ECONOMIC FIGHTERS LEAGUE

Economic Democracy NOW!

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To solve youth unemployment, we should move from Procurement Economy to Investment Economy.

Introduction: A Ticking Demographic Time Bomb

Ghana is one of the youngest nations on earth. With a median age of just 21.6 years and over 54 percent of its population under the age of 25, the country's demographic profile is unmistakably that of a youthful society. The 15–35 age group alone constitutes a significant and growing share of Ghana's approximately 35 million people.This youthful population could, in theory, be the engine of a national transformation. In reality, it has become one of the country's most pressing security threats.

According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), youth unemployment stood at an alarming 32 percent among those aged 15 to 24 in 2024, and 22.5 percent for the broader 15–35 cohort. Seven out of every ten unemployed persons in Ghana is young. These are not just economic statistics; they are indicators of a society under strain. Idle youth, lacking income and purpose, are more susceptible to recruitment by criminal networks, political vigilante groups, and other destabilising forces. The youth unemployment crisis in Ghana is, at its core, a security crisis and it demands urgent, structural solutions.

Ghana's Development Deficit: Challenges That Cry Out for Solutions

To understand why youth unemployment is so tragic in Ghana's context, one must first appreciate the sheer depth of the country's unmet developmental needs. Ghana is not short of problems that require human effort to solve. It is short of the political will to connect those problems to the available human resources.

Food insecurity and the high cost of living remain everyday burdens for millions of Ghanaians. Prices of basic foodstuffs have surged in recent years, placing nutritious meals beyond the reach of low-income households. The housing crisis is equally dire: both public and private sector workers struggle to secure decent, affordable accommodation in Ghana's urban centres. This forces many into overcrowded informal settlements or into long commutes from peripheral areas, eroding productivity and dignity alike.

In the education sector, Ghana continues to grapple with a chronic shortage of qualified teachers in classrooms, particularly in rural and deprived communities. The health sector mirrors this deficiency: hospitals and clinics across the country are understaffed, with too few nurses and other health workers to serve a growing and increasingly needy population. Meanwhile, Ghana's sanitation crisis remains a public health emergency. Inadequate waste management, open defecation, and poor drainage systems continue to claim lives and undermine human development across the country.

These are not minor inconveniences. They are fundamental failures of governance that demand massive, sustained human effort to address. And yet, the very human resource Ghana needs to tackle these challenges, its young people, are sitting idle.

There is a cruel irony at the heart of Ghana's development story. On one side, the country faces a mountain of developmental challenges that require human effort, intellect, skill, and labour to resolve. On the other side, hundreds of thousands of educated and semi-skilled young Ghanaians wake up each morning with nothing productive to do. The two sides of this equation are never brought together. The question that every Ghanaian policymaker should be losing sleep over is simple: why?

Unemployed youth are not a burden; they are a latent resource. Ghana's teachers' deficit could be reduced by deploying trained graduates into schools under structured employment programmes. Its nursing shortage could be addressed by absorbing trained health workers who currently sit at home. Its sanitation crisis could be tackled through community-based employment schemes that pay young people to manage waste, clean drains, and build sewage systems. At every turn, the challenges and the human resources to fix those challenges exist side by side, yet they remain disconnected. The reason for this disconnect lies, in large part, in the nature of Ghana's political economy.

The Procurement Economy: Where Corruption Devours Opportunity

For decades, successive governments of Ghana have operated what can only be described as a "procurement economy"; a system in which state resources are systematically channeled into projects with large procurement components, not because these projects are the most effective solutions to national problems, but because they offer the easiest opportunities for personal financial gain. In this system, public funds are tied up in contracts for physical infrastructure, equipment, and supplies, all of which create opportunities for price inflation, kickbacks, and outright fraud. The individuals who control procurement decisions such as ministers, commissioners, and politically connected intermediaries, enrich themselves through these corrupt acts while the broader public interest is sacrificed.

This procurement-led approach to governance has a devastating side effect: it systematically excludes the kinds of investments that would create mass employment. Labour-intensive programmes to build affordable housing, expand community health services, or rehabilitate degraded agricultural lands do not lend themselves easily to procurement fraud. They require sustained investment in people — wages, training, tools, and management — rather than inflated contracts for goods and services. As a result, they are consistently deprioritised by governments more interested in skimming state resources than in solving national problems.

Consider what a genuine, deliberate commitment to solving Ghana’s housing crisis could look like. A government truly focused on this problem would invest in affordable housing construction using locally sourced raw materials like clay bricks, bamboo, timber, and compressed earth blocks, rather than importing expensive materials that drain foreign exchange. Such a programme would require workers at every skill level: young people to source and process raw materials in rural areas; masons, carpenters, plumbers, and electricians on construction sites; engineers and supervisors to manage quality and compliance; and administrators to coordinate logistics and community engagement. A single large-scale housing programme of this kind could employ tens of thousands of young Ghanaians directly, and hundreds of thousands more in upstream supply chains.

The same logic applies across every sector. A serious commitment to food security would mean investing in smallholder agriculture, irrigation, food processing, and rural markets, each of which would absorb large numbers of young workers. A genuine effort to reform sanitation would require community-based employment at scale. Tackling the teacher and nursing shortages would mean hiring and deploying trained graduates rather than leaving them unemployed while classrooms sit without teachers and wards sit without nurses. In each case, the solution to the development challenge is simultaneously a solution to youth unemployment. The two are not in tension; they are two sides of the same coin. Ironically, the government of Ghana will rather procure hundreds of thousands of tablets for school children who do not have adequate teachers.

Conclusion: A Choice Between Extraction and Investment

Ghana’s youth unemployment crisis is not an accident. It is the predictable outcome of a political economy that prioritises procurement over problem-solving, personal gain over public good, and extractive short-termism over transformative investment. The challenges Ghana faces — in housing, food, health, education, and sanitation — are real, urgent, and solvable. The human resources required to solve them are available, young, and desperate for the opportunity to contribute. What is missing is the political will to connect the two.

Fixing this will require more than new programmes or policy announcements. It demands a fundamental reimagining of what government is for. If the Ghanaian state were genuinely organised around solving national problems rather than enriching political insiders, the procurement economy would give way to an investment economy. Until that shift happens, Ghana’s youthful population will remain not an asset to be harnessed, but a crisis waiting to unfold.

Dr. Fred Otu-Larbi
Head of Strategic Research
Economic Fighters League
+233 23 330 0009