

Unemployment and Communal Conflicts in Nigeria: Issues and Strategies to Improve Socio-Economic Well- Being of Rural Dwellers

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Abstract

Lack of employment opportunities for many Nigerians has resulted in a large number of Nigerians living in poverty. In turn, poverty leads to alienation of poor people (who are often rural residents) from political-economic functioning of their society. This cycle is complete when alienation further decreases these citizens interest in developing the skills, knowledge, tools, beliefs, and values to perform financially rewarding activities. The consequence of this cycle is increased aggression and communal conflicts among the people. This paper argues that unemployment causes communal conflicts in Nigeria. Data are obtained largely from secondary sources and as such, content analysis is used to assess the variables examined. The result obtained provides the framework for conclusion and policy recommendations on how to address the challenges of unemployment and communal conflict in Nigeria.

Keyword: *Unemployment, Communal conflict, Aggression, Agriculture, Infrastructure*

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Background to the Study

The challenges of unemployment in Nigeria have attracted a lot of scholarly arguments. Unemployment occurs when people are without work and actively seeking for a job. It is a global issue as developed, developing, undeveloped and underdeveloped nations of the world are experiencing it. As evidence that even developed nations of the world are “combating” with unemployment, in December 2013, an estimate of 6.7 percent Americans were unemployed (Asaju, Arome and Anyio, 2014).

Unemployment is a phenomenon which originated towards the end of the 19th century. It originated as a result of people who, despite being willing to work, could not find any to engage themselves. It is a phenomenon associated with developing/developed industrialized wage economies (Oluwaseun, 2013). It is based on its origin that many scholars and labour bodies coined the various definitions of unemployment. To Adebayo (1999), it is a situation in which an individual wishes to work but cannot get a job; to Fajana (2000), it is a situation which is as a result of an individual who is willing and capable of working being unable to find a suitable paid job.

In Nigeria, like most developing countries, a large number of her population is badly treated by unemployment. The quest for good leadership in solving unemployment in the country has made almost all that are affected by the menace show their reactions in one way or the other. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of unemployment on communal conflict in Nigeria. The study assumes that rural unemployed youths are vulnerable and prone to conflict.

Methodology

Data are obtained largely from secondary sources and as such, content analysis is used to assess the variables under discourse. The result obtained provides the framework for conclusion and policy recommendations on unemployment and communal conflict in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the Frustration-aggression theory. The proponents of Frustration-aggression theory are Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939). This theory states that conflicts arise from the inability of people to get what they want. They further argued that there are differences between what people want or desire and absolute poverty happen when people do not have enough to survive. Secondly, relative poverty which happens when people have enough to survive but have less than those around them and when their expectations are not met, there is the tendency for them to attack those they think are responsible for their frustration. Ted Gurr supported the above statement when he argued that the greater the discrepancy however marginal between what is thought and seen attainable, the greater will be violent and anger chances.

This theory is relevant to the study because aggression and its adverse outcome is a function of frustration, caused by unemployment. The result of this is conflict and criminal

tendencies. As shall be seen in the review of literature, frustration culminates in widespread of conflicts unless when it is promptly addressed and this is true in Nigeria.

The concept of unemployment

The concept of unemployment has been assessed from various perspectives. ILO (2007) viewed it as an economically active individual who is without work, yet available and seeking for one, including those who have lost their jobs and those who voluntary left their jobs. Hornby (2010) defined it as the facts of the number of persons not having a job. Oluwaseun (2013) saw it as the condition of an individual who is capable of working, yet being unable to find any in spite of seeking for one. Uddin and Uddin (2013) defined it as a conglomerate of persons, who are willing and able to work, being unable to find any, or cannot find the sort of job which they are trained to do which will give them the pleasure to do being their area of expertise; Asaju, Arome and Anyio (2014) conceptualized it as a condition where people who are willing and able to work are without jobs, or cannot find jobs that are productive and effective to do, and lastly, Adegoke (2015) defined it as an economic situation whereby a person seeking for an employable job cannot become economically employed.

The definitions above seem to imply that the concept of unemployment refers to either a situation or a condition in which people are jobless despite being able and willing to work/to be productive and effective. Subsumed in the definition above is the phenomenon of underemployment. According to Harold (2009), it is a situation in which an individual is employed only on a part-time basis, or being employed on a job the individual is unproductive and ineffective, with an accompanying low wage insufficient in meeting the person's needs. The implication here is that the individual not only works on a job which is outside the individual's area of specialization but also, paid inadequately.

There are various types of unemployment as identified by scholars. The various types are explained below;

a. **Seasonal Unemployment:** This type of unemployment occurs in organizations which are seasonal in nature (Udu & Agu, 2005). This means that the organizations engage in activities that are seasonal and whose labour requirements peak temporarily during particular seasons. An example is Oil Palm Plantation that requires more hands during its peak season (November-May), afterwards, the extra hands are laid off during its slack period (June-October). This is in order to cut wage bill costs.

b. **Structural Unemployment:** Also known as technological unemployment, this type of unemployment occurs when jobs in a labour market are unavailable for everybody who wants one due to the mismatch between skill required for the jobs and the skill capacity of the unemployed workers (Harold, 2009). It is also an unemployment type which results from persistent cyclical unemployment. This means unemployment that occurs when an economy suffers from the techniques used by industries thereby leading to long-term low aggregate demand (Udu & Agu, 2005). This is explained by the following

- the Nigerian Brick Industry has suffered a permanent downturn due to people's preference of cement for building houses. Low demand for particular goods and services over a given period of time could make those in such a sector become disheartened, cause their skills and knowledge to be rusty and outdated, and subsequently, throw them out of the labour market (Asaju et al, 2014). Simply put, it is the type of unemployment caused changes that occur in terms of technology, thereby causing a change in the production process of certain products which ultimately leads to those affected adversely by the change being thrown into the unemployment market.

c. **Frictional Unemployment:** There seem to be contrasting opinions concerning the meaning of this type of unemployment. To Udu and Agu (2005), it is the type of unemployment which occurs when certain jobs have a surplus of workers in one part of the country while vacancies for the same jobs abound in some other parts of the same country. Harold (2009) and Anyanwuocha (2010) argued that it is the type of unemployment which occurs when a worker is transiting from one job to another, i.e, a worker transiting from one job to another does not find the job instantaneously. The explanation for the "friction" is due to the disparity between demand for and supply of labour.

d. **Transitional Unemployment:** This refers to normal unemployment as it is characterized by short-term lay-off from a job (Udu & Agu, 2005). Example of this unemployment type is mainly found in construction companies. Being that they rely on a lot on manual labour, workers are usually laid off after completion of major assignments, yet such workers are readily re-employed when other jobs are available while for others, they may simply drift to other ongoing projects upon completion of their major assignment.

e. **Classical Unemployment:** This type of unemployment occurs when wages for a particular job are set above the market-clearing level, thereby resulting in vacancies for the job to be less than the number of persons seeking for the job (Asaju et al, 2014). A ready example of this is the Federal Immigration Application Exercise which took place in 2015 where there were more readily qualified applicants at the stated wages than vacancies with the stated wages. This type of unemployment is said to occur as a result of increased government intervention in the economy. Government intervention which facilitates this type of unemployment is in terms of the minimum wage stipulated by the government in its Labour Law.

f. **Hidden Unemployment:** This refers to the unemployment of potential workers whose statistics do not reflect on official unemployment statistics based on how the statistics were collected (Asaju et al, 2014). For most countries, it is only those who have no work but actively looking for such that are considered as being unemployed. Those who are no longer actively looking for a job are not officially considered as being unemployed even though they are. Thesame situation applies to those who are retired but would prefer to be working. Simply put, this form of unemployment refers to unemployed yet willing

and capable persons in a given society who are statistically not counted as being unemployed. It is based on this form of unemployment that unemployment statistics are usually termed as being incorrect.

The various types of unemployment have shown that being unemployed could be either voluntary or involuntary. Though there are various views on voluntary and involuntary unemployment (Asaju et al, 2014), the simple definitions of the two types of unemployment are as follows;

- a. Voluntary unemployment refers to a potential worker's decision not to seek for work based on reasons which include lack of high wage jobs
- b. Involuntary unemployment refers to a potential worker being unable to secure a job due to externalities to them such as unfavorable business environment, market structure, government policies, etc which permeate their society

Unemployment rate in any given society is the measure of the extent of unemployment. It is obtained as a percentage by the ratio of the number of unemployed persons to those currently employed. Unemployment rates are directly associated with poverty levels in any given economy and its attendant welfare issues (Adekola, Allen, Olawole-Isaac, Akanbi & Adewumi, 2015). High unemployment rates in any given society have a grave consequence if the population structure of such a society is youthful in nature because it is the youths who will be worst hit.

Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) reported that individuals within the age of 15-35 years were estimated to be about 80 million in Nigeria, thus comprising 60% of the country's population. They went further to state that 34 million of them were unemployed while 1.6 million of them were underemployed. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2013), individuals within the age range of 15-35 years constitute about 62% of the nation's population and within the 62%, 39% of them are said to be unemployed and underemployed. Recently, according to NBS (2016), unemployment rate at the third quarter of 2016 for the 15-35 years age bracket stood at 44.52%. A close look at the figures indicates that the trend has risen very sharply based on what was obtained in 2012 and 2016.

Education and gender do not influence unemployment or underemployment. According to Akwara, Akwara, Enwuchola, Adekunle and Udaw (2013), 14.8% of persons with primary education; 23.8% with secondary education; and 21.3% with post-secondary education were found to be unemployed/underemployed in 2010. By 2016, 24.5% of persons with primary education; 33.3% with secondary education; and 40.3% with post-secondary education were found to be unemployed/underemployed (NBS, 2016). As for gender, Akwara et al (2013) reported that 17.0% males and 23.3% females were unemployed/underemployed. By 2016, 28.7% males and 38.8% females were unemployed/underemployed. The figures here also show a rising trend.

Unemployment and communal conflicts in Nigeria

Unemployment has been linked to conflict through issues of social insecurity, crime and violence. Muzan (2014), in his study on addressing insurgency in Nigeria, stated that an unemployed person is usually idle, and that idleness can lead to participating in antisocial conduct to occupy time and energy. Even when such a person is educated and has employable skills, lack of productive employment can lead to frustration and aggression, and ultimately, conflict. Earlier, Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) observed that globally, unemployed youths were found to have played significant roles in stirring up conflict situations. In Nigeria, they stated that unemployed youths were usually the principal actors in any given conflict situation. They asserted that the involvement of the youths in such situations was as a result of their social exclusion and marginalization from the society which they should have contributed positively towards.

In Nigeria, being that there is no social security system in place to cater for the unemployed, unemployment breeds conflict through issues of social insecurity. A contemporary example of how unemployment could breed conflict through social insecurity is the Immigration Test which was conducted in 2015 across some stadia in the country. The vacancies for the jobs were far below the number of applicants who applied for the jobs, the capacity of each stadium used for the exercise was far below the number of applicants who showed up and the applicants were even asked to pay for the exercise at the various venues. The outcome was a stampede in five of the six stadia with many losing their lives. Thus, aside not being opportuned to receive any social security benefit from the government, the unemployed are rather made to serve as avenues through which social insecurity is being bred in the society (Adekola et al, 2015).

In their study on the causes of conflicts in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, Osagie, Akinpelu, Adegoke and Ezeani (2010) adopted a survey research design. The study's population comprised all youths of Delta State while a sample of 400 respondents was selected using both purposive and random sampling techniques. The study used a questionnaire to obtain data from the respondents and the posers therein included assessing the significant difference in the causes of conflict based on gender, age and educational qualification. The collated data were analyzed using mean scores, rank order, t-test, and ANOVA.

The result revealed that the causes in descending order of mean scores were found to be economic, political and socio-cultural in nature. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference in the causes of conflict based on gender, age, and educational qualification. The researchers observed that the responses in terms of the causes of conflict seem to have been as a result of the low level of social security enjoyed by them despite being the major source of the country's revenue base. The reason for their observation was based on the ranking of the various causes of conflict within the area. Going by their observation, the implication here seemingly suggests that if the people were to enjoy social security benefits which, compared to their contribution to the nation's revenue base, the order of the causes of conflict might have been different. Also, there might have been significant differences in the causes of conflict in terms of age and educational

qualification. The study of Akinpelu et al (2010) was deemed pertinent for review based on its evaluation of the causes of conflict.

Aside from social insecurity, another avenue through which unemployment breeds conflict is a crime. Chukwu (2011) asserted that unemployment is the harbinger of misery and hopelessness among the unemployed. In their effort to overcome the aforementioned state, they resort to encouraging social unrest by partaking in crimes which at times serve as a source of conflict between individuals and in some cases, the conflict between communities. In their study, Akwara et al (2013) observed that most of the persons paraded by law enforcement agencies as criminals are either unemployed or underemployed. According to them, the significant part is that most of those paraded are youths between the ages of 15-44years and that both males and females are part of gangs which terrorize communities, causing conflicts to arise among community members. Going further, they stated that the most disturbing part of the scenario is that some of those involved in committing the crimes which lead to conflict are educated. For the educated to be part of the crime wave is a very disheartening situation in the country. Their lack of being productively employed and being non-beneficiaries of social security could only serve to fuel their anger and frustration towards the development of the country.

Contributing further on the moderating effect of crime between unemployment and conflict, Asaju et al (2014) opined that unemployment breeds social ills and vices such as armed robbery, hooliganism and depending on the rate of unemployment and widespread criminality. Due to lack of positive avenues to expend their energies, they indulge in antisocial activities which give them avenues to dissipate their societal frustrations. This is evident in the high rate of youth restiveness, killings, assassinations, kidnapping, 419 and other forms of criminal activities which serve as harbingers of communal conflict. In his study on how unemployment and poverty serve as sources and consequence of insecurity in the country, Usman (2015) reported that very high unemployment rates have made most persons to become sources through which socio-economic peace is threatened and destabilized. In addition, the unemployment rates have made rich moneybags within the country have a large cache of idle persons to use in causing havoc in the country. Going further, he asserted that the level of frustration and anger among the idle ones seems to serve as a fertile ground for participation in widespread criminal activities.

Adegoke (2015) examined youth unemployment and security challenges in the country by utilizing a survey research design. The population of the study comprised inhabitants of Lagos Metropolis while 145 respondents were randomly selected. A questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection and one of the posers elicited responses inquiring whether youth unemployment contributes to insecurity in the country. Data obtained from the field was analyzed using chi-square. The analysis revealed that unemployment contributed significantly to insecurity in the country. Adegoke (2015) observed the result by stating that the high unemployment rate in the country provided

adequate idle manpower resources in the country. The idle persons in turn, with nothing productive to do, engaged themselves in activities which made them have “fast and large sums of money” that will help them meet their needs. The finding seemingly implies that the present high wave of criminal activities in the country will continue to be the order of the day as long as the unemployment rate is high. The above-reviewed study found the necessity for review as a result of its evaluation of the extent to which unemployment contributed to insecurity in the country.

In addition to social insecurity and crime, another avenue through which unemployment serves to breed conflict is through violence. The rise of insurgent groups in contemporary times concurrently with the high unemployment rates is a pointer to how unemployment could breed conflict. The disturbing point is that all the insurgent groups seem to have been formed with the singular objective of fomenting violence to express their frustration and anger towards perceived societal issues (Oluwaseun, 2013). Examples include the Boko Haram, the Egbesu Boys, Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta, the Skolombo, etc. The insurgent groups are any of vigilantes, political thugs, street urchins (area boys), ethnic militia or cultists in higher institutions (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Their emergence has been linked to the rising rate of unemployment, though it is yet to be established whether the increase in the activities is associated with the rising unemployment rate in the country. The various insurgent groups, in their effort to express their frustration, engage in violent activities such as widespread vandalization, killings, bombings, terrorist attacks, destruction of properties and lives, etc. In his study, Nwagwu (2014) observed that most of the members of such groups are unemployed persons whose frustration levels make them more disposed to expressing themselves through violent acts.

Iyoboyi (2014) carried out a meta-analysis in his assessment of economic growth and conflict in Nigeria. The study assessed data concerning economic growth from poverty-based, government expenditure, inflation, unemployment, GDP and other documents related to the country's economic growth while data concerning conflict were obtained from a conflict research institute (Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research - INSCR). Inclusive in the study's objective was an evaluation of whether unemployment served as a significant predictor of conflict. Using multiple regressions, unemployment was found to serve as a statistically significant predictor of conflict. According to the researcher, this meant that where unemployment existed, conflict certainly abounds. The finding of Iyoboyi (2014) seemingly gave the hint that the rate of unemployment could serve to predict the extent of conflict which will occur in a given society. The study of Iyoboyi (2014) was of relevance for review on the premise that it examined the extent to which unemployment served as a significant predictor of conflict.

Strategies to address unemployment and improve socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers

In addressing the challenges of unemployment and improve the socio-economic wellbeing or rural dwellers in Nigeria, the following strategies are highlighted,

1. The educational system, especially in areas must be reformed. The reformation

will require an increase in graduate skills and makes them more problem solvers, creators, entrepreneurs, and innovators.

2. The rural agricultural sector must be enhanced through modernization of the sector, to attract the young graduates to engage in farming. In addition, the youth and graduates should be trained in the use of some agricultural technology to improve their productivity. Through irrigation agriculture sector should have multiple cropping all year round to reduce seasonal unemployment.
3. Investing in the industrial sector this will lead to increase in capital formation and growth of small and medium scale industries that have the potentials to employ hundreds of thousand graduates. Small and medium-sized firms should have access to information on managing the business to prevent failure.
4. Partnering between the government and the private sectors to establish manufacturing plants in all the states will enhance rural capacity. The government should adopt a policy of decentralization of the industrial sector to increase employment generation.
5. Investment in infrastructural development government should increase its capital expenditure especially in the area of transportation - building good roads networks. Subsidizing transportation cost for ease access of raw materials by the industrial sector.

Conclusion

Unemployment has been a problem in Nigeria, especially since 1980, when the nation's economy took a turn for the worse as world petroleum prices tumbled, the Nigerian currency became devalued, corruption became rampant, and the population of Nigeria ballooned at a breathtaking pace. Beyond the national, unemployment is an obvious cause of conflict and other criminal acts in rural communities in Nigeria. Improving rural for the growths of small and medium enterprises, with viable agricultural sector are effective measures of improving the well-being of the rural populace and reducing aggression and communal conflicts in Nigeria.

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