

## Unemployment and Poverty: Implications for National Security and Good Governance in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examines the relationships between unemployment, poverty and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper holds that unemployment causes poverty and that poverty causes insecurity. In a nation where a large number of the people are unemployed, they would be poor; and poverty would lead to the insecurity of lives and property as the peoples' capacity to engage themselves meaningfully in the nation's socio-economic processes would be highly reduced. They would channel their energies to unorthodox methods as crimes to eke out a living for themselves and as they do this, they endanger lives and property in the society and raise the cost of governance. It therefore suggests the restructuring of the nation's socio-economic processes and policies to reduce poverty and unemployment; and to accommodate the less-privileged and unemployed members of the society to achieve national security.

**Key Words:** *Poverty, Unemployment, National Security; Transparency; Accountability, Self-reliance*

### Introduction

Poverty and unemployment as social problems have remained major developmental challenges in Nigeria for a very long time. As Obadan and Odusola (2001) observed, unemployment in Nigeria was more acute in the 1980s and this has been on the increase ever since. In 2008, 15% of the nation's work force was unemployed and in 2011 the figure rose to 20% (Lamido, 2013); and the victims of this phenomenon are the youths who till date have had the highest unemployment rate in Nigeria. According to Akanda and Okuwa (2009) between 40-60% of those unemployed in Nigeria are aged between 15-25 years and Rotimi (2011) puts the ages between 18 and 45 years. The unemployed are poor and most of them carry the phenomena into their old ages.

Most of those paraded by the law enforcement agencies before the mass media in the country as members of criminal groups fall within this age bracket. Most of those used in suicide bombings by terrorist groups in the country also fall within this age group. And most of those involved in the Niger Delta militancy are also of this age group. The fact is that if these youths have alternative means of livelihood or are gainfully employed in the economy, most of them would not take part in these criminal activities.



The most disturbing aspect of this phenomenon is that some of those involved in these crimes are educated. The worst thing that would ever happen to a nation is for the nation's educated citizens to be involved in crimes, and most of them are involved in cyber-crimes and advanced fee frauds. Whereas the uneducated are mostly involved in violent crimes, the educated are involved in non-violent crimes which are worse in magnitude and scope than the violent crimes; and they have greater consequences and impacts on the socio-economic processes and administration of the country. This gives rise to more anger and frustration for the uneducated youth who looks with anger and envy on the educated, and make the uneducated to use more severe violent means to eke out an existence.

The scourge of poverty and unemployment has ravaged almost all nations of the world in different dimensions and shades. But in Nigeria, as Akande and Okuwa (2009) pointed out, the unemployment challenge is captured by the growing number of unemployed youths roaming the streets all over the country. It is seen in the informal sector of the economy as under-employment; declining real wages; reduced incentives; reduced private investment in all sectors of the nation's economy; and a reduction in the quality of education and training given to the citizens in our educational institutions across the country. Poverty and rising crime wave are consequences of this phenomenon. In other words, unemployment in Nigeria carries with it a number of attendant social, economic, political and psychological and security challenges.

This paper therefore looks at the problems of poverty and unemployment in the country and the attendant security challenges they pose, and suggests that there is the need for a paradigm shift in the outlook of our leaders; a review of some of our national policies; and a review of our educational curriculum with a view to making Nigerians imbibe the philosophy of transparency, accountability and self-reliance. This would help to reduce the security challenges posed by unemployment and poverty in the country.

### **Statement of the Problem**

National security, poverty and unemployment are the biggest problems facing most nations of the world today, whether they are developed or developing. They are impediments to social progress, and lead to waste of human and material resources. However, it is believed that security strategies remain incomplete as long as they do not address poverty and unemployment. This paper therefore examines the links between unemployment, poverty, and national security in Nigeria as the government seems to be incapable of handling the security challenges posed by poverty and unemployment in the country; to suggest ways of reducing the security challenges posed by them in order to achieve a stable political governance in the country.

### **Methodology**

Data were generated through secondary sources like text books, journals, newspapers, magazines, publications on the web; and statistical data were gathered from the National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.) in Nigeria. The study is purely historical and the analysis statistically descriptive.



### **Theoretical Context and the Relationship between Unemployment, Poverty and Insecurity**

Since the 1960s, several studies have tried to look at the link between increase in crime on a local or national level and unemployment (Alexis 2011). Several others also show that although there is some correlation between small scale theft and unemployment, it is not very clear that poverty, unemployment and national security have direct links. But this paper believes that there is a link between unemployment, poverty and insecurity in Nigeria, and adopts the frustration–aggression hypothesis as theoretical framework to explain and draw meaningful relationship between the variables.

This psychological theory state that “aggression is always a consequence of frustration” and that “frustration always leads to some form of aggression” (Leeds, 1978; Dollard, 1939). As theorized, frustration breeds hostility and produces anger, (an emotional readiness to aggress). Hostile aggression springs from anger. The principle works everywhere. Ivo and Rosaline Feierabend (1972; 1968) applied the frustration – aggression theory in a study of political instability within 84 nations. It was found that when people in rapidly modernizing nations become urbanized and literacy improves (as being experienced in Nigerian today) they become more aware of material improvements. However, since affluence usually diffuses slowly, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor intensifies frustration and unprovoked aggression ensues and escalates. These aggressions are manifested as crimes and violence in Nigeria.

Unemployment and the attendant poverty situation it brings, though not always by itself, poses a serious problem to democratic governance as well as the security integrity of the nation itself but their consequences have a number of security implications. For example, lack of employment opportunities has contributed to youth involvement in urban conflicts and militancy that confront the Nigerian nation today. The increased rate of sectarian violence, crimes and terrorism are connected with unemployment (Rotimi, 2011). Where the youths cannot get clean jobs, they make themselves available for odd jobs to stay alive which takes any imaginable criminal dimension.

As roots of violence and insecurity tend to be complex, sometimes people resort to violence when they are oppressed, discriminated against, socially isolated or economically deprived. Some researchers hold that poverty and inequality trigger violence (Awake 2012). According to Awake (2012), about 90% (percent) of all violence-related deaths have occurred in the world’s less prosperous nations; and the poorer neighborhoods of cities are often high-crime areas; and according to Akande and Okuwa (2009), youth unemployment and poverty are playing a major role in African conflict experiences including Nigeria. The prevailing socio-economic environment is enticing youths to turn to war, crime and violence as a means of livelihood.

Emerging literature points to the fact that the collapse of social institutions and the failure of the economic system to generate sufficient means of livelihood for people is an explanation for youths’ increasing involvement in conflict and war situations all over Africa. In Nigeria, national security is threatened when unemployed youths are involved in conflict situations such as religious and ethnic conflicts. For instance, the conflict situation in the Niger Delta is spearheaded by youths, all of whom were unemployed and poor. At the very least, there is a correlation between economic hardship (occasioned by



poverty and unemployment) and those accused of taking part in the orgy of violence or violent disorder taking place in this country are the youths. In all, it is discerning that unemployment pre-dispose people to poverty and the two problems co-jointly influence national security by creating insecurity situation. Rising crime waves are therefore the consequence of poverty and unemployment.

### **Conceptual Issues**

#### **Poverty**

The perception of what constitutes poverty has evolved historically over time and varies among nations in magnitude and in scope. Since it varies among nations, universally accepted definitions have become very difficult to emerge. Thus, there are as many definitions of the concept as there are scholars writing on the issue. But there are universally accepted indicators of what constitutes poverty and these indicators categorize and explain the concept. These indicators categorize poverty into absolute poverty, relative poverty, and material poverty.

Absolute poverty means the inability of a person or group to provide the material needs for physical subsistence and protection of human dignity. These materials are food, clothing, shelter, water, health services, basic education, transportation, and work because the persons or groups do not have jobs or income. Relative poverty on the other hand is the inability of certain sections of the society to satisfy their basic needs as well as other needs; while material poverty is the absence of ownership control of physical assets as lands, and all other resources that land produce or that subsists on land as birds and animals and mineral resources. Finally, poverty could be spatial – rural poverty and urban poverty (UNDP, 1996).

Poverty is an abject state of being, in which an individual is incapable of utilizing resources around him to improve himself or herself economically, socially, politically or otherwise. It could be due to lack of opportunities for education which is basic to any human development. Poverty could occur as a result of indolence or misinterpreted religious beliefs (Chigbo, 1996). It could also be a state of the mind or a psychological disposition that places the individual in question in want, material or spiritual. Materially, it involves the want for food, clothing and shelter. Spiritually, it involves want of peace of mind, the spirit and the inner man. According to Okoronkwo (1996), poverty ordinarily stands for a situation whereby one cannot meet average requirements. Any situation under which one cannot afford a good meal at any given time is real poverty. One is poor when one cannot plan for tomorrow because he or she has failed for today. Poverty means a man's inability to afford decent food, shelter, clothing and recreation (Jolaosho, 1996). Poverty entails the absence of the basic requirements essential for the survival and comfort of man. It is hunger and starvation. It is squalor and it is the non-availability of basic medicare.

Poverty therefore is about the absence of the basic necessities of life for any person or a human group. A Somalian elder was quoted as saying that "all development activities are about human beings. The first human need is water. It is the first thing needed to live. Without it, a plant, an animal or a baby dies. Second is food. Without enough of it, life is miserable and short. Third, once water and food are won, is health



otherwise the human being becomes sick. Fourth is education, once a human being has water, food and health, he needs to learn new horizons and unlock new possibilities. And there is the fifth – peace and order. Without these, none of the four basic needs can be sustained” (UNDP, 1996).

Poverty therefore is a condition of being poor; deficiency; inadequacy, or scarcity. Poverty is a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing and health services. Poverty also relates to other things such as poverty of ideas or information. Poverty in the most common usage can be defined as the insufficiency of means relative to human needs (Adefolalu 1992). However, poverty does not affect only the individual, but classes of people, whole societies and nations as well. In Nigeria, the sub-groups among the poor include the unemployed, those with low level of education and female – headed households (NBS, 2009).

According to Adefolalu (1992), poverty is caused by what may be called “exogenous forces” or forces outside an individual’s control such as over population, high standard of living, high cost of living, inadequate education, unemployment and environmental degradation; and is also caused by “endogenous forces” or forces that operate within the victims as exemplified by individual responsibility and welfare dependency, and are thus self-created.

By geographical area poverty is evenly divided between urban and rural areas, though the severity of poverty is worse in urban areas. Consequently, in urban areas as is the case in many Nigerian metropolitan areas, the economic pressures of the poor coupled with high youth unemployment has contributed to growing problems of crimes. And this problem is particularly acute among male youths (Gilbert & Gugler 1982).

Generally, poverty is a condition that somewhat dehumanizes the individual because of the various disabilities that it causes to the sufferer. Poverty makes people to suffer from severe malnutrition, diseases, famine and war. And the effects of poverty include poor nutrition, food insecurity, mental illness, drug dependence, crime and high rates of diseases; all of which are threats to national security. Besides, the poor in urban areas is a source of constant embarrassment to government and the rest of society; for they remain not only politically volatile and seedbeds for urban socio-political intrigues when not catered for. Their utter neglect creates social imbalance and can provide ripe conditions for the outbreak of urban social disorder which may find expression in the form of urban riots, crime and other clandestine activities. Any unpleasant occurrence or situation can be used as excuse by the urban poor with long pent-up grievances, to create sporadic or even widespread disorder. Examples are the Jos riot of 2008; the post-election violence of 2011 in the northern states of Nigeria following general/presidential elections that were believed to be free and fair; and the sporadic disturbances in many parts of the country triggered off by the January 2012 removal of petroleum subsidy in Nigeria. In sum, as crime and violence occasioned by poverty situation continue to increase, they often have detrimental effects on the economy, the administration of the country, and national security in the country.



### **Unemployment**

Simply put, unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs. The International Labour Organization - ILO (2007) defines the unemployed as numbers of the economically active population who are without work, but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998). According to Adebayo (1999) unemployment exists when the labour force wish to work but cannot get jobs. Various forms of unemployment have been identified and elaborated upon by scholars. These include seasonal, frictional, cyclical and structural employment (Adebayo, 1999; Damachi, 2001).

According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2009; 2010) the national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2000 and 2009 showed that the number of unemployed person constituted 31.1% in 2000, 13.6% in 2001, 12.6% in 2002, 14.8% in 2003, 13.4% in 2004, 11.9% in 2005, 14.7% in 2006, 14.6% in 2007, 14.9% in 2008 and 19.7% in 2009.

Unemployment in Nigeria varies by age group, educational level and sex classification. This is evident from the data provided by NBS (2010). For person between ages 15-24 years, 41.6% were unemployed. And person between 25-44 years 17% were unemployed. For those with primary education, 14.8% were unemployed, while those with secondary education, 23.8% were unemployed. And for those with post-secondary education 21.3% were unemployed. Data for those who never attended school and those with below primary education showed that 21.0% and 22.3% were unemployed respectively. As regards sex, data revealed that 17.0% male and 23.3% females constituted the unemployed (NBS, 2010).

The causes of urban unemployment and under-employment in a developing country such as Nigeria are complex. Firstly, there is the pressure of rapidly growing population and especially of school leavers which means that year by year vast numbers of new job opportunities have to be created. Secondly, there is the growing unemployment of trained people including university graduates. Thirdly, there is defective manpower planning coupled with inappropriate bias in the educational system in which disproportionate numbers of white collar job seekers are turned out at the expense of much-needed technicians, technologist and scientists. And lastly there is the fact of job seekers selectivity of job availability or of location, posting or hankering after jobs unrelated to acquired training and skill.

According to Okafor (2011) unemployment in Nigeria are with attendant social, economic, political and psychological consequences. One of its social consequences on the Nigerian youths is the high level of youth unemployment. A phenomenon which encourages the development of street youths and urban urchins ("area boys") that grows up in a culture that encourages criminal behaviour. Unemployment has also contributed to increasing feminization of poverty among young women, which has encouraged prostitution as a means of survival and leads to trafficking of young women across international borders with transnational security implications.

Psychologically, the unemployed usually experience trauma, anger, frustration, low self esteem, negative life satisfaction, unhappiness and mental disorder including depression and acute stress. Other economic consequence of unemployment include flight of youths and able bodied men from the country in search of better opportunities



elsewhere, thereby reducing the labour force and producing capacity in Nigeria (Akande, 2009 and Okuwa, 2009).

### **National Security**

The definition of national security is changing. By the term “national security” we mean both the security of the local (democratic) system of a country as well as the preservation of the social web as it is and the existence of civil society. According to Encarta dictionary (2009), national security means protection of nation from danger: the protection of a nation from attack or other danger by maintaining adequate armed forces and guarding state secrets. It is the mission of the liberal state to guarantee security, prosperity and overall growth of its own part of the global society of citizens and civilians socially. But Nigeria has failed to do so socially by sustaining unequal access to education, employment and social opportunities. This failure signifies a direct threat to the legitimacy of the political establishment, and national security (Alexis 2011).

A broad understanding of what constitutes a national security concern in Nigeria includes disease, violent crime, political assassinations, kidnapping, ethno-religious conflicts, civil war, terrorism, and environmental degradation. Many developing countries like Nigeria have large and growing population of poor and unemployed citizens, many of whom have few choices other than economic activities that endangered the environment thereby threatening the nation’s national security. Hence, the paper aim to relate security dilemmas and development challenges of poverty and unemployment in a way that suggests that they are all rooted in the same source. Understanding these threats to national security as dimension of the same problem in turn would requires a security policy that will no doubt confront both poverty and unemployment problems.

### **Unemployment, Poverty and National Security**

Conventional wisdom dictates that insecurity rises with unemployment and poverty (Kirby, 2011) because unemployment leads to loss of income which affects the people’s ability to pay their bills and provide basic necessities for their house-holds and dependent relatives. It is because of the insecurity posed by unemployment that advanced countries make social security payments to the unemployed to keep them off the streets until they get jobs. This has helped to make their nations safer than countries like Nigeria where no forms of assistance are given to the unemployed.

According to Lamido (2013), unemployment is generally caused by improper orientation of the youths, absence of policy on social welfare, societal attitude towards vocational and technical education, and inadequate teaching facilities. These have manifested in the alarming rate of armed robberies in the south-west region; militancy and arson in the south-south region; terrorism in the north-west, north-central and north-east regions; and in kidnapping in the south-east region. All these have impacts on the security situation in the country, and on business and investments; socio-political processes and governance. They for instance raise the cost of governance. The unemployed must find a means of livelihood and this they do by engaging in crimes and making themselves available to the political class as thugs and assassins. Political violence, ethno-religious conflicts and terrorism rife in Nigeria today are no doubt consequences of unemployment and poverty. If most of our youths are employed, there



would be drastic reduction in the level of crime and insecurity in the country. A large number of the nation's youth are unemployed and the employed are very poorly remunerated and have large number of dependents. After taxation, their take home pay cannot take them home.

The law enforcement agents are very poorly remunerated, equipped, and insufficient in number to police all nooks and corners of the country. And the educational system is dysfunctional in its curriculum and has not thought of introducing entrepreneurship development in the academic curriculum until very recently. The financial institutions cannot provide loans to young and honest school leavers to start their own businesses but would rather give loans to politicians who cannot pay back these loans when they fail elections; while the poverty eradication programs designed by the governments to eradicate poverty are cornered by the politicians and those in charge of the programs in the various regions for political patronage. These have security implications in the country.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

From all indications, poverty and unemployment are social menace in Nigeria and constitutes a threat to national security. Evidently, unemployment creates poverty and poverty lead to insecurity. It therefore follows that both poverty and unemployment have implications for national security. This is because poor and unemployed people especially the youths could be manipulated to undermine national stability and cause violent disorder in the country at any point in time.

It can be concluded that one of the greatest threats to stability and national security in Nigeria is the large army of poor and unemployed people. Okafor (2011) stated that present graduate unemployment in Nigeria is over 50% while poverty (of less than \$2 per day) rate is experienced by over 70% of the population, these have led to the general insecurity and rising crime wave in the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this paper, the following are recommendations for consideration by relevant authorities including Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs):

That government at all levels should put in place and sustain programmes and policies geared towards reduction of poverty and unemployment level via massive youth employment and women empowerment agendas such that both problems can be reduced if not completely removed from our society. The poverty eradication schemes set up by the governments are being used by those in charge of the programmes to settle their political thugs and clients. These programmes would be better managed by the military in the country. Give the funds to the military to manage, recruit the unemployed, train them in specific trades, and advance the funds as revolving loans to them to establish businesses. These loans should be interest-free and applicants must be made to submit realizable business proposals in order to benefit from the loans. And their various traditional rulers should identify them for them to benefit from the loans.

That there should be a paradigm shift in the bias of our educational system with a view to making Nigerian youths imbibe the philosophy of self employment and entrepreneurship through inclusion of vocational and entrepreneurial training and the

inclusion of entrepreneurial development programmes into our school curricula. Students on graduation can use their certificates to obtain loans for businesses from the entrepreneurial loan schemes.

That more research should be carried out on the attitudes of unemployed people towards government's policies and programmes of poverty and unemployment reduction in Nigeria; to desensitize the unemployed of their aggressive tendency and alter their perceptions of reality.

That government should enforce strict ammunition control and consider a sharp reduction in the availability of weapons such as handguns in the country, since aggression is also elicited by aggressive stimuli. Jamaica, for instance in 1974, implemented a sweeping anti-crime program that included strict gun control and censorship of gun scenes from television and movies (Diener and Crandall 1979).

Just as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was designed to foster unity in the country, the scheme could be reorganized to solve the unemployment and security problems of the country. The corps members should be given police and military training and deployed for police service across the country. Their service period should be increased from one year to five years in the first instance and for another five years in the second instance. After ten years, those that want to make a career in the military or police should be given permanent appointments and those who want careers in the civil service and industry should be allowed to leave the service to look for jobs in the civil service and industry. Those who want to be self employed should be given loans to start their own private businesses. This will help to reduce unemployment and insecurity in the country.

Political appointments and posts should be made less lucrative by slashing the jumbo salaries attached to them. The monies saved through such slashing would go a long way to pay the salaries of many Nigerian who would be employed in the service. The jumbo salaries attached to the political posts encourage electoral violence, and corruption associated with the country's political process. It would reduce politically motivated assassinations and electoral violence and malpractices.

The retirement ages for all classes of civil servants should be reviewed so as to create vacancies for the younger generations. This review must be based on the premise that the pension scheme is sanitized to be able pay all retirees their gratuities and pensions on retirement. It is the failure of the pension scheme that has made many Nigerians to ask for an upward review of their retirement ages from sixty years to seventy-five years; and the rampant stealing of public funds by the civil servants while in office because many of them are not sure of getting anything from the pension operators on retirement. Their confidence on the pension administrators must be created and assured to encourage them to retire early.

The political leaders should be transparent in their governance and accountable to the people. If the government is accountable and transparent, most of the violence found in the country today would disappear. Most of the policies of the government that do not favour the poor should be reviewed. There is what may be called "the criminalization of state policies" across the country today. Most government officials use state policies for criminal ends to enable them live in affluence. This causes envy, jealousy and anger among the poor unemployed masses that feel alienated and cannot make any meanings



out of the government policies, and makes them to resort to kidnappings, violent crimes and assassinations we witness today across the country. Government policies should be humane in forms and applications. When these are done the society would become safer to live in.

Lastly, that government should ensure timely collection and analysis of data such as the survey of poverty and unemployment rates purposely to provide policy makers with an important tool for decision-making on pro-poor policies.

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