

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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ABSTRACT

This paper emphasises the implications of youth unemployment in Nigeria, for the third Millennium. The implications are both social, economic and political. It is argued in the paper that youth unemployment is potentially dangerous as it sends disturbing signal to all segments of the Nigerian Society. The rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria is high, even at the period of economic normalcy i.e. the oil boom of the 1970s (6.2%); 1980s (9.8%) and the 1990s (11.5%). Youth unemployment therefore is not a recent phenomenon as is conveyed in the various tables in this paper. The theoretical stand point of the paper is influenced by functionalist school of thought, with a bias for European school of modernism which argues that youth play a central role in the overall survival of Nigeria. Ignoring the political, economic and social roles they play amounts to threatening the very survival of Nigeria as a nation. Thus to reduce unemployment, the paper suggests among others, the establishment of Work Incentive Programme (WIN) by the Nigerian State, as is done in the capitalist America. Government in league with the private sector it is further suggested, can create job corps for school dropouts as one major remedy to unemployment. The paper further sees hope for Nigeria only if Youths are mobilized by way of genuinely socializing them into taking their roles in the stratification system.

Key Words: Nigeria; Unemployment; Political Stability; Youth; Work Incentive.

INTRODUCTION

Youth in any society have the potentials to stimulate economic growth, social progress and overall national development. The strategic roles of youths in the development of different societies of the world such as Cuba, Libya, China, Russia, Israel are obvious. For example, in Cuba, Libya, China and Russia, youths were the vanguards of the revolutionary change which these countries experienced, the outcome of which is the genuine transformation from a backward feudal to a modern industrial states (Wilmot, 1985). Israel has an established institution of Kibutzism mainly to integrate and socialise the youth into the societal precepts for development.

In Nigeria, by recognising the relevant position which the youth occupy in the stratification system, government established in 1973 the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

Scheme, and a Ministry to coordinate the social activities of you in the country. The Scheme affords youth the opportunity to explore the diverse culture of Nigeria, and provide essential services in health, teaching vocation and, community development where such services do not exist. Above all, the Scheme eases tension and anxiety which unemployment generates.

In traditional African economy the strategic placement of youth in the overall political, economic and social transformation of the society, is well recognised. In schools, universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, etc. youth constitute members of voluntary associations and active bodies. They are assets in the development process of the nation. As a link between the present and the future, youth sustain and transmit societal values and culture to future generations.

It is in view of these relevant roles youth play in the society that this paper attempts to discuss the implication of unemployment among them for the third millennium. To achieve this, the paper addresses the concept of youth unemployment within the frame of a paradigm; the implication is examined, and a conclusion drawn.

ON THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Youth as a concept, has no precise definition in the African context. In nearly all traditional African societies, those who fall between 40-50 years of age are still considered youth contrary to what obtains in Euro-America. However, for the purpose of this paper, youth is considered as those young people who fall between the ages of Eighteen and Thirty years.

According to the 1963 National Head Count, youth constitute 42.5% of Nigeria's total population; they constitute the majority of Nigeria's total work force. With the growth rate of 2.5% in 1991, the youth again constitute 45.9% of Nigeria's 88.9 million people. Therefore, the position which youth occupy in Nigeria's demographic structure cannot be de-emphasised.

With the youths schemes such as the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), youth are the vanguards of implementing the national objectives namely, the establishment of a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens as recorded in the Second National Development Plan, 1970 - 74. The Third National Development Plan equally recognises the youth as a force in realising the national objectives.

However, the third national rolling plan recognised increased in the number of graduate unemployment in the country, and suggested an immediate reduction in the number of unemployed, if Nigeria is to achieve a rapid and sustainable development. This has not been achieved for lack of a corresponding policy backing. Consequently, the number of the unemployed youth has continued to appreciate

without a corresponding job placement.

Nigeria's industrialisation drive is weak. This is because the Nigerian petty bourgeois elites lack an economic base or power. The elites are interested in a distorted and disarticulated form of industrialisation which further serves the interest of the metropolitan bourgeoisie. This is a factor in unemployment which continues to deteriorate in scale and magnitude. Suffice to add to this factor, the activities of transnational and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Nigeria. The unemployment is exacerbated by the need to seek loans from IMF and World Bank. These international agencies have inevitable conditionalities which are quite unfavourable to the people and the economy. For example, one of the conditions for loan is to retrench and devalue the national currency. Consequently, the already deflated national economy is further deflated. And this has a direct impact on employment.

Youth unemployment therefore essentially refers to a sociological situation in which young people, aged between Eighteen and Thirty years are not guaranteed full employment and security at the time their productive energies are at their

peak, a situation which dates back to the colonial periods, when the British social organisation was violently imposed on the people, without the people imbibing the culture of Webers' bureaucracy. For example, neither are people fixed in a position which suits their training, nor are they punished accordingly, when bureaucratic rules and procedures are flagrantly violated.

The 1963 Census indicated that majority about 86.5% of the unemployed, were youth between 15-29 years of age (Sanda, 1988). Between 1966/67 and 1974, Nigeria faced a severe youth unemployment. This is partly facilitated by the civil war the country had just prosecuted. To date, this social situation has not improved. The situation has further worsened, with over 36 universities turning out thousands of graduates nearly every year, without corresponding job opportunities, and placement. However, the table below clearly indicates Nigeria's unemployment status. Accordingly the

National Manpower Board estimates that today only 10% of the estimated 3 million youths that enter the labour market yearly cannot be absorbed by the formal and public sectors (Damachi, N.A. 2001).

The Table equally supports the popular assumptions that, the problem of unemployment arises because more youths are seeking work than there are jobs.

Both private and public sectors engage the services of youth in the country. Where these institutions cannot afford to provide employment for the youth, the number of the unemployed consequently increases. Therefore, youths must enrol into programmes in the University which do not have restrictive utility.

SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

Functionalism which influences this paper has its origin deep in the biological sciences. It begins with the premise that action is structured in society. This implies that relationships between members of society are organised in terms of rules or norms. Societal values provide a guidelines for members' behaviour. The main parts of society (ie. Institutions) such as the family, the educational, political, religious and economic systems constitute the major part of the social structure. These institutions are made up of structure that have interconnected and interdependent roles (Haralambos 1980. Brown. 1982).

From the functionalist perspective, society is a system made up of interconnected and independent parts. It follows therefore, that each part affects other parts in the course of performing its assigned roles. Thus the parts must have some degree of compatibility, if the society is to survive, and continuity ensured.

As applied to the youth of Nigeria, the thesis maintains that youth form the major segment of the Nigerian society. They perform essential roles in the society. They form the bulk of agrarian labour force from which food security and availability is guaranteed. In rural community, youth are the vanguards of development. They form voluntary association to

supplement and compliment the efforts of the elderly. Youths are the engine of sports industry. The role they play in this regard has risen the status of Nigeria among nations of the world. Their performance in teaching vocation cannot be de-emphasised. Where teachers are not available, youth provide teachers in large number. These roles youth play therefore, have ensured integration and continuity of the Nigerian nation. Without Youth performing these roles in the system either the system collapses or suffers a mass decay. You cannot be ignored given these roles the play in the society.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THIRD MILLINIUM.

However, Youth unemployment in Nigeria has many implications which transcend politics and Economy. It equally has a psychological implication. All these need to be succinctly discussed without which the overall implications cannot be fully understood.

Implication for Personal Growth and fulfilment.

In Nigeria for example, Youths who are unemployed, underemployed or the poorly paid female youths who work as hairdressers or seamstresses seek a godfather to supplement income. At the same time, they may keep steady mates from the same social class who may know about, and even approve of their Union. If the material condition improves beyond the imagination of both, or if ageing reduces the woman's market value, a formal marriage may take place, without necessarily being sanctioned by the family; at which point, the man expect relatively exclusive sexual right (Wilmot, 1985). Again, because city where majority of unemployed youths live presents anonymity, social relationship rises and decline on the account of the strength of the partners' pockets. (Clinard and Abott 1979). However, the male-female relationship is predicated on the fact that both partners are HIV (Aids force). Also as a corollary, unemployment facilitates rapid reproduction among the unemployed urban

Table 3: Crime Statistics & Victims In Lagos January – July 4, 2001.

Month	Robbery Cases	Robbers Arrested	Robbers Killed	Recovered Arms/ Ammunition	Arms/ Ammunition To Robbers	Police men Killed	Civilians Killed	Vehicles Stolen	Vehicle Recovered
Jan	13	51	22	47/680	1/-	1	18	79	191
Feb	29	63	40	46/290	2/10	2	6	94	90
March	12	30	15	36/174	4/60	1	1	129	147
April	25	29	29	26/261	-	-	7	111	157
May	31	33	16	32/382	4/28	4	6	135	138
June	16	53	47	46/540	3/27	3	2	159	184
July 1-4	3	15	14	13/104	-	3	1	11	15
Total	129	274	183	256/2,431	14/125	14	41	751	919

Source: Lagos State Police Command as quoted in Newswatch, July 23, 2001 p.31.

youths, who, for lack of what to do, derive pleasure in unregulated sexual behaviour (Heneicke, 1986). Youth are also into drugs which have profound impact on their personal development.

Implication for National Security

Unemployment generates other ancillary socially unapproved behaviours among the unemployed youths such as armed robbery. Drug use and Abuse, part-time commercial sex work and so on.

In the *TELL* (Nigeria) Magazine of April 3, 2002 issue, Dele Agakameh observed that nearly every robbery operations in Nigeria was organised by the youths. Behind one successful robbery gang he argued, is a woman. Funmi Ahmed, 29 – year – old graduate and mother of

two. Converting her home to a robber's den and armoury; she leads attacks to homes of family and friends. This is a major fallout of unemployment among the youth. The unemployed youth form the core of hired killers/assassin in Nigeria according to *The Week*, January 21, 2002 vol. 15. No 16).

The table below indicates the rate of robbery cases for Lagos alone.

The formation of militant youth organisations along ethnic and religions lines equally forms part of the fallouts of youth unemployment in Nigeria. To the youth, anything is better than unemployment. Thus in response to unemployment, Egbesu Boy, Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) Arewa People's Congress (APC) Bakasi Boy (BB) etc have emerged respectively in different parts of the country. The clashes of these militant youths organization with

the law enforcement Agents have had profound demographic impact and, a mass lost of valuables which accompany these clashes. The value of the items destroyed at best can only be estimated, in billions of Naira. The activities of these militant youth organizations have been documented in *Daily Trust Newspaper*, Monday, July 30, 2001, and *Tell Magazine* Sept 3, 2001, Oct. 29, 2001. All these result from lack of job for the teeming youths of Nigeria.

Implication for National Economic Growth

Another area which Youth unemployment has affected directly is the economic sector of the country with unemployment, the development potential of Nigerian Youths cannot realized. In search of hope, the unemployed youths indulge in oil pipeline vandalization as recorded in the *NewsWatch* magazine September 18, 2000. The impact of this action of youth on the Nigerian society is both social and economic. Economically, this is detrimental to the nation as a substantial part of the nations revenue is lost to violence and anarchy. Unemployment is a fertile ground for breeding inequality, injustice and social deprivation on this basis, one can consider stimulating the economy so that more jobs will become available, or one can consider reducing the number of workers by persuading persons to leave the labour force due to age and other possible factors. This was the early social security thinking, which is still applicable to today's social reality. Older workers would have support and so could retire, leaving places for energetic younger workers. Additionally, educational programmes and support for education can reduce unemployment by delaying the entry of young workers into the job markets. At the economic front, this can pull down the negative implicol of unemployment.

Implications for Democracy and Political Stability

In a plural society like Nigeria, unemployment is a causative agent for the polarization of the unemployed youths into ethno-religious groups, for the purpose of fostering sectional interest. These groups have

wrecked the stability of the country both in the past and in the present. Also, unemployment is a major obstacle to worker's solidarity against exploitation and oppressive nature of capitalism. With employment, workers can form trade union through which interests of workers can be represented and consequently forestall instability in the work place in particular and the country in general.

Manpower Training and Utilization.

Unemployment is functional through which corporate organisations such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) are established. The mission of this organization is to provide training for graduates and non-graduates who are unemployed. The training is to provide the platform for self-actualization and self-reliant development.

CONCLUSION

The third millennium is still far from us. But the implications of youth unemployment are very much with us. Most of us may not live to see the third millennium. But the social problems generated by unemployment are an indication of what the future holds for Nigeria. They point to the direction in which Nigeria is going. Something functional ought to be done to ameliorate the youth unemployment situation in Nigeria.

Moreover, youth replace parents after death; youth give parents and old members of the society support which includes giving parents befitting burials and comfort, love and support with basic needs. Above all, they are agents of change and continuity for the family name in particular and society in general. Thus, if Nigeria appreciates these social roles of youth in the stratification system and the position they occupy in the status hierarchy; the youth need to be fully mobilised for popular production. The material means of production which provides the bases for dominance in Nigeria, may be collectivised as one sure way to bridge the gap between the rich, the poor, and the unemployed Nigerians. Again, as we earlier noted, the youth constitute nearly

half of Nigeria's population. Youth unemployment therefore, is generally detrimental to the national economy and other social structures. Unemployment among the youth is a major facilitator of violence, crime, ethno-religious acrimony, and social deprivation.

Although not pessimistic, the scale of crime and other social problems resulting from unemployment or underemployment in Nigeria, portends doom for the country. However, while we blame the government for misplaced priority, the youth equally have a share of the blame. They enrol into courses in the University which offer restrictive employment.

All things considered, the future of Nigeria lies in the hands of youth. The mobilisation of youth in the direction of employment and production will thus ensure peace, justice, stability, equality, and social progress for all the people of Nigeria. This paper therefore, sees hope for Nigeria only when youth are guaranteed full employment and security. This can be made possible, if the constitution of Nigeria would guarantee individuals a right to employment as it obtains in some European countries. Consequently the search for happiness would be a thing of the past and no longer would anyone live in fears of unemployment, which breeds Crime, violence, commercial sex work and above all, poverty.

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