.2) are more or less economically insignificant, due to their large numbers of peoples carrying out these activities; therefore “their number could be halved without reducing output” (ibid, 1954, p.2). Owing to its close proximity with “a few industries highly capitalized, such as mining or electric power, side by side with the most primitive techniques; a few highly capitalized plantations, surrounded by a sea of peasants; between the few highly westernized, trousered natives, educated in western universities, speaking western languages, and glorifying in Beethoven, Mill, Marx and Einstein” (ibid, 1954, p, 5-6); Lewis was of the opinion that it was only inevitable that at some point, the “closed economy” would eventually cease to exist, due to the fact that those actively engaging and participating within the closed economy would wholeheartedly embrace

the advantages and benefits guaranteed as being part and parcel of the open “capitalist” economy (ibid, 1954, p, 5-6)

Keith Hart - Ghana (1965 - 1968)

The research carried out by Hart in Ghana between 1965 to 1968, where he observed the migratory patterns of the Frafra people, moving from rural to urban spaces; alongside the range of “informal economic activities” they undertook when they settled in cities such as Accra, he set out to determine whether, “the reserve army of urban unemployed and underemployed really constitute a passive, exploited majority in cities like Accra, or do their informal economic activities possess some autonomous capacity for generating growth in the incomes of the urban (and rural) poor?” (Hart, 1973, p.61). In response to the negative rhetoric leveled against the informal economic activities, Hart sought to stress the “important part played by these workers in supplying many of the essential services on which life in the city is dependent” (ibid, 1973 p.68).

In this research, Hart (p.78) drew attention to the prevalence of “job duplication” and “moonlighting” in urban cities such as Accra, where “multiple informal employment - both with and without simultaneous wage employment - is almost universal in the economic behavior of Accra’s sub-proletariat. Only rarely is an individual or family dependent on one one source of income”. Seeking other sources of income was in direct response to a combination of monetary lapses, such as “price inflation, inadequate wages, and an increasing surplus to the requirements of the urban labor market” (ibid, 1973 p.61). Such developments not only influences the rationale for seek other avenues for employment, but also served as a motivating factor to become more engaged and integrated within spaces of informality, because in such volatile economic

landscape, the idea of “‘one man, one job’ is a risky assumption, especially when low-paid, low hours employment is involved” (ibid, 1973 p.66).

Hart (1973, p.69) draws distinction between formal income opportunities and the legitimate and illegitimate informal income opportunities. Formal income opportunities are derived from the following: (i) public sector wages; (ii) private sector wages; (iii) pensions, unemployment benefits. Legitimate informal income opportunities are sourced from either “primary and secondary activities”, such as farming, gardening, shoemaking, garment makers; or “tertiary enterprises” occupations, which entails activities such as construction of houses, provision of transportation services, the renting of spaces for personal or commercial use. Illegitimate informal income opportunities refer to either “services” such as pawnbroking, drug-pushing, prostitution, smuggling and protection rackets; or “transfers” relating to gambling, petty theft, embezzlement, amongst other activities which may be deemed as illegal and unlawful by the governing authorities.

Another important distinction which Hart (p.83) brought to the forefront of this discourse concerned the difference between being “unemployed” and “underemployed”. According to Hart, “most urban workers lacking formal employment and therefore ‘out of work’ maybe said to be, in the most basic sense, unemployed”. It is argued that individuals who fall into this category are open to obtaining formal wage employment (“i.e. fixed, regular, and relatively permanent” jobs), providing that it does hinder their capacity to continue their participation in the informal economy. The unemployed are “those who will not accept income opportunities open to them for which they are qualified, and this often means rejecting informal means of making a living”.

Perhaps the most prominent groups of people who fall into this category are youths who have attained a certain level of academic qualifications. (p.83). Finally, those who fall into the category of the “underemployed” are those whose “wage job alone cannot provide for a family’s subsistence needs” (ibid, 1973 p.84).

The International Labor Organization - Kenya (1972)

The 1972 joint report from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on Kenya was centered around the issue of employment on the African continent. According to the report “we identify the main problem as one of employment rather than unemployment. By this, we mean that in addition to people who are not earning incomes at all, there is another group of people whom we call ‘the working poor’” (ILO, 1972 p.9).

A major takeaway from the ILO’s report was the constructive and favorable manner in which it characterizes the activities taking place in spaces of informality. For instance, by way of stepping away from using archaic terms, the report chose to use the designations of formal sector or informal sector, “to describe a duality that avoids the bias against the low-incomes sector inherent in the traditional-modern dichotomy” (ibid 1972 p.503-4). Furthermore, the report worked at great lengths to argue that both the formal and informal sectors “are modern; both are the consequence of the urbanization that has taken place in Kenya over the last 50 years” (ibid 1972 p.504)

The approach adopted in this ILO report served to backdrop to challenge the cynical and obstructive views and rhetoric assigned to informal economic activities, which were perceived as “stagnant, non-dynamic, and a net for the unemployed and for the thinly veiled idleness into which those who cannot find formal wage jobs must fall” (ibid 1972, p.5). Pushing back against such reasoning, the report explained that “often people fail to realize the extent of economically efficient production in the informal sector because of the low incomes received by most workers in the sector” (ibid 1972, p.5). Unfortunately, these negative characterizations and rhetoric leveled against informal economic activities can be traced to “academic analysts who often encouraged and fostered such an interpretation (ibid 1972, p.5). However, the report notes that the negative rhetoric assigned to the informal economic activities such as such as carpentry, masonry, etc; stems from either their inability to acknowledge that these activities are “far from being marginally productive”, rather, they are “economically efficient and profit making” due to the simple reason that they are “offering virtually the full range of basic skills needed to provide goods and services for a large though often poor section of the population (ibid 1972, p.5).

According to the ILO, the main attributes of the informal sector are: (i) ease of entry; (ii) reliance on indigenous resources; (iii) family ownership of enterprises; (iv) small scale of operations; (v) labor-intensive and adapted technology; and (vi) unregulated and competitive markets. Furthermore, these activities are “largely ignored, rarely supported, often regulated and sometimes actively discouraged by the government” (ibid 1972 p.6). This is a stark difference from the formal economy, which is characterized by: (i) difficult entry; (ii) reliance on overseas resources; (iii) corporate ownership; (iv) large scale of operation; and (v) protected market - through tariffs, quotas and trade licenses. (ibid, 1972 p.6).

Defining the Concept of the Informal Economy

Since the concept of the informal economy emerged in the early 1970s, a substantial amount of time, effort and resources has been devoted by academic scholars towards attaining one specific goal: defining the concept of the informal economy. However, to the dismay of many, the progression geared towards this has proven to be an uphill battle. According to Buehn and Schneider (2012, p. 140) the reason why its been difficult to find a proper definition stems from the fact that “information about the extent of the shadow economy, who is engaged, and the frequency of these activities, and their magnitude is crucial for making effective and efficient decisions regarding the allocations of a country’s resources in this area”. The challenges they face when attempting to explore the informal economy stems from their inability to gain access to relevant information, which continues to prove exceptionally difficult, because “all individuals engaged in these activities do not wish to be identified. Hence, doing research in this area can be considered as a scientific passion for knowing the unknown” (ibid, 2012).

In contrast with the straightforward (and scientific) definition of the formal economy, which Daniels (2004 p. 502) describes as being “based on the employment of waged labor within a framework of rules and regulations, usually devised and implemented by the state, on working hours, minimum wages, health and safety at work, or the social security obligations of employers and employees”. Furthermore, these activities taking place across in the formal economy can be measured using various economic statistical tools such as inflation rate, unemployment rate,

Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), amongst others statistical instruments devised and formulated by economists and policymakers, which enables them monitor the health of the economy.

Although scholars acknowledge and recognize the fact that “informal economic activities have long been part of the total national economy, and a large literature documents their presence” (McLain, 2010 p.1); one of the many sources of dispute amongst scholars “centers on whether to include non market transactions, and if so, what type of non market transactions (e.g, unpaid work, self-provisioning, subsistence activities) to include” (ibid, p.4). Another reason attributed for this “lack of clarity” and consensus when it comes to providing a definition for the informal economy results from the “use of such a varied assortment of designations for this sector” (Guerguil, 1988 p. 57). For instance, terms such as “alternative economy, black market economy, cash economy, clandestine economy, parallel economy, shadow economy”, etc are just a few out of a variety often used by scholars whenever they chose to make reference to the activities taking place across spaces of informality. In response to these variety of terms, Moser (1978, p. 1051) explains that “since the utility of the informal sector concept was recognized, researchers and policy-makers in a number of different but related disciplines have applied it to a diversity of empirical data, and in many different concepts. What has resulted is complete confusion about what exactly is meant by the informal sector”.

Owing to the focus which academic scholars have devoted to sourcing out a scientific definition of the informal economy, it is argued that they have lost sight of the bigger picture, by failing to pay attention to the peculiar character and dynamic nature of the activities taking place in the

sphere of the informal and the manner in which informal actors and their socio-economic and political activities positions itself, either as complimentary or in opposition to the formal economy. According to Gerry (1974, p.6), “it is noticeable that most writers and researchers in this field intuitively recognize these various differentiating characteristics; however, it is probably this preoccupation with characterization and the refining of definitions which has caused such studies to neglect the fact that, to an important extent, it is the relations between these different systems or sub-systems of production which determine those phenomena which will characterize each of the (productive) ensemble, and will lay the foundations for the functioning of the whole”.

In an attempt to bypass this tricky hurdle, scholars have often resorted to the use of metaphors to best describe this elusive, yet intriguing concept. For instance, Hans Singer parallels the informal economy to a giraffe, which is “difficult to define by usual standards, but easy to recognize when you see one” (Charmes, n.d p.4). Hernando de Soto compares the informal economy with an elephant; whilst Bruno Lautier argues that it's neither of these two: it's a unicorn. But perhaps the best and most prolific metaphor is provided by Peter Kilby (1971, p.1), who compares the informal economy to a Heffalump (a cartoon character from Winnie the Pooh!). “The Heffalump is a rather large and very important animal. He has been hunted by many individuals using various ingenious trapping devices, but no one so far has succeeded in capturing him. All who claim to have caught sight of him report that he is enormous, but they disagree on his particularities. Not having explored his current habitat with sufficient care, some hunters have used as bait their own favorite dishes and have then tried to persuade people that what they caught was a Heffalump. However, very few are convinced and the hunt goes on”.

According to Charmes (2000), “it may seem paradoxical to attempt to evaluate a sector the very nature of which is to remain unregistered or insufficiently registered just because it is unwilling to be evaluated. Nevertheless, progress has recently been made, particularly in the wake of the boost provided by the adoption of an international definition”. The definition which Charmes makes reference to stems from the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1993 p.2), which defined the concept of the informal sector in 1993 as “broadly characterized as consisting of units engaged in the production of goods or services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes to the persons concerned. These units typically operate at a low level of organization, with little or no division between labor and capital as factors of production and on a small scale. Labor relations – where they exist – are based mostly on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees”. Intriguingly, it is important to note that not all scholars subscribe with the definition provided by the International Labor Organization.

For instance, Lindell (2010, p.1 & 5) notes that “despite much writings on the persistence and growth of informal economies, our understanding of the politics of informality has been hampered by deeply entrenched views that tend to deprive people in the informal economy of agency. The notion of informality does not necessarily involve a dualistic view of the economy as having two separate sectors, underpinned by unilinear assumptions of economic development, where the informal is understood as marginal, residual and a mere appendage to the formal economy. Rather, the boundary between the formal and informal is blurred. The two interconnect in varying degrees and in multiple ways and often contain elements of each other. Both feel the influence of the same global forces and citizens straddle the two spheres as they pursue their income strategies”.

Maintaining the same trajectory of argument, Mortenbock (2015 p.105) is of the opinion that “this expanding grey zone of informal economic activities in which an ever increasing number of regions, groups of people and areas of life are becoming involved cannot be explained solely by structural unemployment and income inequality – as the International Labor Organization (ILO) tend to argue – or by the legal barriers that advocates that advocates of micro-entrepreneurship argue are necessitating an immersion of informality”.

It has also been noted that scholars should deliberate and focus their attention on certain attributes within the confines of the informal before attempting to define this complex, yet enigmatic concept. For instance, Laguerre (1994, p.6), argues that when attempting to define this concept, we “must take into consideration a large number of variables. These include: its origin, either as preceding the formal system or as growing from it; its relations to the formal system; the participation of its actors in the formal system; time and space factors; the meanings of everyday practices; and the structural location of informal practices in relation to other practices. Does the informal share characteristics with the formal system? These are criteria that may provide clues for a definition of the informal system”.

Schools of Thought

There are three main schools of thought which continues to govern the debate and influence our understanding of the informal economy: (I) the Dualist School, (II) the Structuralist School and (III) the Neoliberal School.

The Dualist School

Proponents of this school, influenced by the likes of Lewis, are of the opinion that there is no relationship between the formal and informal economies. They view informal economic activities as representing “a little more than a residue or leftover of pre-capitalism”, as against the formal economy, which is heralded as a “thriving phenomenon” which is deeply embedded and rooted with modernity, technological evolution and transformation (Huang, Xue & Wang, 2020 p. 2-3). Furthermore, they argue that when “nations step into a certain advanced stage of economic development”, the activities taking place across spaces of informality would decrease and eventually disappear into the ether (ibid, 2020 p.3).

However, the continued existence and growth of the informal economy stems from “a lack of dynamic growth and unavailability of modern employment” (Navarette, 2015 p.38). In other words, the existence and growth of the informal economy is directly linked to the inability of the formal economy to provide jobs and meet the demands from growing populations, particularly those situated in the global south. In order to mitigate the expansion of the informal economy, the adherents of this school propose that governments should work towards assisting

entrepreneurs by generating more jobs and provide incentives such as “access to credit and business development programs as well as social protection services for their families” (Marinescu & Mircioi, 2019 p. 313) as a way to entice and secure the transition from the informal to the formal economy.

The Structuralist School

For adherents of this school, there is no question as to relationship between the formal and informal economies. According to Moser (1978, p.1057), informal economic activities are existing “at the margins of the capitalist mode of production but nevertheless integrated into it and subordinated to it”. Owing to the fact that capitalist firms have to respond to an array of issues, both domestic and global in nature such as: competition, the growing power of employees as a result of “strong unionization of formal employees, state laws and tax regulations, globalization”; the solution for capitalist firms is to take drastic measures aimed at the reduction of production and labor cost” (Marinescu & Mircioi, 2019 p. 313-314).

Structuralists argue that the “informalization of economies” is a calculated and deliberate tactic used by capitalist firms as they endeavor to “cut costs, improve competitiveness, and weaken the power of unions” (Huang, Xue & Wang, p.3). The consequence of such strategies often results in a race to the bottom, whereby capitalist firms, pressured to increase profit and aided by globalization, are able to migrate to countries with the cheapest labor and lax tax regulations.

According to (Sassen, 1997 p. 5 &19), “the combination of economic, political and technical forces... the new urban economy not only contributes to strengthening existing inequalities but

sets in motion a whole series of new dynamics of inequality. The new growth sectors - specialized services and finance - contain capabilities for profit making vastly superior to those of more traditional economic sectors. The latter are essential to the operation of the urban economy and the daily needs of residents, but their survival is threatened in a situation where finance and specialized services can earn super-profits”.

At this juncture, Apple Inc serves as a typical example. With stocks valued at US\$3trillion (Leswing, 2022), Apple maintains an enviable position as the most profitable company in the world. An argument can be made that a major reason why such a corporation has been able to attain such lofty heights has to do with the fact that it has been able to take advantage of the lax regulations in China, where it produces its products through Pegatron factories. An investigation conducted by the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) focusing on the working conditions of Pegatron factories found that workers are forced to work over time (BBC, 2014).

This analysis is also supported by the China Labor Watch (2016), which draws attention to the fact Pegatron has been able to recruit “student interns, who had overtime work amounting to 80 hours per month on average”; which is the amount of time for full time employment. Such is the case, even though “Chinese law forbids companies from asking interns to work overtime”. According to Chabal (2009, p. 151) “the informalization of the state also brings further trouble for the powerless in that it increases everyday arbitrariness. Indeed, the less the state functions as it is supposed to do, the more it becomes a source for exploitation. Not only do ordinary people meet constant demands for kickbacks in their daily dealings with state officials but they are also subject to the whims of all of those who can exercise power over them”. For structuralist, the only way around this is for governments to step in with strong public policy aimed at addressing

the existing inequality and “unequal relations” between capitalist corporations and subordinate businesses, thereby demanding for essentials such as good minimum wage and better working conditions.

The Neoliberal School

This school of thought views the informal economy as “a hotbed of emerging entrepreneurs, constrained only by unnecessary, slanted and superfluous legislation” (Wilson, 2011 p.206). They are of the opinion that the existence of the informal economy is the direct consequence of “a mercantilist legal system that works to maintain elite privileges and exclude poor people from the market economy” (Navarette, p.43). Neoliberals are of the opinion that operating informally is the only option available to the participants within and across its diverse terrain, as they object to the strenuous regulations imposed on their economic activities by the state.

In other words, “informality is thus conceptualized as a representation of free market forces responding to the failure of state intervention” (ibid, 2017 p.4). Adherents of this school focus attention on the “ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and rationality of informal workers in creating income opportunities and alleviating their poverty in the context of the high cost of legality” (ibid, 2017 p.4).

In order to integrate informal economic activity into the national economy, it is necessary for the state to get rid of burdensome regulatory practices, which should motivate and persuade informal agents to register their enterprise “and extend the legal rights to property for assets held by informal businesses so that they can capitalize on their productive potential by converting the assets they own in addition value” (Marinescu & Mircioi, 2019 p. 313).

Size of the Informal Economy

The sheer size and reach of the informal economy remains unparalleled. The ILO (2018 p.v), estimates that “more than 60% of the world’s employed population earn their livelihoods in the informal economy” – ranging from 85.8 percent in Africa; to 62 percent in Asia and the Pacific; 68.6 percent in the Arab states; 40 percent in the Americas and 25.1 percent in Europe and Central Asia” (ILO, 2018). First and foremost, it has to be noted that in nations situated in many nations situated in the global south, the vast range of informal economic activities has assumed the role of being “the main driver of job growth”, and more importantly, they are “now playing the major labor absorbing role that the agricultural sector used to play in the past” (Assaad, Kraft & Yassin, 2018 p.16).

According to Bugnicourt (2000), who refers to the informal economy as “the popular economy” notes that the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality “frequently provides more or less satisfactory occupations for two thirds of the working population. It is the only immediate opportunity for most young people who wish to work, by generating low-pay jobs and income. It responds, even if only imperfectly, to the essential needs of the poor and some people in the higher social strata. The need to feed oneself, clothe oneself, acquire or develop skills and knowledge, find accommodation, benefit from a few vital services, clean oneself, move about, communicate and have some kind of social life felt by people with very limited disposable incomes generates a very significant demand, which can be met from the informal economy, as well as from the modern one. The popular economy meets this demand more or less successfully”.

Ironically, the informal economy thrives in some of the biggest economies in the world. For instance, figures show that in nations such as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the Federative Republic of Brazil, and the People's Republic of China; the vast range of socio-economic activities taking places across diverse spaces of informality within these nations contributes approximately: 60% (Olubiyi, 2021); 47% (Gamal & Dahalan, 2016 p.76); 47.1% (Romero, 2021) and 22% (Huang et al, 2020 p.1) respectively to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Furthermore, Neuwirth (2011, p.41), – who describes the informal economy as ‘System D’ – speculates that the combined GDP value of the activities taking place in spaces of informality around the world “is close to US\$10 trillion. Which makes for another astonishing revolution. If System D were an independent nation, united in a single political structure - call it the United Street Sellers Republic (USSR) or, perhaps, Bazaaristan - it would be an economic superpower; the second-largest economy in the world (the United States, with a GDP of \$14 trillion, is numero uno)”. Although a lot has changed since the publication of this book, Neuwirth’s illustration serves to demonstrate the economic value of the activities taking place in spaces of informality on a global scale.

Tackling the Informal Economy

In spite of the magnitude, scale and significance of the informal economy, which serves as a source of employment for billions of peoples worldwide, it remains that informal economic activities “remain controversial” (Porta and Shleifer, 2014, p. 109). In an article written by Farrell (2004), in which she acknowledged that the majority of economic activities taking place across the terrain of informality “are not outright criminal enterprises, such as drug cartels, mafias, prostitution rings, and illegal gambling operations”, it was noted that the very existence of informal economic activities poses a significant threat, because they “can dampen productivity and undermine a nation’s financial health”. Furthermore, she argues that “informal players operate at just half the average productivity level of formal companies and at a small fraction of the productivity of the best companies – and as a result, informal companies persistently drag down a country’s overall productivity and standard of living” (ibid, 2004).

The World Bank further entrenches the point of view presented above by arguing that “informality has gained increasing attention as a possible drag on growth and rising social well being, and as a force corrosive to the integrity of our societies. Given the long standing negative connotations of informality – inferior working conditions, low-productivity firms, disrespect for the rule of law, to name a few – it is not surprising that the rise in informality over the 1990s across several measures is viewed with concern and as meriting closer investigation” (Perry, 2007 p.1). In conjunction with this argument, Elbahnasawy, Ellis and Adom (2016, p. 31) argue that the informal economy “promotes the inefficient use of scarce resources, encourages adoption of

low-return technology and small-scale production, distorts investment, and aggravates income inequality”.

Furthermore, Buehn and Schneider (2012, p.141) refer to those participating within the informal economy as “informal agents”, making the conscious decision to integrate themselves into spaces of informality in order to “avoid payment of income, value added, or other taxes; to avoid payment of social security contributions; to avoid having to meet certain legal labor market standards, such as minimum wages, maximum working hours, safety standards, etc; and to avoid complying with certain administrative procedures, such as completing statistical questionnaires, or other administrative forms” even though they are fully aware that such actions are illegal and could potentially land them at crosshairs with state enforcement authorities”.

Owing to these negative characterizations and rhetoric, it has become evident that the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality “troubles policymakers in developing countries because it is seen as being associated with low productivity and poverty” (Keen, 2015). This is manifested in the manner in which national governments in the Global South, influenced by donor nations and institutions have sought to look for ways to restrain and suppress activities taking place across the terrain of the informal. In order to extinguish the informal economy, national governments have adopted coercive and harsh measures of harassment, intimidation, alongside the threat of persecution if they desist from engaging in these activities. As Bromley (2000, p.20) notes, “at the street level in most Latin American, African and poor Asian countries, neither vendors nor inspectors and police have much detailed knowledge of the regulations, and so enforcement is often ad hoc. Long periods of

tolerance are interspersed with short waves of persecution. In the occasional crackdowns, non-compliance with a great variety of obscure laws, codes, and regulations can be invoked to justify displacements, confiscation and arrest”.

(At this point, how can we forget about Arab Spring uprising, which was literally sparked by Mohammed Bouazizi, the 26 year old Tunisian who asked, 'How do you expect me to make a living' as he set himself alight, in response and reaction to the abuse and harassment he experienced at the hands of the state authorities who unjustly confiscated his property?)

The 2020 ban on okadas (commercial motorcycles) and keke napeps (commercial tricycles) on the streets of Lagos, and the creating of a “State Taskforce” to enforce this order, under the pretext of 'security' serves as typical example as to how governments attempt to quell and suppress the informal economy. During the announcement of this ban, the Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, stated that “after a robust assessment of the debate on what has been widely referred to as the motorcycle (okada) and tricycle (keke) menace, the Lagos State government and the State Security Council have decided that the security and safety of lives of Lagosians are paramount. The figures are scary. From 2016 to 2019, there were over 10,000 accidents recorded at the general hospitals alone. The total number of deaths from reported cases is over 600 as at date. Also, the rate of crimes aided by okada and keke keeps rising. They are also used as getaway means by criminals” (Erezi, 2020).

However, it is critically important to bear in mind that such actions often prove to be both counterintuitive and counterproductive. Whilst it is duly recognized that security challenges must be addressed and tackled by government authorities whenever and wherever they arise, a major reason why the ban of these commercial vehicles - which remains the most effective way to

maneuver and navigate the heavy traffic in the most populous city in Africa - proves controversial stems from the fact that the government haven't provided any viable economic alternatives for these okada and keke napep drivers. According to a driver affected by this ban, "where do they (the government) want us to go? We are going no where because we are going a legitimate work. This is what I do to feed my family with other responsibilities. We normally come out in the night now to avoid taskforce in the daytime" (ibid, 2020). From the onset, it was obvious that those affected by this ban were never going to take it lightly. This was exhibited on various social media platforms, which displayed the violent reactions waged by these affected drivers, against the government and the regulating taskforce, after the seizure of several vehicles. Due to the lack of foresight which characterizes this enforcement, Kazeem (2020) argues that "the ban on motorcycles and tricycles is part of the state's grand design for a mega-city which is rooted in aesthetics rather than reality".

In acknowledgement of these challenges associated with the informal economy, the ILO (2013) has made it a primary objective to take steps towards remedying the obscure working conditions of those operating along the terrain of the informal, by advocating for the implementation of certain regulatory frameworks in the form of the Four Pillars of Decent Work, geared towards (I) Employment; (II) Social Protection; (III) Social Dialogue; and (IV) Rights (ibid, p.11). The rationale behind this policy is geared towards ensuring and facilitating the transition of workers from the informal to formal economy.

According to Dasgupta (2016), the transition towards formalization is contingent on making sure that workers entering into the workforce are provided with "robust legal protection" as outlined by the UN commission on legal employment of the poor, which calls for the entrenchment of

labor and property rights due to the fact that such protections would ensure for “better working conditions and workers benefits” which would ultimately propel them to gain access to the financial markets; alongside setting “inclusive hiring target and on the job training”, which would significantly reduce issues associated with barrier to entry, such as “the absence of requisite educational qualifications and the lack of corporate networks”.

It is also argued that having such regulations in place would provide informal workers – especially the working poor - with the opportunity to “have access to justice and the judicial system”; giving them the opportunity to defend their freedoms and rights. Another recommendation from the World Bank (ibid, 2016) is geared towards “inclusive hiring targets and on-the-job training”. Due to the fact that those in engage within spaces of informality face a high barrier of entry into the formal economy, as a result of their lack of education qualifications, it falls on the formal economy to “bridge this gap by employing people from low-income households, investing in them through on-the-job training along with on-field exposure to working systems”.

Analyzing the Root Causes of the Informal Economy

Whilst Farrell (2004), the World Bank (2007); Elbahnasawy et al (2016); Buehn and Schneider (2012); are united in their critique and disapproval the vast range of activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality, it is critically important to note that they seldom give attention to the reasons why people chose to engage and integrate themselves within spaces of informality. Surely, it cannot be that 60% of the world's employed population are actively seeking avenues to escape paying their taxes? Furthermore, before setting lofty and towering goals geared towards formalizing the informal economy, it is critically important to understand the key factors which influences and motivates an individual to engage and integrate within spaces of informality. Furthermore, it should not be ignored that the "low rate of job growth in the large formal private sector is particularly disappointing given the degree of attention this segment of the private sector receives from policymakers" (ibid, 2018 p.17).

First and foremost, it is critically important to recognize that the most pertinent reason as to why multitudes of peoples around the world - the youths in particular - chose to immerse themselves within spaces of informality stems from their innate and natural desire to survive. Karl (2000) explains that, "there are millions like them all over the world. Driven by a natural desire for survival, men and women, the old and even children are doing what they can too drag themselves out of poverty. By their actions, which could actually be described as reactions, they have helped to create what is rightly or wrongly termed the informal sector. This sector continues to teem with an abundance of continuously expanding activities performed by illicit street vendors, shoeshiners, small commercial, production or service enterprises and a great many of other economic agents. The informal sector is ruled by resourcefulness and imagination. Reflecting the energy of

people at the base of the social pyramid, it provides almost the only possibility of escape, and is frequently a source of hope, for those who work in it, either because of they have to or out of convenience, with the common objective of improving their living conditions or simply of surviving”.

Additionally, Becker (2004, p.9) notes that, a combination of factors, such as: (I) barriers of entry into the formal economy; (II) weak institutions; (III) demand for low-cost goods and services; (IV) economic hardship and poverty; and (V) rural-urban migration; are major determinants, which continues to influence the decision of millions of people to engage and integrate within spaces of informality. Reflecting on the combination of these factors, it is pertinent to ask one simple question: Is the State complicit in contributing to the growth of the informal economy?

Of Marginalization and Social Exclusion

The overarching reason why multitudes of people are forced to ‘react’ by engaging and integrating within spaces of informality stems from the abhorrent marginalization and resulting social exclusion leveled against the citizenry, by those in positions of authority and power. Marginalization is defined by Lamsa (2012, p.4), as “the weakening of the ligatures between the individual and the society. The marginalized are those who have been left on the dark edges. Social exclusion is the utmost form of marginalization”. Levitas, Eldin, Gordon & Demy (2002, p.9) describes Social Exclusion as “a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, and good and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to majority of the people in a society, whether in

economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life and individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole”.

In societies where marginalization and the resulting social exclusion are rife, it is apparent that those in positions of authority (the State) have neglected their most fundamental duties and responsibilities to their citizenry. In order to illustrate this point, the Federal Republic of Nigeria would be used as a country of reference. Popularly referred to as ‘the Giant of Africa’ owing to her possessing a population base of over 201 million (the largest on the African continent, and the most populous black nation on the surface of the earth); this nation continues to maintain occupy - at least on paper - a prestigious position on the global stage. According to the World Bank (2021) not only is this nation the largest economy on the African continent, but also 27th largest economy in the world based on nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 24th largest economy in the world in terms on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

In reality, this nation state - in spite of its global prominence - continues to be weakened under the weight of an array of manufactured and self-inflicted lacerations which continues to hinder the capacity of the citizenry to make certain moves towards the attainment of their personal socio-economic and political goals and objectives. In the words of the prominent Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, “we are in a mess. This country is in a mess. It is disintegrating before our very eyes. This government is floundering. The problem here is that the government does not have a holistic grasp of the problems in Nigeria... If we are looking to this government for a solution, then it means we are lost” (Odeh, 2021). Very few Nigerians would dispute this analysis. This is because of the realization that there is no logical or rational reason to explain how or why a

nation such as Nigeria, which is blessed and rich with human and natural resources, can have 41% - 88,434,769 - of her population are living in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2021); hence being “the poverty capital of the world” (Borgen, 2020)

Unfortunately, this should not come as a surprise. It is virtually impossible to write about Nigeria without bringing up the issue of corruption, which continues to breed marginalization within the nation. According to data derived from Oxfam (2021), in under 45 years, public officials in Nigeria have embezzled US\$20 trillion (bigger than the United States GDP in 2012!). This incessant and immoral corruption, continues to be the major driver of marginalization and the resulting social exclusion. Accordingly, it is noted that “poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to a lack of resources, but to the ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root is a culture of corruption combined with a political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians” (ibid, 2021).

According to Silverman (1992, p. 16), “most people understand intuitively what functions, at a minimum, governments should perform. It is from that understanding that governments derive their legitimacy. When governments do not, in fact, perform their necessary functions and/or where they do so in substantially ineffective ways, many of those functions will be performed in one way or another outdone the formally and officially sanctioned governmental system in much the same way that necessary economic functions are performed in parallel systems under similar circumstances”.

The inability of the citizenry to access key public infrastructures and services is just one out of multiple ways in which systematic and widespread marginalization and exclusion transpires. The fact that Nigerians in the 21st century, don't have access to basic amenities and infrastructures such as education, healthcare, good roads and telecommunication systems; which would improve their livelihoods and embolden the socio-economic and political posture of the State remains a serious cause for concern.

Infrastructure Deficit

There is broad consensus that investment in human capital is contingent on investing on the key infrastructures which will give propel the socio-economic and political wellbeing; not just of the individual, but society at large. As Puentes (2015) rightly notes, “infrastructure is the backbone of a healthy economy”.

According to McNichol (2019), “state investment in transportation, public buildings, water treatment systems, and other forms of vital infrastructure is key to creating good jobs and promoting full economic recovery. The conditions of roads, bridges, schools, water treatment plants, and other physical assets greatly influences the economy's ability to function and grow. Growing communities rely on well-functioning water and sewer systems. State of the art schools free from crowding and safety hazards improve educational opportunities for future workers. Every state needs infrastructure improvements that can pay off economically in private-sector investment and productive growth”. This acknowledgment and recognition seems from the inherent realization that “concrete, steel and fiber-optic cable are the essential building blocks of the economy. Infrastructure enables trade, powers businesses, connects workers to their jobs,

creates opportunities for struggling communities and protects the nation from an increasingly unpredictable natural environment” (ibid, 2015). According to a World Bank survey (2018), the nations of Japan, Sweden, Netherlands and Austria are the recipients of the best quality infrastructure in the world. These are nations concerned with the socio-economic and political development, evolution and growth of their citizenry. Unfortunately, no nation from Sub-Saharan Africa appeared in the top 50. Nigeria ranked 78 out of 160, whilst Sierra Leone, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea ranked 156, 157, 159 and 160 respectively.

In an extensive report by Bello-Schunemann and Porter (2017, p. 2), detailing the state of infrastructure in Nigeria, attention was drawn to the fact that the nation “faces multiples simultaneous pressures to advance economic growth and human development in a context of a large and rapidly growing population. Presently the greatest drag on Nigeria’s economic growth is the country’s substantive deficit in basic physical infrastructure” (For such a country, to learn that 90% of the transportation movements occurs via land, it isn’t only alarming or frightening but rather, very upsetting to learn that only 15.5% of the roads are paved “compared to an average of over 55% in the country’s global income peers” (ibid, p.17). For example, in Pakistan, approximately 70% of the roads are paved. Categorizing physical infrastructure into transportation, energy, water and sanitation and information and communication technologies (ICT) (p.3), this report states that “Nigeria’s infrastructure deficit is evident across all categories as the country performs worse than its average income peer and significantly worse than its average global income peer”. According to estimated that 60 million people (approximately 30%) of the population don’t have access to clean water (ibid, p.11). This is particularly the case in Lagos, the most populous city on the continent, where less than 60% of urban dwellers have access to clean water (ibid, p.13).

The lack of electricity supply is another infrastructure deficit which continues to hinder the socio-economic development of the nation. Popoola & Adeleye (2020, p. 242) estimates that roughly 60% of the Nigerian population have no access to electricity, whilst 94% don't have access to clean sources of energy. Furthermore, they note that in Nigeria 55% of the population continue to depend on charcoal, firewood, biomass and animal waste as their main sources of energy for cooking and heating, which "signifies that Nigerians are climbing down the energy rungs" (ibid, p. 243). Such reliance is definitely against the grain, especially as nations around the world, are seeking for alternate energy sources to combat climate change and global warming, however, the capacity to catch up and begin the process of sourcing for new energy sources, such as wind or solar, especially for commercial utilization; continues to be hindered as a result of "poor leadership and weak governance" (ibid, p.246).

In Nigeria, the impact of the lack of investment in national infrastructure is mostly felt in the rural communities. In recognition of the reality that 70% of the population resides in rural settlements, Johnson and Ifeoma (2018 p.241), argue that "regrettably these rural sectors of Nigeria that are vital to the socio-economic development of the nation are faced with the problem of retard development. This has been attributed to the top down approach policies of most Nigerian government to rural development".

These rural communities and regions are where the raw materials such as cocoa, palm oil, gold, gas, amongst an array of natural resources, of the nation are deposited. Evidently, the magnitude and significance of these localities cannot be exaggerated. Unfortunately (as earlier noted), rural

communities - which are the foundation and lifeline of urban cities such as Lagos - continue to be excluded and marginalized, as they don't have access to the most basic of infrastructures. The lack of investment in these regions remains the greatest failure of successive Nigerian governments. According to the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP, 2005 p.1), rural dwellers constantly "experience insecurity and vulnerability (drought, desertification, flooding, deforestation, diseases, volatile commodity markets, etc); lack of empowerment to influence public policies according to their priorities; and lack of opportunities for income generation and benefits from markets".

In Nigeria, the inability of the Federal Government to fulfill its most basic duties and functions continues to be the main reason why people chose to engage and integrate themselves within spaces of informality. For instance, the fact that in the 21st century, a significant proportion of the public don't have access to basic amenities and infrastructures such as education, healthcare, good roads and telecommunication systems; remains a serious cause for concern; and those saddled with bearing this brunt are the young men and women of the nation, driven to the brink by incessant marginalization and social exclusion; thrust upon them by an unruly set of corrupt political elites. In an article published by Accountable Nigeria (2020) attention is drawn to bleak reality, which noted that "the Nigerian youth has been relegated to a mere spectator role in the scheme of things. Jobless, frustrated and majority, hopeless about the country. They are told to go to school to become better humans, yet they are frustrated everyday in their respective institutions. They are products of institutional decay and inactions, government nonchalance and systemic rot. A vast majority are now recognized cybercriminals, poor role models, glorified thieves, and street urchins and thugs for their complicit principals - usually politicians".

The Status of Youth in Society:

There is global consensus that the youth population remains the greatest asset which a nation possesses, due to the recognition that they remain the backbone of society. According to Onyekpe (2007, p. 78), “the youth are the most important segment of the population of any society. Apart from being the owners and leaders of the future, they are numerically superior to the middle and the aged... they have a lot of energy and ideas. Their energy and ideas are society’s greatest potentials. These potentials of energy and ideas are latent and redundant until they are accessed and mobilized for development and social progress”.

Enshrined in the Nigerian Youth Policy (2019, p. 28-29) is the acknowledgment by the Federal Government that “the growing population of youth has amplified the need to acquire high-quality education and skills to contribute to a productive economy, as well as access to a job market that can absorb them into its labor force. The dividends can only become a reality if the country invests heavily in young people’s education and health, and protect their rights, and strategically equip them to seize opportunities for meaningful jobs and other income earning opportunities”.

Additionally, education remains the greatest gift which can be offered to young people. This stems from the realization that education serves as the foundation upon which young people are afforded the opportunity to strive and work towards the successful actualization of their nascent dreams and aspirations; which also provides an escape from the clutches of destitution and poverty. According to Idris et al (2011, p.444), “education is the key to move the world, seek better jobs and ultimately succeed in life. Education is the best investment for the people because

well educated people enjoy respect among their colleagues and they can effectively contribute to the development of their country and society by inventing new devices and discoveries. The main purpose of education is to educate individuals within society, to prepare and qualify them for work in economy as well as to integrate people into society and teach them values and morals of society”. This is particularly of importance in this digital age, which continues to not only transform, but revolutionize the socio-economic and political landscape which we inhabit.

The capacity for young people to work and strive towards the materialization of their hopes, dreams and aspirations; is fundamental contingent on the support provided by that State, by means of guaranteeing that the safety of the environment and space which they occupy. According to Taggart (2003), “for much of the last century, it was taken for granted in many countries that it was the duty of the State to care for its citizens ‘from cradle to grave’. To provide education, pensions, medical services and public utilities; and to hold out a safety net for the less fortunate so that they had food, shelter, and the other necessities of life”.

Furthermore, forward thinking States around the world are all too aware of the dire consequences and ramifications of failing to protect and safeguard the interests of their youth population, and cater to their socio-economic development and political empowerment. Yusuf (2019, p. 222) notes that “that when society becomes a tool for marginalizing youth, when society fails to protect the interest of its youth and abandons them to the fringes and mercies of poverty, inequality, alienation, an absence of quality education, and unemployment, then radicalization, involvement in violent acts and extremism will ensue”.

In recognition of the pivotal position of young men and women in society, governments around the world continue to take steps towards formulating and implementing policies which are geared towards the facilitation of the socio-economic and political development and empowerment of their youth populations. This is the major reason why they are compelled to invest heavily in critical infrastructures; such as education, sports and recreation and social care. For instance, the United States Department of Education (2020) has investments north of US\$500 million in support qualifications associated with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Comparatively in 2018, the European Union (EU), collectively spent over €50 billion on sports and recreational activities geared towards their youth population (eurostat, 2020).

The Radicalization of the Nigerian Youth

Reflecting on an article written by Ighoeli (2016) in which he stated that “the Nigerian youth is amongst the brightest, resilient and is a born trailblazer. Like Archimedes, give him a place to stand and he will move the world”, the question which remains to be answer is: why have the Nigerian youth - for all his/her brilliance - not able to move the world? Thankfully, he provides an answer: “the Nigerian youth, no doubt, has largely been marginalized. He has become made to feel so inconsequential in the scheme of things ... he has become a chicken, happy to peck at the feed thrown at him by those who marginalize him whereas he ought to rule the skies! Honestly, the marginalization is deliberate! First, they are denied access to quality education, a tool with which they can make better decisions for themselves and their community... even with the education and the skill, they are still denied access to a number of opportunities, such as finance, soft loans, quality healthcare and housing. These obstacles majorly leaf to shattered

dreams, which in turn rewire the thinking of the youth propelling them into a life of crime and despondency”.

This is perhaps the biggest existential crisis facing a nation where approximately 70% of the population is below the age of 30 (Fayehun & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2020). Neglected in a state of despondency and frustration, the Nigerian youth often turn to drugs as a means to escape the pain and suffering they are forced to wrestle with on a daily basis. A study conducted by Jatau, Sha’aban, Gulma, et al (2021), revealed that “in Nigeria, the burden of drug abuse is on the rise and becoming a public health concern. Nigeria has developed a reputation as a center for drug trafficking and usage mostly among the youth population”. More specifically, attention was drawn to the fact that “a prevalence of 20-40% and 20.9% of drug abuse was reported among students and youth, respectively. Commonly abused drugs include cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine, heroin, diazepam, codeine, cough syrup and tramadol. Also, studies have shown that over 50% of persons with drug abuse-related psychiatric admission were secondary school students” (ibid, 2021). To make matters worse, rather than investing in the socio-economic and political development and empowerment of the youth population, those in positions of power continue to play an active role in facilitating and influencing the decisions of young men and women to engage and integrate within spaces of informality. According to Eneji and Ikeorji (2018, p.9), “many youth in Nigeria are exploited by the older political elites who use them as a climbing ladder to attain their own political ambitions. On the other hand, young people see violence as a last resort to create their own spaces within the political arena. Young women and men are using their creativity and agency to create their own spaces for action in which they try

to subvert authority, bypass the encumbrances created by the state, and fashion new ways of functioning and maneuvering on their known”.

Chabal (2013, p. 132) explains that “the failure of the state to perform its basic functions and, in particular, to ensure the delivery of primary services opens up an infinite number of possibilities for the informal sector”. The emergence of terrorist groups and organizations, such as Boko Haram are prime examples of such openings; attracting and recruiting young people, particularly in the Northern axis of the nation. According to Meagher (2014, p. 1), “economic marginalization” and “the profound poverty and deprivation affecting the Muslim north of Nigeria”, which successive governments have been unable to arrest, remains the “critical factor” as to why Boko Haram, and other emerging terrorist organizations continue to attract youths in the North East and North West regions of the country, where the levels of poverty is approximately 40% than in the Southern axis of the nation (ibid, 2014). In agreement to this point, Yusuf (2019, p.222), notes that the reason why youths associate and integrate themselves within criminal activities and nefarious groups stems from the fact that they “are reacting to the socio-economic injustice and marginalization meted on them by the society. Their exposure to this extreme difficult socio-economic situation have rendered them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist elements”. Owing to this critical factor, it is no surprise to learn the unfortunate and tragic outcome, that the youth population “still constitute huge percentage in facilitating different sorts of violent acts in Nigeria, including farmer-herder conflict, militant vandalizations and Boko Haram insurgency... Youths in Nigeria have been attributed to all sorts of evils. No social problems is devoid of a youth in this country. This has been seen as youth reacting to the socio-economic injustice and marginalization meted on them by the society” (ibid, p.220 & p.222).

The unemployment and underemployment rate amongst the youth population in Nigeria is a testament to this marginalization. Ajufo (2013, p.308), opines that “unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youth causing frustration, dejection and dependency. The high rate of unemployment among the youth in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country”. According to figures obtained from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2020, p.35), “a combination of unemployment and underemployment rates shows that those aged between 15 - 24 reported a combined rate of 71.3%, showing a serious challenge for the age group in secure full-time employment. Female unemployment was highest among the genders with 31.6% while male was 22.9%. A similar case was recorded for underemployment, 31.0% was reported for females, while males reported an underemployment rate of 22.6%”.

The neglect of the education sector is another avenue used to illustrate the extent at which youths are marginalized. According to Odiya and Omofonmwan (2007, p.81) “education in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. These include, poor funding and thus poor educational infrastructures, inadequate classrooms, teaching aids (projectors, computers, laboratories and libraries), paucity of quality teachers and poor/polluted learning environment. In addition to these inadequacies, our school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption”. In agreement with the views espoused above, Ekundayo (2019), draws attention to the reality that Nigeria “has over 10 million out of school children. That’s the highest in the world. Another 27 million children in school are

performing very poorly. Millions of Nigerians are half-educated, or over 60 million - or 30% - are illiterate”.

The failure of the Federal Government to invest in the education sector serves as another prominent example of marginalization and social exclusion of the youth population. This was made evident in the 2021 national budget presented to the National Assembly (the legislature) by President Muhammadu Buhari’s administration, in which out of the NGN13.08 trillion (US\$31,752,183,960) budgeted for the fiscal year, only NGN742 million (US\$1,805,500,362) - 5.6% of the total budget - was allocated to the Ministry of Education (Fatunmole, 2020); whilst NGN181,104,352,485 (US\$440,570,000) was allocated to the Ministry of Youth and Sport Development (Usman, 2020). It is important to note that the allocation for the education sector is far below the recommendation of UNESCO (2020), which has urged “states to allocate at least 4-6% of GDP and/or at 15%-20% of public expenditure to education”.

Furthermore, the systematic and sporadic strike actions waged by Nigeria teachers, under the aegis of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), against the Federal Government serves to illustrate the extent at which the youth population continues to suffer marginalization and neglect. Since 1999 - 22 years ago - it is noted that Nigerian teachers have gone on strike a total of 15 times. The last strike action, which took place in 2020 lasted for over 9 months. According to Yusuf (2020), these strike actions are the result of “the incessant face-off between the federal government and the striking academic union workers around the context of poor funding in the education sector lackadaisical attitude of the government to implement negotiated agreements with the union”. Whilst acknowledging the need for teachers to express their opposition against

the inaction of the state, it has to be recognized that those who bear the brunt are the youths, who are seeking to gain quality education. According to Peterside (2020), the incessant strike actions has ultimately led to the “watering down the quality of education offered to Nigerian students which has at best been mediocre. The academic performance of students is adversely affected, and the entire educational system is almost crippled. These result in half-baked students and graduates who are unemployable and who lack the basic skills necessary to survive dynamic environments like Nigeria and the rest of the world”.

As a direct result of the Federal Government’s ignorance and negligence of education system, secondary and tertiary institutions have become the breeding ground for nefarious activities and violent associations such as cultism. According to Gboyega (2005, p. 39), “Nigeria, has witnessed unprecedented violent behaviors occasioned by students’ involvement in campus cultism. Peace on campus has been shattered due to this development of violent behavior. Blood letting arising from either murder or manslaughter has become pervasive”. Young people often make the (ir)rational decision to join cult groups at either secondary school or universities because of the following: (I) need for protection; (ii) economic and financial benefits; (iii) exerting authority and supremacy; (iv) lack of guidance and direction; (v) peer pressure; (vi) influence of politicians and school administration and; (vii) deplorable school facilities; amongst other factors (Ajotoni and Olaniyan, 2018 p. 261).

The challenges associated with the education sector is further compounded by the failure of the Federal Government to ensure and guarantee the protection and safety of students. The recent infiltration of the Nigerian Defense Academy (NDA), which is described as “Nigeria’s foremost

military university” by bandits and unknown gunmen, which resulted in the abduction of a Major, and the killing of two military officers, is just an example of how the government has failed to protect its citizenry. According to Iwara (2021), “Since December 2020, criminal gangs have emulated Boko Haram’s tactic - committing over 10 mass abductions, totaling more than 1,000 schoolchildren, to extort ransoms across northern Nigeria. Many smaller attacks go unreported. The violence is only deepening a years-old educational crisis that has been worse for northern Nigerians - and for girls. The erosion of education for a generation of school children in the north will reduce their abilities to earn a living and bring skills to the reconstruction of their communities. It will increase their risk of being radicalized amid the region’s conflicts”.

Unfortunately, the response from those in positions of authority to these catastrophic events have been grossly unsatisfactory. For instance, the Minister of Defense, Bashir Magashi (2021) told Nigerians, “it is the responsibility of everybody to keep alert and to find safety when necessary. But we shouldn’t be cowards. At times, the bandits will only come with three rounds of ammunition, when they fire shots everybody runs. In our younger days, we stand to fight any aggression coming for us. I don’t know why people are running from minor things like that. They should stand and let these people know that even the villagers have the competency and capabilities to defend themselves”. Maintaining the same train of thought as the Minister of Defense, the Governor of Katsina State Aminu Bello Masari (2021) urged that Nigerians “must intensify prayers with clean minds to seek God’s forgiveness and intervention. We must all rise up to counter the insecurity challenge, we must not seat and watch some people buying guns attacking our houses, we too should buy the guns and protect ourselves”. Such remarks from an incumbent Minister of Defense and Governor, makes it abundantly clear, by proving that those

in positions of authority have abdicated, ceded and surrendered their constitutional duties and responsibilities to the populace.

Whilst such loose remarks beg numerous questions, the overarching conclusion is that the Federal Government can neither ensure nor guarantee the safety of the nation. More importantly, when high ranking government officials ask the citizenry to take up arms in order to protect themselves, albeit from terrorist, such actions have the serious potential to open the floodgates to anarchy and mob-rule, which would, for all intent and purposes, plunge Nigeria - the Giant of Africa - into a domain of a failed state. Despite the insurmountable challenges bedeviling a nation such as Nigeria, Ostrom et al (1989, p. 175) draws attention to “the fact that social life has not totally disintegrated even under the impact of the most repressive regimes implies that small-scale organization that allows people to maintain some of the most basic functions exists everywhere”.

Responding to Marginalization

According to Azarya and Chazan (1987 p.106 - 107), upon the realization that the State, which was once viewed as “primary vehicle for integration and consolidation” has transitioned and reformed itself “to be seen as the arena of conflict, different groups vying for control over its apparatus”,the citizenry adopts certain mechanisms to convey their discontent against the excesses of the state. One of such mechanism is Suffer-Manage. This involves “an array of activities aimed at reconciliation to a declining standard of living and learning to manage in these circumstances” (ibid, p.116).

This mechanism is adopted during periods of scarcity, such as food material in the market or gas at the station. In response to these circumstances, on a personal level, it is pertinent on the individual to make some personal adjustment. For instance, rather than eating 3 square meals, food intake would reduce to 2 meals a day; or instead of driving (or hailing a taxi) to work, the sacrifice to make might involve trekking the distance to get to required destination; or if medical attention is required, rather than visit the hospital, individuals would revert and seek out the help of traditional healers. During such periods of uncertainty, it is often the case rather than go to work, individuals devote their time and effort on searching for food supplies to ensure and guarantee their survival. Accordingly, Azarya and Chaza notes that, “dissatisfaction with existing conditions and with the prospects for amelioration has become commonplace, breeding a studied aloofness from affairs of government and a skepticism vis-a-vis the machination of its leaders.

The suffer-manage syndrome reflects the reaction of those who are unable to extricate themselves from the arena of a malfunctioning state. The essential passivity intrinsic to this approach serves as an indicator of both the extent to which people are willing to reconcile themselves to diminishing circumstances and the degree to which other possibilities are foreclosed” (ibid, 117-18).

Another mechanism of disengagement adopted in the face of difficult situations is Escape. In contrast with the Suffer-Managers who chose to come to terms with the adverse conditions they find themselves in, “those opting for escape remove themselves not only for the site but from the country as a whole” (ibid, p.118) no matter the cost.

The most prominent example are stories of citizens (in their hundreds or thousands) from nations - particularly on the African or Latin American continents - taking the gamble of selling all their belongings and property, in order to obtain a ticket and endure the most breathtaking, and unthinking routes, just to attempt to touch the shores of Europe or the United States. Furthermore, this method of disengagement often results in a brain-drain, which has “affected both urban and rural groups. It has wrecked havoc in the standards of the service sectors, curtailed agricultural and industrial production, and limited the development of human resources. Educational investment by the states have been wasted as so many beneficiaries chose not to use their skill in their own countries” (ibid, p. 121).

Methodology

The main objective of the literature review was geared towards attempting to understand what the informal economy and certain push and pull factors which continues to inform the decision of people to engage within spaces of informality. Drawing upon a wide array of publications authored by highly esteemed academic scholars and policymakers, we've embarked on challenging and questioning our understanding of what we understand as the informal economy. In order to ascertain the authenticity, credibility and validity of the viewpoints espoused in the publications analyzed and reviewed, this thesis sets out to conduct an in-depth fieldwork study, in order to gain first hand information as to 'how' and 'why' the informal economy continues to grow and thrive, particularly in resource rich nations situated in the global south.

The site chosen to conduct this analysis and investigation of the informal economy is Gishiri, a community village with a population of approximately 4,000. Gishiri is situated in Abuja, the capital of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The main objective here was observe the vast range of activities undertaken by the youths alongside the strategies which they employ in order to navigate their way through this space to ultimately ensure and guarantee their survival.

The youths living in Gishiri were chosen as the focus for this research study for two main reasons. The first reason was based on the recognition that they constituted the most marginalized and oppressed segment of the population Nigeria. With this in mind, it was critically important to engage and interact with this pivotal group to shed light on the socio- economic and political challenges which they are forced to wrestle with on a daily basis; alongside the actions and processes which they employ in order to maneuver and navigate them. The second reason is

based on the genuine and profound attempt to give a voice to this marginalized group, who were very desperate and eager to share their their experiences and stories - with an atom of faith and hope that maybe someone would hear their pleas and supplications and render assistance in order to alleviate their misery.

Conducting this research in Gishiri was dependent on obtaining the approval to carry out this research in Gishiri and for the permission for youths to participate in this study. For this reason, a courtesy visit was paid to two influential figures within the community. Seeking information about my intention, the parameters and scope of this research, they were briefed on the objective of the research. In order to gain their assurance and confidence, they were informed that this study posed no harm to those who would partake as I also stressed the fact that under no circumstances would any confidential information about those who participate in this study be shared with any of the authorities. Their personal information, such as their given birth names; home and work addresses; and other details would neither be obtained nor required from the respondents who willingly participate in this study.

Furthermore, attention was drawn to the strict guidelines this research is adhering to; as stipulated in the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If they had any further questions or inquiries, they were provided with my contacts details to reach me whenever they could. Additionally, a request was made to introduce me to someone within the community who would serve as a guide to navigate the terrain of Gishiri, and also help to recruit individuals willing to participate in this study. The requirement was for 25 to 30 (both male and female) individuals, between the ages of 16 to 27; from different ethnic and tribal groups and religious groups to participate in this study.

The approval to carry out this research was granted when Yakubu, a 24 year old student at the University of Abuja, reached out via phone and invited me to Gishiri to discuss further about the nature of the study which I required assistance to undertake in Gishiri. During our conversation, he mentioned the fact that he is one of the ‘youth leaders’ in the community, and we proceeded towards walking around the community village, as we engaged in conversation about Gishiri. During our conversation, I sought his assistance to secure the venue where the interaction would take place within Gishiri.

A total 22 respondents (16 male and 6 female) - including the youth leader - contributed and participated this study. All the individuals who took part in this study were between the ages of 16 and 26; they were all Nigerians, originating from different ethnic and tribal groups. They all resided in Gishiri. Although the sample size is small, the intent here was to ensure that the respondents conveyed the diverse character of the youth population existing and settling in this peculiar space.

Owing to the fact that this is a qualitative research study, the method of engagement with the youths was carried out in the form of semi-structured interviews, which began with a series of open-ended questions for the respondents. This is the best approach for this type of engagement due to the fact that it provided them with the opportunity to be at the driving seat, and also to enable them fully express themselves at great lengths without much constraint.

Two sets of interviews and interactive sessions were conducted with the respondents who partook in this study. The first set took place in the form of a focus group. This was attended by 12 respondents (7 male and 5 female), which lasted more than 4 hours. The other set of interviews

were conducted during an impromptu investigative tour of the community, at the urging of two of the individuals participating in the focus group session. This serves as the backdrop against which interactions with 10 more respondents (7 male and 3 women) when we visited the local hospital, market place, and the primary school. At the onset of each interaction with the respondents, their attention was drawn to the fact whilst our conversation was to be recorded and transcribed; they would remain anonymous, and pseudonyms would be used in order to protect their identity, as was guaranteed in the ascent and consent forms they were required to sign before partaking in this study. The data and information obtained during our conversations would be deleted following the conclusion of this project.

The interviews with the respondents were conducted in both English and Pidgin. In some cases during the focus group session, where the respondents didn't have a strong command of either English or Pidgin, the youth leader stepped in and acted as the translator from English to Hausa (and vice-versa). This was the situation with 4 of the respondents who took part in this study.

Findings & Analysis

The Informal Space:

Obi (2020) describes Gishiri as a place “where poverty, affluence meets”. This stems from the fact that this locality, which some may argue “epitomizes squalor and degradation” (ibid, 2020); is situated right in the middle of the wealthiest neighborhood in Abuja; namely, Katampe, Maitama and Wuse II; alongside its very close proximity to the Central Business District (CBD) of the nation’s capital. From the perspective of an outsider, attempting to make sense of the the vast range informal socio-economic activities and transactions taking place across what can be best described as the perilous and tumultuous terrain of Gishiri is nothing short of an audacious task. This is because Gishiri gives the impression of functioning like a rudderless ship, under the cloud of chaos and disorder - bereft of any form of coordination or direction. However, upon taking a closer look, one begins to recognize the subtle enigmatic and tactical protocols which governs this space, and the activities which transpires along these terrains.

The most significant group in Gishiri are migrants from the Northern axis of the nation, who have situated themselves in this community village after fleeing from to the waves of insurgencies and terrorist attacks which continues to engulf their states. For example, Adamu, from Borno State, spoke of how his parents took the decision to move he and his younger brother to live with their uncle so they would not be recruited by the Boko Haram. Charity from Benue State, also shared how her mother and siblings sought refugee in Gishiri in 2020 after Fulani herdsmen invaded their village, which led to the unfortunate demise of her father who was trying to protect his family farm from the invading terrorists.

Beggars (panhandlers), newspaper vendors, okada (motorcycle) and keke-napep (tricycles) drivers, bricklaying, food sellers, provisions kiosk managers, makeshift garages, car wash outfits, cloth sellers, carpenters, mechanics, drug dealing on corners, etc. These are some of the activities, services and transactions constantly taking place across diverse spaces of informality in Gishiri. According to Laguerre (1994, p.2), people situate themselves in spaces of informality “in order to deal effectively with the routine issues of everyday life”. These are the spaces where both young and old; the handicapped; educated and uneducated; employed and underemployed and unemployed; amongst other groups of peoples, converge upon with a single goal: to find opportunities which would provide them with a source of income. The majority of the activities taking place along the terrain of informality space are commandeered by young men and women, driven by their desire to seek avenues in order to guarantee their livelihoods.

Although these public spaces (the land which they operate on) are usually under the direct jurisdiction of the local authorities, it is fascinating to observe and watch the intuitive and intelligent manner in which informal actors position and reappropriate public spaces. The positioning of okada and keke-napep drivers; and the carwash station in Gishiri also serve as good examples. Owing to the fact that the deplorable conditions of the roads, it is often the case that people often make the rational decision not to drive into Gishiri (alongside their knowledge that taxi drivers always refuse to enter because of fear of their vehicle being stuck in potholes); the options available is to hail either a okada or keke-napep to take you into Gishiri. These modes of transportation, which operate exclusively in Gishiri are the best suited to navigate the bumpy roads and dangerous terrain in this community. These vehicles are strategically positioned at the junction leading into Gishiri and the market square, situated in the middle of Gishiri and also

serves as a convergence spot for the community. Next to where these vehicles are clustered is a carwash. For those with cars, who either live in or decide to drive into Gishiri, the chances are that when the car would be covered in either dust or mud. Upon exiting, it might be the case that the car needs to be washed before proceeding on your journey. Furthermore, owing to the fact that Gishiri is situated along one of the busiest highways in the capital, and judging by the number of cars being washed at all times of the day, it is evident that the carwash reaps the most benefits of the strategic position it occupies in Gishiri.

Along the same sphere, it is often the case that people claim public spaces as their own possession and territory. This was illustrated by Salisu, who narrated - in Hausa (and translated by Yakubu) - his experience during his stint at begging at one of the corners in Gishiri. "After 2 weeks of begging at the place I usually stay, some people who I thought were beggars like me come to me and said that they will beat me up if I don't leave the place I was begging. They said that I needed to go and meet their oga (boss) for him to give me permission to beg from that place. When I met the oga, he told me that if I want to beg, everyday I will give him 20% of my money because that corner has belonged to him for a long time. One I heard that nonsense from his mouth, I knew that I cannot continue like this. I had to find another work to do, because to give someone the money I gotten from people pitying me standing under this hot sun is impossible". Although this sounded absurd, it was confirmed by the youth leader, who described it as "one of many street politics going on. You don't know that it is a very profitable business".

The Agberos & Area boys:

In Nigerian society, the youths, particularly those from low income areas - are often defamed, maligned and vilified as 'agberos' (thugs) or 'area boys' (deviant youths), hoodlums, and thugs; the purveyors of brutality and extreme violence who are deemed as outlaws and menaces to society, with nothing good, positive or substantial to offer to their community. Speaking with the youths in Gishiri, it was noted that such characterizations were not a surprise. According to Zeke, "we don dey use to am. No be today we dey hear am for here. That one na old talk. Afta all, na your presidio wey use him mouth call us lazy shebi?" (we are very familiar with these comments, its nothing new to us. Remember that it was the President who called us lazy, right?).

Whilst acknowledging the fact that that young people often engage in criminal and nefarious activities, Anselm sought to explain that adopting such blanket characterizations and interpretations about the youths "would be like judging a book by its cover". However, Anselm claims not to hold any grudges or offense to such perceptions because "it is something experience we everyday from people like you who are not from this side. It is nothing new. It doesn't bother us at all. Na so we dey take eye see am (that's the condition we find ourselves in). You people would be fearing us because you think that we are cultists or part of bad gang that wants to steal your wallet or phone. It is very funny. Even though we know of some bad people living here with us, it is nonsense to believe that everyone is bad. I hope you know that it is foolish and stupid thinking? Yes, we are rough riders - no be lie (the truth). Do you know what it take to survive in a place like Gishiri? In this place, you have to pray to God to give you very tough skin, if not, you be OYO (on your own)".

In agreement with the opinions of Zeke and Anselm put forward, Mustapha argued that it should not come as a surprise that young people are forced to “do bad things in order to survive” as he shed light on the “hopeless” circumstances which they find themselves in. “People don’t know - people don’t understand. what we are going through day in, day out. People don’t see the pain we are fighting. Some people get high to calm the pain. Sometimes you cannot sleep because you don’t know where you will get food from tomorrow. Do you know what it feels like you don’t have a purpose in this life? Look around, and you just see people roaming around aimlessly. You see small children who should be in school but they cannot go because their parents cannot buy them food to eat, talk less to pay school fees. People think that we woke up one morning and prayed to God, ‘God today, I want to join bad gang because I like to fight on the street or that I want to grow up to become a thief for a living’. They look at us and believe that we didn’t have the desires and ambitions to be something good? Reason am, we get chance, you think sey we go melt for this zanga? (Think about it, if we had opportunities, do you think you will remain in this space?).

This desire to leave - escape - the shores of Nigeria was a reoccurring theme during the course of interacting with the youths in Gishiri. As Azarya & Chazan (1987, p.118), this is one of the mechanisms adopted by people in response to the marginalization which they are forced to contend in on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, all of the respondents who took part in the group session mentioned of their wish to leave the country. Canada, Greece, the United States, the United Kingdom, amongst other Western countries were locations which they aspired to migrate to, because, as argued by Halliru, “for these countries, their government get sense well well” (in these countries, governments function very well).According to Jubril, “I go do anything just to

comot from this country. Ah ah, how person go fit dey live for here? Free the matter. I go even find way go Libya, swim enter Jand. As you see me so, I no dey fear death at all. God forbid say na for this place where I go stay I go born my pikin dem. Look me, e no fit happen at all. God no go gree at all” (I would do anything just to leave this country. The living conditions over here is not worth it. I will find a way and go to Libya. I will even swim to the UK. God forbid that this is where my children would be born. Trust me, it cannot happen. God would not allow it to happen).

A State of Abandonment

During our interaction, the youths vehemently expressed their lack of confidence and faith in their elected representatives and deep-seated distrust for the police. Still fresh and ingrained in their memories were the catastrophic, horrific and violent events of the October 2020 #endears movement, which Samson described “when young people were slaughtered like animals for no reason by this government”; and the government’s “wicked decision to lock palliatives for poor people during COVID-19 lockdown, when they know that we suffering and dying”; which youths responded to by participating in the mass looting of warehouses around the country, which was also met with violence from the State security authorities. So when they were informed of the government’s claim that it “recognizes and values young men and women as valuable resources, national assets and situates their needs and aspiration at the center of national development” (Nigerian Youth Policy, 2019 p. 22); they didn’t find such a claim remotely funny. This was when it became very personal.

Describing such a claim as nothing more than “a fat and shameless lie”, Aminu drew attention to the challenges that young people are forced to contend with on a daily basis, as he noted “as we are here today, the truth of the matter is that most of us don’t have any good work even if some of us went to school and graduated from university. Everyday we are just wandering the streets aimlessly with nothing to do. We are here suffering because of lack of empowerment! Just wasting away and you are telling me what about value? How can anybody with common sense believe politicians when they tell you that they value and respect us the youths? The honest truth - between God and man - is that we are seriously suffering. Wallahi, the suffering is too much”. IT was evident that there is a disconnect between the youths and public officials. In agreement with the point of view Cynthia sought to make it clear that, “Don’t listen to those politicians, they are wicked liars. We have never gotten any support from government to try and prove ourselves. In short, it is not a secret that our government has abandoned us”.

Hassan, who fled from Zamfara State during the Boko Haram insurgency in 2015, sought to argue that the inability to protect young people was “solid proof” that the State does not value young people, as he protested the fact that “we are not safe! The government say that it is their job to protect us but just see what is happening in the North East. See what is happening in Kaduna. See what is happening in Niger State. Everyday, you hear that 100 children, 200 children have been kidnapped by bandits and unknown gunmen. Everyday you hear that people have been kidnapped from the Abuja-Kaduna express. Everyday it is one story or another, yet this Buhari government continues to keep quiet and doing nothing as if they don’t know what is happening or where these unknown gunmen are from”.

To further illustrate the extent at which they've been abandoned, the youth leader; alongside two other respondents, Aminu and Jide, insisted that I take a stroll with them to inspect first hand, the conditions of the infrastructure in their environment. Navigating the depilated state un-tarred roads, which was described to as “an abomination”; the “useless” police station, which was evidently under-funded; the neglected primary school; we briefly stopped at a makeshift hospital building, which Jide dismissed as “nothing more than a chemist with beds”. Building up their courage, they described an event that occurred a couple years ago, which resulted in one of the loss of life of a close friend. Reflecting on this unfortunate event, Aminu narrated how “when we brought him here, the nurse told us that the Doctor was not around and that there is nothing they can do because they didn't not have any resources to treat him. They referred us to another hospital, but because it was night, taxis refuse to drive into Gishiri because of the bad road, they are afraid of getting accident or getting robbed. See, I know that if we had a good hospital in Gishiri, our guy would have been here with us today”. It was regrettable to learn that in spite of the fact that Gishiri is in close proximity with some of the most affluent areas in the Abuja, logic might dictate that this community village would have, at least been the recipient of some socio-economic development or windfall trickling down from their rich neighbors. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case.

The Anguish of Displacement

Whilst Taggart (2003) argued that was the “duty of the State to care for its citizens ‘from cradle to grave’”, in spaces such as Gishiri, it is evident that opposite occurs. Whilst it is the case that informal spaces such as Gishiri functions as safe haven for individuals either seeking better economic opportunities in Abuja, or fleeing the violence emanating from their home states, the

youths who took part in this study were eager to highlight and stress - at great pains - the insecure and precarious circumstances of their their existence in Gishiri. According to Hassan, “when I wake up in the morning, I thanked Allah that there is a roof over my head. When I go to the Mosque for afternoon prayers, I pray to Allah that my house will be standing. When I come back home in the evening, I thank Allah for being merciful that my house is still standing and pray that I have a roof over my head tomorrow morning. I pray this blessed everyday”. The reason why Hassan, amongst other youths - irregardless of their faith or religious beliefs - in Gishiri are compelled to appeal and make such requests during their devotions and prayers, stems from the real apprehension and deep-rooted fear that one day, without a moment’s notice, their dwellings could be demolished and razed to the ground by bulldozers belonging to the local authority, the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA).

The youth leader drew attention to the most recent demolitions carried out by the FCTA in Gishiri, which rendered 8 families homeless. The reason given by the authorities was that the demolished structures were illegal, because they were not consistent with the master plan of Abuja, hence it had to be razed to the ground. One of the respondents, Jemima, who is a victim of this sort of this demolition exercise carried out by the FCDA expressed her shock when she saw armed men and a bulldozer at the place she had worked since May 2020. According to Jemima, “we all know that demolition is not a new thing. Everybody here knows the buildings that are marked for demolition. What they usually do is that they will mark your fence with red paint. The place where we used to plate hair, they did not give any notice at all. They just came with bulldozer and told us that in the next 1 hour they will start demolishing - whether or not anybody was around. My madam cried, begged and even started rolling of the floor. All the girls

begged, we begged till we were tired. We called the landlord, but he put his phone off. Before we knew what was going on, they switched on the bulldozer. That was when we entered the shop to start removing our property. That day, they almost killed my madam. She stayed in hospital for 2 weeks”.

After hearing about Jemima’s lived experience, it was incumbent to ask the group if any compensation was given to the businesses and families affected by these demolition exercises taking place in their community by the governing authorities or their representatives. Immediately this question was posed, the expression on the faces of the respondents was nothing short of striking. Some burst into a fit of laughter; whilst others turned their gaze towards my direction with astonishment and bewilderment.

Adamu, who spoke in Hausa, was evidently puzzled by this line of questioning and asked the youth leader to ask, “where does he think he is? This is not abroad. Has anybody ever heard of government giving anybody compensation for anything? As you were entering here, didn’t you see that they are building estates? Those people (estate companies) have bribed government to take our land. We cannot expect anything from them. Even if there is compensation, the FCDA people will not give us, instead they will eat it”. The dire circumstances described by Jemima and Adamu were shown to me by the youth leader, who pointed out the buildings which were marked with X in red paint, for demolition and those which had been reduced to rubble. As we surveyed this environment, I was introduced to Stanley, a resident of Gishiri for over 10 years, whose house was brought down by the FCDA. During our interaction, Stanley described how difficult it has been for him ever since the demolition of his house. “When they gave me 2 months notice, me

and my other neighbors will go to their office almost everyday and beg them to give us more time. They would tell us not to worry, that government will give us money to find a new place. It's been 9 months now and I have not seen even 1k (kobo). Whenever you call them, they will shout at you and tell you to stop harassing them. No pity at all. As you see me, I'm an orphan. My parents have died since. I have no brothers and sisters with me. If not for God and my friends who I've been staying with, I don't know what would have happened to me. I swear, the stress is too much".

Pipe Dreams

Perhaps the greatest challenge afflicting young people of working age was the lack of socio-economic and political empowerment, which they desperately sought in order to enable them flight against the claws poverty. In Gishiri, the respondents draw attention to the fact that they are unable to access to good schools and find quality jobs that would give them a strong foundation. Yetunde reflected on her desire was to become a Medical Doctor as she recalled, "when I was very young, I used to spend a lot of time in the hospital with my mother who used to be sick all the time. By the time I was 7 or 8, I decided that I would to become a Medical Doctor and promised my mother that I would treat her when she was ill or sick". Following suit, Ade who described himself as "the best player in Gishiri" noted that for as long as he could remember, his desire was to become a footballer. "I use to follow my father and brothers to one bar close to our house to watch football. At that time JayJay Okocha and Kanu Nwankwo were the biggest players in Nigeria. I liked their style of play and wanted to be like them. After school would finish, me and my classmates will play ball outside till night come. I wanted to play for Nigeria and Arsenal". Abdul also shared about his fascination and intrigue with airplanes as he noted

that “when I was much younger, I would lie on the grass, then wait and watch as they fly through the sky like birds. My family thought that I wanted to be a pilot, but the truth is that I would like to become an engineer and study about aerodynamics and physics in university Inshallah (If God wills it)”.

Regrettably, these individuals are nowhere close towards the materialization of these goals. Rather than medical school, Yetunde works as a shopkeeper in a makeshift kiosk in Gishiri; Ade works as bricklayer, rather than attending sports college; and Abdul works as a carpenter, rather than being enrolled in University. These menial jobs are the only options they have in order to ensure their survival. According to Ade, when he dropped out of senior secondary school due to the inability of his family to pay his school fees, “my uncle, who is a pastor at our church always preached to me at home at an idle mind is the devil’s workshop, so he helped me find this bricklayer work 2 years ago. The work is very hard, but its work and I’m now good at it. At least, I don’t need to stand on the street and beg strangers for money just to eat”. Yetunde, the oldest daughter of her single mother, drew attention to the fact that due to her mother’s deteriorating health, she could not afford to register for secondary school. As a result, she had to step up to the plate become in charge of her mother’s small kiosk in order to pay for medical expenses.

The Traumas of Unemployment

As noted in the literature review, unemployment and underemployment remains a major problem facing the youth population in Nigeria. In spite of the fact that an individual possessed either education certificates or references to vouch that they harnesses the experience and skills needed to obtain a good paying job, their search towards attaining employment has been futile.

Rufai who graduated with a degree in environmental science from the University of Abuja in 2019, narrated how “since graduation, I cannot count how many offices I have visited to submit my CV. I graduated with a first class in environmental science, yet some of these offices will not even consider to interview you. They will tell you, no vacant. Other places will give you hope that they will call you. It is who you know that will help you. In fact, I have even given people money to put my name at the top of their list for simple consideration. It is very tiring”. He also noted that when he first began the application process, owing to the degree he had obtained, he was expecting a job that would fetch him between N150,000 (US\$365) to N200,000 (US\$486) a month; however, “omo, as we day so, if I see job do for N50,000 (US\$121) to N70,000 (US\$170), I go take am” (my friend, due to the circumstances, if I see any job paying N50,000 to N70,000; I will accept).

Even when an individual has “work”, it was often the case that their daily wages were extremely inadequate and insufficient. Yusuf, a painter in Wuse II explained how whenever he complains to his employer about his wages of N500 (US\$1.21c) an hour, he was often met with the threat of dismissal if he continued to raise the matter; as he was reminded that the streets are filled with people who would be grateful to receive wages of even N400 (US\$0.97) in this economic climate. In order to illustrate his predicament, Yusuf sought to provided a breakdown of how much he spends on a daily basis. Assuming that after working for 10 hours on a given day, by the close of business, he is expected to take home approximately N5,000 (US\$12.). Before he arrives home, he branches the market to buy some food items for dinner and breakfast, which could cost him anything between N700 (US\$1.70) to N1,000 (US\$1,000) - depending on how well he haggles with the kiosk attendant. By the time he arrives at the place he stays, he and his neighbors are

mandated to contribute approximately N600 (US\$1.46) for their use of electricity. Prior to retiring for the night, he checks and measures the amount of water in his big drum. If he deems it necessary to replenish the water drum, he is going to have to pay approximately N700 (US\$1.70) to the water vendor; and another N200 (US\$0.48) for the transportation to his house. When he wakes up the next morning, he notes that whether or not he takes a cold or hot shower is dependent on the weather. If he requires hot water, he has to take water in bucket to one of his neighbor's house, who would boil his water for N50 (US\$). As he heads to work in the early morning, he stops to buy N500 (US\$1.21) top-up and N200 (US\$0.48) data for his phone; and to test his luck, he gambles N500 (US\$1.21) at the NaijaBet store, in hopes of cashing out on the days football matches (he has never won). The transportation cost from Gishiri to Wuse II would be approximately N400 (US\$0.97). Drawing attention to the increasing costs in virtually all sectors of the Nigerian economy, Yusuf notes that roughly 6 months ago, he used to pay okada (motorcycle) N50 (US\$0.12) from his house to the junction, now, he has to pay N100 (US\$0.24).

In agreement with Yusuf's assertion, Miriam, highlighted the fact that the costs which Yusuf has outlined doesn't take into consideration other costs associated with rent; health emergencies; monies dispensed to family members and friends; social contributions for the night watch men patrolling their community during the night time; amongst other spendings associated with living in Gishiri. This prompted Yusuf to ask a simple, yet thought provoking question: "how you fit say make we survive? Because before you know wetin day happen, the money don japa" (How do you expect us to survive? Before you are able to find your bearings, the money has finished). In the course of trying to process Yusuf's and Miriam's input, another respondent, Jide, chimed in and said, "omo guy, for us wey be youths, we gats hustle for this streets in you wan chop oooo.

This one na man-o-man. Nobody dey look our face at all. Na between God and us” (my friend, for the youths, our only option is to hustle in the streets if you want to eat. It’s all about survival of the fittest. Nobody cares about your daily struggles. Only God watches us”).

Government Steady Scheming

Upon hearing about their experiences, I was compelled to inquire about the welfare support and grants from the federal government, such as the distribution of cash to poor households by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs under its N-Power program; and the Ministry of Labor’s disbursement of N20,000 (US\$48) to unemployed youths for a period of 3 months, in conjunction with the ministry’s Special Works Program (SPW) scheme to employ 774,000 youths. Although all the respondents admitted that they know about the existence of program and schemes presented by both ministries, 7 of them acknowledged that they had registered for the grants by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs; however, only 4 had received any sort of cash transfer payment. In order to apply for either of these schemes, an individual must possess a Bank Verification Number (BVN), which is provided when opening a bank account. Only 9 of the respondents had owned bank account.. However, because these schemes were introduced during the COVID pandemic, the youth leader noted that it almost impossible for many people to access these federal grants, because they needed to visit banks in order to open an account. However, they were shut. Owing to such reasons, people sought to find seek alternatives to bypass this BVN hurdle. For instance, one of the respondents narrated how he attempted to apply for the Ministry of Labor’s scheme by engaging someone with a bank account. However, there was a caveat: if he was going to apply on his behalf, he would agree to a fee of N5,000 (US\$12) out of the N20,000 that would be deposited into his account during the 3 months period. However,

others such as Chinwe, dismissed the disbursement of these funds as government as “useless”, because “you cannot buy anything with that amount in the market again. The cost of living keeps on increasing”. In agreement with Chinwe’s point, Matthew described this disbursement as “appeasement” and “an insult”, as he sought to argue that the youths are not looking for “any nonsense handout from the government. What we want is empowerment. The should go and fix our schools so that we can learn. If you see the state of our universities, you will be sorry for us. You cannot learn anything. To pass and graduate, you have to drop cash (pay bribe)”.

The Survivalists, Hustlers & Professionals

During the course of observing the activities taking place across this terrain, three main groups of young informal actors were identified: (I) the survivalists; (II) the hustlers; and (III) the professionals (aka the big boys). Ironically, regardless of which category they fall into, the youth leader explained that the individuals working in informal spaces have the capacity to earn more money than if they were employed in formal economy. This is because compared with the national minimum wage of N30,000 (US\$73) per month, the youth leader argued that “depending on how people position themselves here, they can make that amount in a less than day”.

The survivalists engage in activities such as, begging, hawking and vending newspapers along the street in order to sustain themselves. This is where migrants usually find themselves when they first arrive at Gishiri. These individuals are guaranteed to make approximately N36,000 at the end of each month. For example, Salisu, who currently works as an okada driver and as a mechanic apprentice in Gishiri, noted that “begging was the only thing I could when I first came to Gishiri

because I didn't not know anybody. I did it for about 6 months. When I came, I did not know anybody at all, I started to beg on this same street we are standing today. It was the only way I could eat. At least everyday, I would collect at least N1,500 (US\$3.65) - N2,000 (US\$4.86). I remember one day, I collected N4,000 (US\$9.73). But there were times when I collected N500 (US\$1.21).

The hustlers, refers to individuals who are either unemployed or underemployed (side hustlers). Although these individuals might have work from the formal economy, their take home pay is usually insufficient, and as a result, they seek work from the informal economy in order to augment their income. The youth leader introduced me to Eze, who lives in with uncle in Gishiri. When he dropped out of secondary school (JSS3) due to the inability of his family to pay his school fees, he had to find creative ways to find and seek out different sources of income in order ensure his survival and contribute to the upkeep of his family back East. Although Eze doesn't possess any qualifications, he argues that "even though things can be very difficult here, the truth of the matter is that there is work to do and there is money to be made. Sometimes, you just have to humble yourself".

Eze works 3 days a week, with a waste management company in the Kado district, picking trash from the streets with his neighbor, who introduced him to this line of work. He described how they wake up as early as 2:30 in the morning for their shifts, which begins at 4:00, due to the competitive nature of the work, they have to make sure that they reach the office site early so that they get chosen as part of the 24 people who would work, out of a pool of over 60 people. The days he isn't working, he takes his uncle's truck to Gishiri market to meet with retailers seeking to

purchase goods and provisions in bulk from the market. For instance, he notes that on a given day, he drives to Suleja market in Niger State (which is cheaper than the capital) to purchase fresh produce, or the abattoir for cow meat, goat meat, etc; for restaurants or suya joints. On occasion, when he returns from Suleja, he would be asked by vendors to go to either Wuse or Utako markets, to procure goods such as bottled water, can drinks, biscuits, etc; on behalf of the road side kiosks or other small scale enterprises situated in Gishiri.

At the end of the week (a good week), Eze claims to expect between N80,000 - N120,000 (US\$194 - US\$292). Although this might seem as easy cash, Eze also notes that there are days when he comes back home with less than N10,000, (US\$24) due to reasons beyond his control. For instance, there are times when he isn't selected to work with the waste management company because he was late or just overlooked or if he is unable to use his uncle's truck to make market runs, due to mechanical issues or in use; or if vendors don't pay at the expected time as promised. However, in spite of these challenges, Eze maintains that his saving grace is from the relationships he has established with the waste management company, alongside the vendors in Gishiri who seek and rely on him to bring goods for them to sell. According to Eze, "no matter how bad and difficult things can be here, there is always work that people will pay you to do. If there is nothing, I'll find something small, even if it is to sweep in front of someones shop. God forbid that because of money, you will see me begging on the street or hear that I have stolen. God forbid. If I go to bed hungry today, it ok, because I know that I have to work harder tomorrow".

The Professionals (aka big boys) are individuals who undertake activities which are often deemed as illegal by the law. These are the cyber '419' scam artists, and those dealing drugs, which, as

noted in the review, was becoming a serious cause for concern within the nation. Not surprisingly, in Gishiri, drug peddling was one of the most profitable economic activity which youths engaged in. This was evident at almost every turns, young people are “manning their corner” - particularly around bars, kiosks and restaurants (a majority presumedly to be below the age of 21) offering to sell a variety of drugs, such as tramadol, SK (marijuana), Arizona (a strain of marijuana), amongst other substances, which “could be readily available, no problem at all”. During my interaction with an individual who is engaged in this line of work, he stated how he began selling at the age of 14 with some of his friends on different corners. “When we started doing it, we didn’t know what we were carrying. They would just give us a bag and tell us to go and drop it somewhere or give it to somebody. They would tell us not to open the bag - if we do, we would enter trouble. They would call me at anytime of to go and drop or collect something. Whenever they sent us for message, they would give me N3,000 for transport, which was not bad and from there, it just became normal

As a result of his involvement in this trade for over 10 years, he has been able to climb up the ranks and he proudly draws attention to the fact that he has been able to accomplish things that his peers “could only dream of at the age of 25”. He has been able to buy 3 fairly used cars (1 for his personal use, the other 2 for uber and bolt); rent a 2-bedroom apartment at an undisclosed location in the city (where he stays with his mum, brother and sister); and also bought 4 okadas and 3 keke napep in Gishiri for commercial purposes. However, it would be impossible to believe that he has accomplished these feats simply by judging his appearance. At first glance, he could easily be mistaken as any other young man, roaming round the streets with nothing to do; however, there is a reason for this. For instance, before leaving his house, he leaves his

smartphones at home and picks up his burner phones; and calls one of his foot soldiers to pick him up at a destination of his choosing. He also stays in Gishiri for 3 or 4 days out of the week. There is a reason for this musical chairs dance. He notes that for people like him, amongst others who are at (or working towards) his level or higher in trade in Gishiri, it is critically important to “blend in” due to the fact that “there are many eyes out there, full of envy, greed and jealousy. If people know what I did or where I stay or what I have, they would not think about it for a second - they would look for a way to gun me down. It is a very risky, but so far, so good. There are a number of times when I was almost casted (exposed) but.. we are still standing”.

Although he acknowledges and recognizes the dangers and risks associated with his trade, the reason he continues to engage in this line of work is because “the money is very good. Even though there is plenty of risk, the money is better than anything else you can find. You see a corner like this, by the end of the week, I am expecting to make nothing less than N150,000 (US\$365); and that is just this one corner. Only a few people here that are my age mates can boast of making or seeing of money. I remember when I told my mother what I was doing, and she started crying, I asked her to if she knows of any other place where someone that is 25 years old would be guaranteed to make N250,000 (US\$608) a month in this Naija; she should show me and I will leave this work and go and work there”. Apart from Gishiri where he has a strong presence, he notes that he has built a strong network of customers based in affluent areas in the Capital, where he sells “other stuff”.

Owing to the nature of his trade, he expresses the fact that the loyalty and trust “is the most important thing to him”. Although he has a handful of friends who he knows he is certain of

their loyalty and trust, when it comes to his foot soldiers on the field, he demands “absolute and unquestionable loyalty when I give them instructions to do for me”, but he also admits that this very difficult to come by because “there are plenty judases that will rat you out the moment someone flashes small change in their front. They will start talking like tap flowing out of water”. However, he has found ways to circumvent this challenge. For instance, he choses to associate himself more with people from his own ethnic groups - particularly those from his own local government area “because they are my people and we understand and relate with each other on another level. We know ourselves from the village. And if anything happens... you understand”. The other option which he also has at his disposal stems from the relationships he has established with people, whom due to their association and allegiance with certain obscure element, they are sworn by oath of secrecy, not to divulge - under no circumstances - any information pertaining to the activities they undertake, (for obvious reasons, he wouldn't provide a straightforward answer as to whether he is part of any cult or other groups) they also act as his protection. He also notes that he has people in the police, who often provide him with information concerning any events, such as raids that might be on the horizon.

As a person of faith, he notes that certain rules are in place which his foot soldiers must always adhere to. Under no circumstances are his products allowed to be sold to children and women; they can never be found selling around schools, churches or mosques, and the police station; they cannot “lose guard” (appear too flashing, drawing unnecessary attention); his foot soldiers cannot encroach upon the space of competition; they cannot get high off the products they sell; amongst other commands and established rules. However, he notes that “this isn't cheap at all. Just to keep everyone and everything tight, I make sure that I pay them well. Every month, I spend a

minimum of N300,000 (US\$730) just to make sure that they have my back. The reason why he has to be extra careful stems from the fact that he has to, not only ensure the loyalty and trust from his customer base, but also his handlers, because “we are talking about very big and powerful people in government. The type of people you see on TV everyday. Believe me, you don’t want to mess with them at all”.

Although he has been able to profit well from this trade, he stated that he was currently working on “leaving this joint” due to his belief that he is “getting too old for this work. As of right now, my focus is to save enough money so that I can go back to University - but this time, outside this country. It's already in the works and I’m hoping, God willing, that by this time next year, I’m out of this place”.

Informal Leadership

Laguerre (1994, p. 14), rightly notes that, “the informal system emerges to fill a need because of a failure of the formal system. It helps smooth the functioning of the formal system. Its existence rests on the inability of the formal system to meet everyone’s expectations”. This was particularly evident when engaging with stakeholders about the security situation in Gishiri. Furthermore, light was also shed on the dynamics between the formal and informal. Whilst acknowledging the existence of their elected representatives, it was noted that they were detached from the activities taking place in Gishiri. In their absence, the elders within the community (chiefs, pastors, imams, amongst other persons of influences and stakeholders) have picked up the mantle to act in their stead as the governing authority, overseeing and preceding state of affairs in Gishiri.

For instance, they constituted committees, such as environmental, health, youth, and security affairs, amongst others; each made up of at least 6 individuals, whom were all volunteers and not paid to do the work. According to the youth leader, “we meet every 2 weeks to update the elders of what is happening here in the community and they give us advice on how to proceed on a matter”. Whilst these committees are not outrightly legal due to the fact that they are not part of the political framework, the youth leader made it absolutely clear that “these committees that our elders set up would not have worked without the backing and support from our politicians and the police officers”.

During my first visit to Gishiri for the purposes of this research study, the community was in a state of high tension because a burglary incident at a restaurant, where the robber(s) took off with a brand new television set. When criminal activities takes place, it is expected that the first port of call would be the report such a case to police authorities; after all, the police station occupies a central and unmissable location within the community. However, in Gishiri, this is not often the case. This is borne out of their personal experiences with them. Mustapha drew attention to his last encounter with the police authorities, when he went to their station to report that his phone was stolen in broad daylight, “they asked me to write a police statement and that they will call me. I went to their station plenty times to see if they have any information. They said they will call me, I should not worry. That they are making progress. I remember the last time I went, they said that I was disturbing them and acting as if I was the only people who has been robbed before. Since that day, I swore that I will never set my foot inside the station”. Towing the same line, Titus, who described the authorities as “useless” and “weak”, argued that “we cannot trust or even respect them because we know how they behave. When you are trying

to hustle so that you can buy food for you and your family to survive, that is when they will target you and start harassing you. When you enter their wahala (trouble) you have no choice but to settle them with something (bribe them) if not, you cannot know peace”. Rather than go the police route, they prefer to bring matters arising to these committees because “we know them and they are on our side”.

Drawing the attention of the youth leader to the information given by these individuals, he explained that owing to the tension between the police and the youths, the various committees serve as the link, and they always collaborate when matters arise because “no matter how bad the relations are, they always have to be in the know, whether we like it or not”. Reflecting on events during the COVID-19 lockdown in the community, the youth leader noted that “two weeks into the lockdown, things in Gishiri was very very bad. In short, it was dangerous. People were hungry. People were just breaking into houses and stealing anything that they could sell so that they could eat. As we were trying to deal with that matter, some cultists and gang rivals began making noise. Everybody had to act”. In order to quell these issue, the elders in the community, the committee members, and police mobilized a group of individuals to work incognito to serve as “vigilantes” and “nightswatchman”, who are tasked with patrolling the streets in an attempt to resolve these issues.

Probing further as to how he manages to address issues associated with the nefarious cult and gang groups, who are predominately youths, rather than providing a straightforward response, all he said was, “we know them and we understand ourselves”. Interestingly, those who benefit from this tacit arrangement are the police authorities. According to an officer to spoke to me under

strict conditions of anonymity said, “there is nothing happening here that we don’t know about, but we have a lot of pressures, and funding is just one of them. Abuja is where the President lives and we are surrounded by big people and they don’t like to hear about trouble. This is why we allow the elders and their committees handle matters before they come to our front”.

Conclusion

Contributing to the existing literature on the subject of the informal economy, this paper has attempted to shed light on some of the main reasons which influences the decision of multitudes of peoples to engage, interact and integrate themselves within spaces of informality, as against the formal economy. The main objective of this paper is to draw attention to the important role of the informal economy in providing a “safety net” especially for the youths, who are “living in the cracks of a rule system that could not reach down to their level” (Hart, 2015).

To be informal is to be human. According to Laguerre, who describes the informality as both “the behavior of actors” (p.6) and “a structure of action” (p.7), draws attention to the fact that “human life is recognized as having both a formal and an informal side. At the individual level, informality is understood here as a way of life. At the personal level, it is a reflection of human freedom, an implicit or explicit choice that an individual actor makes to locate himself or herself in a retreat position vis-a-vis the formal apparatus of society. The causes for such a retreat are multiple. They include the necessity to meet a personal need, to experience a different reality, to challenge the formal system or simply to express one’s socialization and one’s routine of everyday life” (p.8).

In this paper, it has already been established that the vast range of socio-economic activities taking place across diverse spaces of informality continues to play a prominent role in nations situated in the Global South such as Nigeria, owing to its capacity to provide employment opportunities to millions, alongside its contribution it the national economy. Furthermore, it has also been noted that the main reason why people chose to integrate themselves within spaces of

informality stems from their recognition that they cannot depend on the formal economy to ensure and guarantee their socio-economic and political wellbeing. This recognition stems from the failure of the State to invest in education, broadband connectivity, healthcare, transportation, social services, amongst other critical infrastructures; which has the potential to generate employment opportunities for millions, whilst radically improving the socio-economic and political landscape of the nations. Perhaps more important is the inability of the State to ensure and guarantee the security of her population.

The inability of the State to enact and implement policies which are geared towards fostering a business friendly environment, has also contributed to the growth of the informal economy in Nigeria. The challenges faced by Small and Medium Size enterprises (SMSEs) in Nigeria serves as a typical example. Although SMEs are “considered as the engine of economic growth and for promoting equitable development” (Aremu and Adeyemi, 2011, p.200); and responsible for “96% of businesses and 84% of employment” in Nigeria (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2020, p.3); it is estimated that “on average, 50% of SMEs that are started eventually fail” owing to the failure of the State to “give enough backing to the SMEs sector” (Ufua et al, 2020 p.2).

Whilst it must be acknowledged that the vast range of socio-economic (and increasingly political) activities continues to mitigate the negligence of the State by means of generating job opportunities, it also critically important to draw attention to the fact that these informal activities are facing undue challenges, particularly from policymakers originating from international institutions. By drawing attention to the vulnerabilities associated with these activities, alongside the claims that their activities drags down the economic viability of the nation, particularly due to

their assertion that those operating within spaces of informality operate in spaces of informality so that can avoid the payment of taxes.

In order to stem the perceived threats they claim the informal economy poses, policymakers have often advocated for the “formalization” and “transition” to the formal economy. Unfortunately, they continue disregard the fact that it is virtually impossible to get rid of the informal economy and remain oblivious to the profound and far-reaching impact the informal economy in enabling in the creation of jobs and giving people an opportunity to not only survive and escape from the claws of poverty, but also to seek alternative avenues to fight towards the actualization of their their ambitions and dreams. Furthermore, they fail to recognize the fact that political actors have no incentives to eradicate the informal activities taking places across diverse spaces of informality, owing to the fact that these are the avenues upon which they draw their support from.

During the course of conducting this fieldwork research in Gishiri, it was impossible to ignore the very fact that informal spaces are undergoing a pivotal paradigm shift. First and foremost, in spite of the adverse circumstances and conditions which these brave young men and women are forced to contend and wrestle with on a daily basis in Gishiri, it was intriguing and reassuring to learn that they haven’t given up hope in achieving their dreams. For instance, Yetunde, who hopes to become a Medical Doctor, often watches American and British medical shows such as House and Casualty; alongside volunteering as a nurse at the local hospital. Abdul, who desperately yearns to get an academic qualification notes that the days when he is off work, he visits a friend who is enrolled at Baze University, who gives him access to the library, so he can borrow books on engineering, which he brings back with him to Gishiri and reads during his

breaks from work and in the evenings “after I pray and before I sleep”. Ade notes that every Saturday morning “if rain doesn’t fall”, he goes with a group of friends to football fields, especially at the National Stadium to play football and also showcase his talent, because “you never know when a scouting agent will show. I always have to be ready”.

Increasingly, young people without any formal education can be found in cyber cafes, using YouTube and other interactive platforms such as uLesson (an online learning service in Nigeria) to educate themselves and gain knowledge, by conducting research on various exciting and intriguing and novel topics, of personal importance. Furthermore, these young people, armed with cheap smartphones and other technological devices, - eager not to be left behind - are rapidly making every effort to attain relevant skills which they believe would enable them march towards prosperity. This was apparent during the group interactions, where I noticed the respondents engaging in the compelling conversation about the ebbs and flows of various cryptocurrencies, such as bitcoin and dogecoin; and also how they are learning about how to trade in foreign currencies. In my discussion with the youth leader about this compelling observation, he noted that “it is something else. This was the new thing that youths want to invest their money in. All of them are always following crypto. Some of them that I know don’t even want to spend their money on playing bets again, instead, they want to save their money and invest in crypto. It is good. After all, everybody no say Naira no get value again” (everybody knows that the Naira no longer has value).

Whilst it is acknowledged that these young individuals - of whom possess the capacity to transform the socio-economic and political landscape of their community and nation at large -

are driven and motivated to seek avenues for growth and prosperity; it is critical to recognize the very fact that they need guidance, help and support. Rather than relying and waiting on the government to make things right, it is critically important for individuals - especially those of us who have had the opportunity to attain a level of exposure outside the shores of Nigeria - to use our established networks (both local and international) to look for ways in which we can help in alleviating the socio-economic and political pressures which the youths of forced to wrestle with on a daily basis. We cannot assume to remain blind to the consequences of their abandonment, marginalization and the resulting social exclusion which they are forced to contend in on a daily basis. Even though we are blessed and fortunate to be living amongst the upper echelons of Nigerian society, we cannot claim to be ignorant of the sufferings of young people, because the very moment we step out of our Air Conditioned environs, we see the impact of poverty on children, who have been robbed on their innocence at a very young age. For this reason, it is our duty and responsibility to respond. It is imperative to respond to the tyranny of poverty, which continues to drive multitudes of young men and women into becoming drug addicts, criminals and terrorists. For this reason, it is critically important to take bold actions and steps.

One of those stepping up to the plate is Tunde Onakoya, the founder of Chess in Slums Africa (CISA), who, since 2018, has been introducing the game of chess to children living in slum communities, in an attempt to not only lure them away from crime, but more importantly, to unlock their latent potentials. More importantly, the message which Mr. Onakoya, this getting across to these young people know is that they are not forgotten to irrelevant, but rather that they matter and they are of immense value to their families and communities at large. Something similar can be achieved in Gishiri. During my interactions in Gishiri, it was obvious that the

young men and women are very interested in becoming more integrated and entrenched in the technology ecosystem, especially as they are determined and enthusiastic to learn and obtain knowledge which would propel them to contribute meaningfully to their societies.

Before going any further, it is critically important to recognize the fact that Igboeli (2016) was correct in describing the Nigerian youth as “bright”, “resilient” and “a born trailblazer”. This is particularly the case for those in rural communities such as Gishiri, amongst across Nigeria. Their innovativeness and raw talent is beyond outstanding. The manner in which they’ve used social media apps such as Facebook, instagram, tiktok, amongst others; to showcase their talents in various fields is nothing short of spellbinding. In acknowledgment of such expressions, it is critically important to seek avenues on how to establish and set up a technological school in Gishiri, so that these young people can be afforded the opportunity to enhance their knowledge on the latest advancements in the technological space. In order to accomplish this, it is imperative to explore the possibility of engaging with Western techs firms and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assist by funding the establishment of educational institutions where young people can work towards extracting themselves from arenas of crime and poverty. Furthermore, in order to accomplish this feat, it would be critical to win the approval and support of the local government authorities - both the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) and the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) - owing to the fact that they have the power to provide, for instance, the land within Gishiri, upon which this proposal can be manifested into reality. These are the types of small, yet audacious and bold steps, which can transform the socio-economic and political livelihood of young Nigerians. By giving young people a sense of purpose,

we begin the journey of working towards ensuring that they are not caught in the quagmire of the more nefarious aspects of the informal economy.

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