

My name is Lawrence Afere and I'm a Nigerian.

In 2003, I went to the university where I studied Business Management with an intention to graduate and get a well paid job that will help cater for my family. I remember it was a Friday, November 17, 2006, when my life changed. This change was triggered by a report in the newspaper about the plight of over 30 million unemployed Nigerian youths. It raised the question, what may happen to the country in 2020 if nothing was done to solve the situation. It was written in the report that “By 2020, Nigeria will have over 20 million highly skilled criminals”¹ I was really sad and concerned after reading this report. Immediately, I felt I might someday become a victim of what this report says. And then my perspective shifted from living for myself to finding a way to help the situation and also become self employed. I found myself constantly thinking about this.



Lawrence Afere

Process of realising my dream

After graduating from the university in 2007, I returned to my town, Akure, a low-income community in the south west of Nigeria. It was a huge shock for my parents, relatives and friends to see me returning home. They all expected me to remain in the city and get a good job. Thinking of the investment they had on me, my parents felt disappointed when I informed them I wanted to do something different with my life by empowering unemployed young people. After some time I agreed with my parents and went back to the city where I got a job. However, the dream of doing something different was still in my mind and therefore I was not able to focus properly. Finally, I quit the job and went back to my town. People, especially family members said I was bewitched! People in Nigeria are suspicious when things are not going as expected. They believe there is a spiritual force that can influence one's destiny.

“Where and how could I start?” I kept asking myself. I was jobless and wanted to do something that would give jobs to unemployed young people in my town and I wanted to have a meaningful occupation myself. I tried several things that failed for example selling books to schools. Selling books was not an effective tool for bringing young people together. But this time my undying passion would not let me give up.



An Idea that worked!

Late 2008 I had an idea to start a farm where we would cultivate and sell farm products. I shared my idea with the unemployed young people in my church and 5 of them showed interest and also invited 9 of their friends. A parent, who was interested in our idea, lent 7 plots of farmland to us free of cost. We named the farm 'Youth Farm Project' and 15 of us began to cultivate the land by planting maize. In the process, I realized that there is a relationship between a farming process and

entrepreneurship. The farming process provides a practical experience for learning how to become an entrepreneur. The project has given opportunities to unemployed youth and I to

¹THE PUNCH, Friday, November 17, 2006, pp.52

generate some income.

Shock

On Thursday, June 21, 2012, I became a victim of highway robbery by some young Nigerians as I was preparing to travel to India. As one of them put a gun to my face, asking for my money, and in deep fear, the thoughts of my wife and son came to my mind. "I don't want to die now" I said to myself. So I gave my money. Immediately I remembered the report that changed the course of my life and career six years ago "If nothing is done to help the country's youth situation, by 2020, Nigeria will have 20 million highly skilled criminals." sadly, on this day, I became a victim of the over 20 million highly skilled criminals my country is presently grooming!"

SOME PHOTOS TAKEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT IN 2008-2011

