

An Integrative Social Development & Sustainability (ISODS) Framework as a Sustainable Policy Direction in Addressing Unemployment in Nigeria: From Policy to Sustainable Practice

Bassey Ekpenyong Anam

*Institute of Public Policy & Administration,
University of Calabar, Calabar*

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Abstract

Unemployment in Nigeria constitutes a major barrier to social advancement, fuelling widespread poverty, rising crime rates, and pervasive social unrest. Despite global commitments—such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on decent work and economic growth—and numerous governmental interventions, Nigeria continues to struggle in translating these aspirations into tangible employment outcomes. Using a qualitative technique, this paper systematically highlights the gravity of the unemployment crisis, critically analysing the historical evolution and inherent weaknesses of both past and present social intervention programmes. These efforts have frequently been hampered by policy inconsistencies, administrative inefficiencies, and a “one-size-fits-all” approach that overlooks Nigeria's regional diversity. Structural factors, including the nation's overreliance on oil revenues and a significant mismatch between skills and labour market demands, are identified as core challenges. To address these enduring issues, the paper proposes the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework—a novel strategy that holistically incorporates social, economic, and environmental dimensions to promote sustainable approaches to employment creation. By focusing on long-term planning, institutional strengthening, accountability mechanisms, and inclusive stakeholder engagement, the ISODS Framework aims to shift the paradigm from short-lived initiatives to durable, impactful employment solutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework, Policy Direction, Unemployment, Sustainable Practice*

Corresponding Author:

Bassey Ekpenyong Anam

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9762-6816

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Background to the Study

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, articulated through its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a comprehensive framework for achieving a fairer and more sustainable global future. This agenda prioritises peace, prosperity, and environmental sustainability (Ejiogu et al., 2024). SDG 8, in particular, aims to foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all—underscoring the vital role of employment in the broader sustainability discourse.

As Ejiogu et al. (2024) note, despite the global consensus on these goals and their adoption by developing countries, many—including Nigeria—still face formidable obstacles in translating these ambitions into measurable progress, especially in the realms of employment creation and poverty alleviation. Nigeria's position on the 2021 SDG Index, ranking 160th out of 165 countries with a score of 48.9, highlights the urgent need for more coherent and effective policy approaches to its socio-economic challenges. This poor performance, alongside the staggering figure of over 133 million Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty (Osimen et al., 2025) and the alarming unemployment rates (Sajini, 2022), reflects a severe disconnect between global development aspirations and their domestic implementation.

Unemployment—especially among Nigeria's rapidly growing youth population—constitutes a major constraint to societal progress and national stability (Sajini, 2022). Its consequences extend beyond economic deprivation, encompassing a range of social ills such as disenchantment, exclusion, and diminished self-esteem. For many, particularly the youth, the desperation borne from unemployment has become a key driver of engagement in illicit activities, including kidnapping and armed robbery (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2025). These entrenched issues of poverty and joblessness are not merely domestic phenomena; rather, they reflect the complex interplay of global economic dynamics, governance failures, and demographic pressures. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for policy frameworks that can bridge the gap between global development models and local realities. Such frameworks must be practical, contextually relevant, and capable of directly addressing Nigeria's unique socio-economic landscape.

Problem Statement

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation, has grappled with a severe and persistent unemployment crisis for decades (Sanjini, 2022). According to Ifeanyichukwu et al. (2025), pervasive unemployment in Nigeria significantly contributes to a wide array of socio-economic issues, including rising crime rates, widespread social unrest, and deepening poverty. The acute shortage of meaningful employment opportunities often results in overwhelming feelings of frustration, marginalisation, and a loss of self-worth—especially among the youth. This desperation frequently drives young people towards alternative, often illicit, means of attaining financial stability, such as kidnapping and armed robbery.

Unemployment directly exacerbates income inequality, as those without work endure prolonged periods of low income and restricted access to job opportunities, particularly in low-skilled sectors (Gado, 2025). With over 133 million Nigerians living in multidimensional

poverty shortly before the 2023 elections (Mbachu, 2025), and nearly 40% of the population living below the poverty line, unemployment continues to widen an already significant income gap. The youth unemployment rate—41% among those aged 15–24 and 31% for those aged 25–34 in Q2 2020 (under the previous methodology)—poses acute risks, including social vices, depression, and civic disengagement within this crucial demographic (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020).

The relationship between unemployment and various societal ills illustrates a self-reinforcing cycle of social degradation. Desperation born from a lack of legitimate opportunities pushes individuals—particularly young people—towards crime. These aggregated individual acts drive up crime rates and broader unrest. In turn, the resultant insecurity creates an unattractive environment for investment (Stewart & Harcourt, 2021), thereby reducing legitimate employment prospects. The absence of a comprehensive social security system in Nigeria leaves the unemployed without support, further compounding their vulnerability to engage in unlawful activities (Adesina, 2013). This dynamic forms a vicious feedback loop: unemployment fuels crime, which deters investment, which in turn perpetuates unemployment.

Despite numerous governmental interventions over the years, unemployment and poverty in Nigeria have persisted—largely due to fundamental flaws in policy design and, more crucially, implementation (Osimen et al., 2025). A key shortcoming is the application of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to employment and skills acquisition programmes, which often overlook the diverse regional and state-specific realities of Nigeria (Nwanakwere & Ogwumike, 2020). In addition, the absence of effective follow-up mechanisms and sustainable exit strategies means that many beneficiaries of temporary interventions return to unemployment once the programme ends.

Recurring issues such as corruption, administrative inefficiency, and discontinuity in programme execution suggest that the core challenge lies not in policy formulation, but in governance and institutional weaknesses (Odalonu & Adigu, 2023). These systemic inefficiencies are exacerbated by a policy inertia and troubling tolerance for inefficacy. Accordingly, the framework proposed in this study explicitly targets governance and institutional shortcomings, advocating for improved monitoring and evaluation, greater stakeholder engagement, and the development of robust accountability structures to ensure that policies are not only well-designed but also effectively implemented and sustained.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to critically examine the relevance and applicability of the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework as a strategic and sustainable policy response to unemployment in Nigeria. The framework aims to bridge the gap between policy formulation and long-term implementation that promotes inclusive economic empowerment and job creation. Specifically, the study will:

1. Establish the severity and multidimensional nature of unemployment in Nigeria.
2. Critically examine past and present social intervention programmes in Nigeria,

- evaluating their impacts, successes, and persistent limitations.
3. Identify cross-cutting factors influencing unemployment and hindering policy effectiveness.
 4. Propose and elaborate the ISODS Framework as a holistic, integrated policy approach to sustainably address unemployment in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the viability of the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework as a sustainable policy direction for addressing unemployment in Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring the complex social, economic, and institutional dimensions of unemployment and for generating in-depth insights into policy-practice gaps and potential transformative solutions.

Data for the study were sourced primarily from secondary materials, including academic journal articles, government policy documents, institutional reports, expert commentaries, and development agency publications. These sources were purposefully selected based on their relevance to themes of unemployment, social development, sustainability, and policy implementation in the Nigerian context. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis, allowing for the identification and interpretation of key themes and patterns relating to the causes of unemployment, limitations of current interventions, and the applicability of the ISODS model. The analysis was guided by an interpretivist epistemological stance, which values the diverse perspectives and contextual realities that shape social policy outcomes in Nigeria. By integrating existing knowledge and policy critiques, the study provides a grounded and context-sensitive framework aimed at promoting sustainable employment solutions through inclusive, community-based development practices embedded in the ISODS model.

Conceptual Clarification

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development serves as a foundational theoretical concept in this study. The widely cited definition provided by the United Nations Brundtland Commission (1987) defines it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Martin, 2018). This definition underscores intergenerational equity and calls for the reconciliation of three essential pillars: economic prosperity, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship (Lee, n.d.). According to Barron et al. (2023), sustainable development is not confined to environmental protection—it is also about ensuring equitable access to opportunities, resources, and well-being for all. While "sustainability" is often equated with ecological concerns, the Brundtland definition equally highlights social and economic dimensions. Hence, sustainable development is unattainable without robust social development.

Unemployment

For this study, unemployment is primarily defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as the proportion of the labour force without work but available for and actively seeking

employment. An individual must meet three conditions to be considered unemployed: (i) not working in the reference period, (ii) being available for work within two weeks, and (iii) actively searching for work within the past four weeks.

Unemployment is a core indicator of economic health. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the unemployed are individuals above a certain age not engaged in paid work, who are available and actively seeking employment (Winkelmann, 2014). High unemployment signals a weak job market, discouraging long-term career development and threatening job security.

Jing and Tony (2024) note that a high national unemployment rate serves as an environmental cue, signalling the serious consequences of job loss—including financial instability and diminished social status. In Nigeria, where unemployment remains high, such cues affect not only the unemployed but also those currently employed. Among the employed, this creates job insecurity and a focus on financial survival, discouraging long-term career investment. Among the unemployed, it heightens psychological stress, increasing vulnerability to social unrest and crime.

The recent revision of unemployment measurement by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has reduced Nigeria's official unemployment rate (e.g., 4.3% in November 2023), but revealed a time-related underemployment rate of 9.2% (Mbachu, 2025). While this change aligns with international standards, it has been criticized for downplaying economic realities, particularly in a labour force where 93% are self-employed and many youths are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Mbachu (2025) argues that Nigeria's unemployment crisis is often an elite issue—most citizens cannot afford to remain unemployed and thus engage in informal or precarious jobs merely to survive. This reflects a more nuanced reality, extending the understanding of unemployment beyond a binary classification.

Social Intervention Programmes and Unemployment

According to the Nigerian Social Protection Policy (2020), social protection comprises policies and programmes enacted by governments, organisations, and individuals to reduce vulnerabilities, assist the poor, and ensure a minimum standard of living for all citizens. The ILO similarly defines social protection as a set of measures that prevent and alleviate poverty, economic hardship, and social risk throughout the lifecycle. These include income support during unemployment, sickness, or old age; access to healthcare; and benefits for families with children. Social protection is a universal human right and a governmental obligation. It is vital for achieving social and economic development, particularly as it intersects with health, security, and income outcomes. As a central component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, social protection plays a crucial role in ensuring that no individual falls below a socially acceptable standard of living.

Historical Overview of Social Intervention Initiatives in Nigeria

Successive Nigerian governments have long acknowledged the unemployment crisis and introduced a range of national plans and programmes aimed at citizen empowerment and job

creation (Uwakwe, Ikemereh & Efe, 2022). These efforts began with the National Development Plans (1962–1985), which laid early foundations for economic and social development. Later initiatives included the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2003 and Vision 20:2020.

However, the literature consistently identifies a key pattern: inconsistency and a lack of policy continuity. Programmes often end when the initiating administration leaves office, leading to minimal long-term impact (Uwakwe et al., 2022). This lack of continuity is not merely a design flaw; it reflects broader issues of political will and institutional memory (Ogunmodede et al., 2020; Agwudagwu, Egboh & Obiorah, 2023). The persistent problem of “policy churn” undermines even well-designed initiatives. Without mechanisms for institutionalisation and long-term planning, programmes fail to achieve sustained outcomes. This signals the need for a new approach that embeds accountability, intergenerational thinking, and resilience into Nigeria's social policy architecture.

Table 1: Nigeria's Social Protection Policies and Interventions, Pre-1986 -2022 (Source: Compiled by Author)

Period & Intervention	Category (Function)	Description	Role and Effectiveness	Policy Evaluation/Challenges
National Accelerated Food Production Program (NAFPP) (1973)	Promotive	Aimed at boosting food production to ensure food security and self-sufficiency.	Partially effective in increasing agricultural output but limited by poor infrastructure and policy continuity challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coordination • Poor Funding • Limited cooperation of farmers • Shortage of Extension workers
Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) (1976)	Promotive	Promoted farming to encourage self-sufficiency and reduce hunger.	Created public awareness of agricultural selfreliance, though it was not sustained long enough for lasting impact on food security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate infrastructure/extension services • Lack of long-term commitment • Bureaucratic inefficiency • Political instability
Free Primary Education (UPE) (1976)	Promotive/ Protective	Aimed at increasing educational access and reducing illiteracy.	Initially successful in expanding educational access, though constrained by funding and implementation issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor planning • Poor funding • Limited resources • Limited facilities
STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM (SAP) ERA (1986-1999)				
Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (1986)	Promotive	Created to improve rural infrastructure and enhance agricultural productivity.	Had limited impact due to poor project sustainability and corruption issues; successes were uneven across regions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor financing • Inadequate sustainability
Better Life for Rural Women Program (1987)	Transformative/Promotive	Empowered rural women through skill acquisition, health, and literacy programs.	Initially impactful in promoting women's roles in rural economies, but outcomes diminished with the transition in political leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate funding • Poor implementation • Socio-cultural barriers • Political interference • Lack of sustainability
National Directorate of Employment (NDE) (1986)	Promotive	Aimed at reducing unemployment through vocational training and job creation initiatives.	Effective in creating job training opportunities, but limited reach due to funding constraints and urban-focused implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor funding • Poor public awareness • Corruption • Political Interference
POST-SAP ERA (1999-2010)				
Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) (2000)	Protective/ Promotive	Provided jobs and temporary income support to address immediate poverty.	Short-lived program with limited long-term impact on poverty alleviation. Effectiveness was hindered by poor targeting and lack of sustainable funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor targeting • Corruption • Political Interference • Lack of proper monitoring & evaluation • Poor implementation • Lack of sustainability
National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (2001)	Promotive/ Protective	Focused on reducing poverty through microcredit, skill acquisition, and empowerment programs.	Moderately effective in reaching rural areas and vulnerable populations, though impact varied due to implementation inefficiencies and political changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor implementation • Inadequate funding • Corruption • Ineffective monitoring • Poor coordination between government agencies • Political interference • Lack of sustainability
Universal Basic Education (UBE) (2004)	Promotive	Reintroduced and expanded access to basic education as a fundamental right for all Nigerian children.	Effective in increasing enrolment rates, though challenges like inadequate facilities, poor teacher quality, and funding gaps persisted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate funding • Poor Infrastructure • Personnel challenges • Poor implementation • Lack of continuity
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) (2005)	Preventive	Established to provide access to affordable healthcare through a contributory health insurance model.	Limited effectiveness due to low enrolment, especially among informal sector workers, though successful in providing some risk protection for enrollees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low enrolment • Poor service delivery • Rural exclusion • Lack of transparency and accountability

In-Care of the Poor (COPE) (2007)	Protective/ Preventive	Targeted at extremely poor households (those headed by a female, the elderly, physically challenged, and fistula or HIV/AIDS patients) with children of school-going age;	Break intergenerational transfer of poverty and reduce the vulnerability of the core poor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited coverage Poor service delivery Poor infrastructural development
SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES (2010-2022)				
Community-Based Health Insurance Scheme (CBHIS) (2011)	Preventive	Established to provide health insurance access to people in the informal economy who might not be covered under traditional NHIS plans	Offers financial protection against healthcare costs by pooling funds within a community, however, its effectiveness is limited by factors like low participation rates and challenges in managing the scheme, especially for the poorest populations within the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding Poor uptake and community involvement lack of clear legislative and regulatory frameworks Accountability and transparency in management of the scheme Availability of adequate number of the various cadres of health workers Availability of essential drugs
SURE-P (Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program) (2012)	Promotive/ Protective	Invested fuel subsidy savings into social welfare programs, skill acquisition, and employment generation.	Impacted some sectors positively but struggled with issues of corruption and lack of accountability, limiting overall effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underpaid youths Difficulty identifying beneficial projects Duplication of functions Corruption
National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) (2016)	Protective/ Promotive/ Transformative	Umbrella initiative comprising the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), N-Power, School Feeding Program, and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program (GEEP).	Effective in reaching vulnerable populations; N-Power provided employment opportunities, and CCT improved welfare but faced issues in funding and data accuracy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor implementation Inadequate funding Corruption & political interference Data management issues Lack of proper monitoring Inadequate exit strategies for beneficiaries Lack of sustainability plans
Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) (2016)	Protective/ Promotive	Provides cash transfers to the poorest households, with the goal of reducing poverty and incentivizing school attendance and health services.	Moderately effective in providing relief to vulnerable households; however, issues with targeting accuracy and limited funding reduced its reach and impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty in accurately targeting the most vulnerable beneficiaries Administrative complexities Potential for leakage to non-eligible recipients Insufficient funding
N-Power Program (2016)	Promotive	Offers skills acquisition and employment opportunities to unemployed youth and graduates.	Effective in providing short-term employment, but sustainability and absorption into the labour market remain challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient funds Corruption Lack of transparency Poor exit strategy for beneficiaries Inappropriate targeting
TraderMoni (2018)	Promotive/ Protective	Provides small loans to informal traders to enhance their businesses and improve livelihood resilience.	Some impact on reducing poverty among traders, but limited in scope and reach, with concerns about political motivations affecting sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor beneficiary profiling Lack of proper verification mechanisms Political interference Inadequate financial literacy among beneficiaries Difficulties in loan repayment Limited access to banking services Lack of transparency in disbursement Political manipulation
COVID-19 SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSES (2020-2022)				
Conditional Cash Transfer (expanded in 2020)	Protective	Enhanced cash transfer coverage to support vulnerable households affected by COVID-19 lockdowns.	Temporarily effective in providing relief to affected households, though logistical challenges and data constraints limited full impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor targeting and beneficiary selection Corruption Logistical difficulties in reaching remote areas Diversion of funds by beneficiaries Inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems
Youth Employment and Social Support Operations (YESSO) (2020)	Protective/ Promotive	Aims to provide labour-intensive jobs for the youth and offers cash transfers to poor and vulnerable households.	Effective in creating short-term employment and income relief but struggled with scalability and reaching informal sector youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inadequate funding Lack of inclusion Limited capacity Lack of transparency

Rapid Response Register (RRR) (2021)	Protective	A digital platform set up to identify and deliver social assistance to urban poor and vulnerable households impacted by COVID-19 and economic challenges.	Effective in targeting the urban poor with cash transfers, though digital literacy and data accuracy were challenges in the rural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data accuracy issues due to poor data collection methods. • Limited awareness of the program among eligible citizens
Extended N-Power and NSIP Programs (2021-2022)	Promotive/ Protective	Expanded versions of the original programs, providing employment and support for youth, women, and small business owners.	Effective in maintaining support for unemployed youth and small businesses, though criticisms over political influences and targeting persist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor funding • Political interference • Inadequate monitoring and evaluation • Problem of sustainability, discontinued in 2023.

Evaluation of the Unemployment Situation in Nigeria

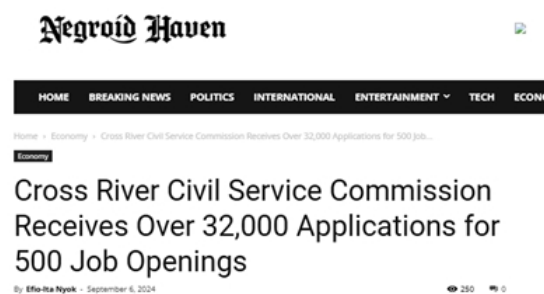
A stark illustration of the depth of unemployment in Nigeria is the 2014 Nigerian Immigration Service recruitment exercise, where more than 600,000 applicants competed for merely 5,000 vacancies nationwide. The process, marred by overcrowding and poor organisation, resulted in the tragic deaths of 15 applicants. Similarly, in 2008, no fewer than 20 individuals lost their lives during recruitment exercises held by the Nigeria Prisons Service, the Customs Service, and the Immigration Service across various states. These incidents underscore the extreme desperation for limited job opportunities and highlight the systemic challenges in addressing unemployment in the country.

Figure 1: Crowds at Immigration recruitment exercise



In another instance, in Cross River State, Nigeria, when the state government recently lifted an embargo on recruitment, over 32,000 applications were submitted for just 500 available positions.

Figure 2: 32,000 applications to fill 500 job openings



Such incidents underscore the urgent need for job creation as a vital means of escaping poverty. The intense competition for scarce positions—often culminating in tragic loss of life—reflects the deep economic vulnerability that continues to afflict Nigerian society. A review of the historical trajectory of unemployment in Nigeria is essential for contextualising the scale and persistence of the problem. The table below provides a visual representation of key trends, offering insights into the enduring and evolving nature of the country's unemployment crisis.

Table 2: Trend of Unemployment in Nigeria

Year	Unemployment Rate
1991	3.85
1992	3.81
1993	4.04
1994	4.08
1995	4.16
1996	4.06
1997	3.98
1998	3.94
1999	4.00
2000	3.96
2001	3.91
2002	3.68
2003	3.65
2004	3.60
2005	3.73
2006	3.76
2007	3.80
2008	3.80
2009	3.77
2010	3.75
2011	3.77
2012	3.76
2013	3.71
2014	3.90
2015	4.14
2016	4.50
2017	4.83
2018	5.07
2019	5.21
2020	5.74
2021	5.45
2022	3.82
2023	3.07
2024	2.99

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin, Macrotrends.net

Despite numerous past and ongoing government interventions, unemployment in Nigeria remains a persistent challenge, largely due to fundamental flaws in policy design and, more critically, shortcomings in implementation.

Cross-Cutting Factors Influencing Unemployment and Policy Effectiveness in Nigeria

1. Economic Structure and Diversification Challenges:

Nigeria's economic structure is heavily dependent on the oil sector, a reliance that has significantly shaped labour market dynamics. The dominance of the oil industry has led to the systemic neglect of other vital sectors—such as agriculture and manufacturing—which traditionally offer greater potential for job creation. As a result, employment opportunities have been concentrated in a capital-intensive sector with limited capacity for absorbing labour (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2025). This structural imbalance underscores the urgent need for comprehensive economic diversification to stimulate employment through robust growth in non-oil sectors (Nwanakwere & Ogwumike, 2020).

Repeated emphasis on oil dependence points to a core structural problem. The neglect of labour-intensive sectors due to this dependence reveals that Nigeria's unemployment crisis is not merely a failure of individual policies, but a manifestation of deeply entrenched structural issues. Therefore, meaningful reform requires a long-term economic transformation strategy.

2. Skills Mismatch and Gaps in the Educational System:

Another significant contributor to high unemployment in Nigeria is the disconnect between the skills imparted by the educational system and those demanded by the labour market. The system's overemphasis on theoretical instruction, at the expense of vocational and practical training, leaves graduates ill-prepared for immediate employment (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2025). Interestingly, unemployment is lowest among those with only primary education (2.8%) and highest among individuals with senior secondary education (8.5%), with intermediate rates for those with lower secondary and post-secondary education (Mbachu, 2025). This counterintuitive trend suggests that higher levels of education, in their current form, do not necessarily enhance employability—especially when qualifications are not matched by market-relevant skills. This skills mismatch underscores the urgent need for educational reforms that prioritise vocational training and practical skills to better align educational outcomes with labour market demands (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2025).

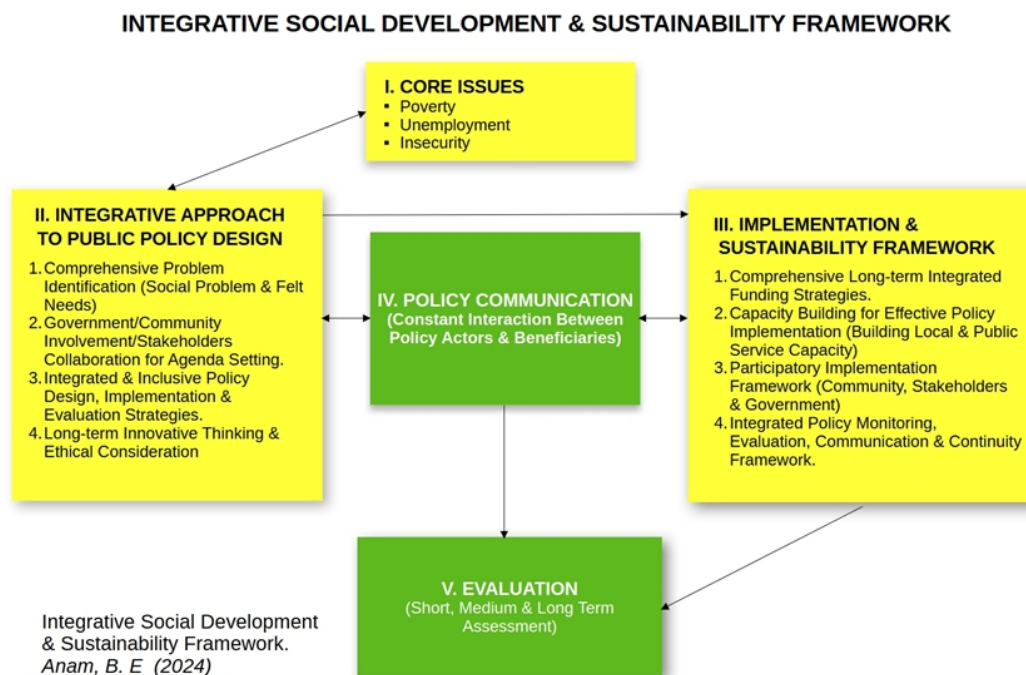
A New Framework for Achieving Public Policy Goals, Sustainable Development, and National Stability

Given the enduring and complex nature of unemployment and its detrimental effects on Nigeria's social development, conventional policy approaches—often fragmented and narrowly focused—have proven insufficient (Osimen et al., 2025). There is a pressing need for a more comprehensive, integrated, and sustainable policy framework that bridges economic, social, and environmental considerations.

The *Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework*, proposed by Bassey Anam (2024), offers such an approach. It aims to enhance both the design and

implementation of public policy by systematically integrating social equity, economic viability, and environmental responsibility. Its central objective is to foster sustainable solutions to deeply rooted social problems, with a primary focus on unemployment.

The ISODS framework is grounded in the recognition that sustainable progress requires a holistic understanding of the underlying causes of unemployment, their interconnections with other development challenges, and their long-term implications. The repeated failure of past social intervention programmes in Nigeria—often due to lack of coordination, limited impact, and unsustainable design—highlights the need for this integrated model. Within this framework, unemployment is not treated solely as an economic issue but as a critical social dimension of sustainability. ISODS emphasises long-term policy planning, institutional resilience, and structural reform over short-term project-based interventions. It calls for robust institutional mechanisms capable of withstanding political transitions and for systems-oriented solutions that build capacity and empower individuals in meaningful, lasting ways. Despite the multitude of past and ongoing government interventions, the challenges of unemployment and in Nigeria have persisted, often due to fundamental flaws in policy design and, more critically, in their implementation.



I. Core Issue

This foundational block correctly identifies unemployment as a central 'core issue' alongside poverty and insecurity. In Nigeria, these three are deeply intertwined. High unemployment fuels poverty, and economic hardship can contribute to insecurity through increased crime

rates, social unrest, and vulnerability to extremist groups. Addressing unemployment through the ISODS framework inherently seeks to mitigate poverty and enhance security.

II. Integrated Approach to Public Policy Design

- i. Comprehensive Problem Identification (Social Problem & Felt Needs). Using a Bottom-Top development approach. This means moving beyond just national unemployment rates to understand the nuances of unemployment in Nigeria. This includes identifying specific types of unemployment (e.g., youth unemployment, graduate unemployment, underemployment, disguised unemployment in the informal sector), their root causes (e.g., skills mismatch, lack of access to capital, poor infrastructure, insecurity, inadequate education system, low industrialization), and the "felt needs" of affected populations (e.g., desire for stable income, dignified work, entrepreneurial opportunities, access to training). It requires disaggregated data by region, gender, age, and educational background.
- ii. Government/Community Involvement/Stakeholders Collaboration for Agenda Setting. Consultative and participatory approach to policy design. It calls for collaboration beyond just government ministries (e.g., Labour, Education, Trade & Investment, Agriculture). It requires bringing in the private sector, educational institutions, civil society organisations and even the unemployed. This collaboration ensures that policies are relevant, practical, and have broad support.
- iii. Integrated & Inclusive Policy Design, Implementation & Evaluation Strategies. This has to do with the identification of implementation strategies that are peculiar to the policy environment. Instead of siloed approaches (e.g., just an N-Power program without linking to a broader economic strategy), this means designing policies that connect multiple sectors, are inclusive of marginalized groups like women or people with disabilities. This also requires planning not just for design, but also for robust implementation mechanisms and clear evaluation metrics from the outset. For instance, setting up a policy that addresses education reform, promotes specific industries, provides access to finance, and offers skill acquisition, all within a coherent framework.
- iv. Long-term Innovative Thinking & Ethical Consideration. Flexibility and long term perspectives in the policy process.

III. Implementation & Sustainability Framework (Interventions And Actions)

- i. Comprehensive Long-term Integrated Funding Strategies. Budget and Non-budget sources (Corporate Social responsibilities, Loans, & Grants)
- ii. Capacity Building for Effective Policy Implementation (Building Local & Public Service Capacity). Continuous manpower training for administrative performance and skill training for community dwellers.
- iii. Participatory Implementation Framework (Community, Stakeholders & Government). Shared responsibilities in policy implementation as a strategy for programme sustainability.
- iv. Integrated Policy Monitoring, Evaluation, Communication & Continuity Framework.

IV. Policy Communication

Policy communication refers to the act of conveying information about a policy to relevant audiences, like the public or stakeholders, with the goal of informing them about the policy, explaining its purpose, and encouraging understanding and compliance. This often involves strategies to persuade and engage the audience effectively on policy prospects and outcome.

It is a continuous process that provides feedback from the policy design to implementation and evaluation. To be effective, policy communication must be short term, medium term and long term.

Evaluation

- i. Short-term: Assessing immediate outputs (e.g., number of people trained, stipends disbursed).
- ii. Medium-term: Evaluating direct outcomes (e.g., percentage of trainees finding employment, start-up survival rates).
- iii. Long-term: Measuring the ultimate impact on unemployment rates, poverty reduction, economic diversification, social stability, and sustainable livelihoods.

The evaluation results feedback into the "Core Issues" block, informing new problem identification and driving further iterations of policy design and implementation, ensuring that the ISODS framework is a learning system, constantly adapting to better address the complex and persistent challenge of unemployment in Nigeria.

The Relevance of the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework in Explaining and Reducing Unemployment in Nigeria

The persistent problem of unemployment in Nigeria has been a source of national concern for decades. Traditional policy approaches have often failed to yield meaningful results due to fragmented implementation, weak institutional capacities, and lack of coherence between economic planning and social development (Okonkwo & Agba, 2020). In response to these systemic issues, Anam (2024) introduced the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework. The model provides a multidimensional, strategic approach designed to align policy formulation with sustainable practice and long-term development goals.

The ISODS Framework is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria's unemployment crisis because it emphasises *policy coherence*, *institutional synergy*, and *stakeholder engagement*—three critical dimensions often missing from existing intervention programmes. According to Anam (2024), one of the primary shortcomings of Nigeria's social and economic policy interventions has been their disjointed nature. The ISODS Framework addresses this by proposing a harmonised approach that integrates economic planning, human capital development, and institutional reform into a unified strategy to combat unemployment sustainably.

Furthermore, unemployment in Nigeria is not just a consequence of job scarcity, but also of *skills mismatch*, *weak labour market structures*, and the *disconnection between education and employability* (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2022). The ISODS Framework provides a holistic model that situates youth employment within broader goals of social inclusion, sustainable livelihoods, and economic diversification. For instance, it advocates for the institutionalisation of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems tailored to regional development needs, thereby enhancing the employability of the labour force (ILO, 2020).

Additionally, the ISODS Framework underscores the importance of data-driven policymaking, an area Nigeria has historically struggled with. The absence of reliable labour statistics and social registries has led to poorly targeted unemployment interventions (World Bank, 2021). By embedding robust monitoring and evaluation systems into the policy cycle, the ISODS model ensures continuous feedback, accountability, and evidence-based adjustments—thereby improving programme outcomes.

Political economy also plays a significant role in the unemployment landscape in Nigeria. Many youth employment schemes have been undermined by politicisation and short-termism (Akanbi & Oladipo, 2019). The ISODS Framework proposes greater political insulation of social development policies, ensuring that programmes are not subject to frequent disruptions due to changes in political leadership or agendas. This aspect is crucial in building continuity and trust among beneficiaries and implementing agencies.

In essence, the ISODS Framework aligns with global best practices and is consistent with the principles of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 8, which advocates for *decent work and economic growth*. By proposing a shift from *ad hoc interventions* to a *structured, participatory, and inclusive development framework*, ISODS presents a viable roadmap for reducing unemployment and fostering long-term socio-economic transformation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the relevance and applicability of the Integrative Social Development and Sustainability (ISODS) Framework as a strategic response to the persistent unemployment crisis in Nigeria. The findings underscore that unemployment in Nigeria is not simply a result of policy inadequacy but a reflection of systemic issues—ranging from structural economic imbalances to entrenched educational and skills mismatches. The review of existing policies revealed that fragmented and short-term approaches, combined with weak institutional capacity and poor implementation, have consistently undermined efforts to reduce unemployment.

In light of these failures, the ISODS Framework emerges as a transformative and sustainable alternative. By integrating social, economic, and environmental priorities into a unified policy model, it offers a comprehensive and long-term approach to addressing unemployment. Its emphasis on coordinated implementation, stakeholder participation, and resilience to

political change positions it as a strategic tool capable of fostering inclusive development, stability, and national progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ISODS Framework is not merely a theoretical proposition but a timely and practical roadmap for policy reform that responds directly to Nigeria's unique challenges and development aspirations.

Recommendations

The study recommends the need to,

1. Adopt and Institutionalise the ISODS Framework:

The Nigerian government, through its national planning agencies and relevant ministries, should formally adopt the ISODS Framework as a guiding policy tool. This requires embedding its principles into national development plans, employment strategies, and sectoral programmes.

2. Promote Economic Diversification:

Policymakers must aggressively implement strategies to diversify the economy away from oil dependency by revitalising labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. This will expand employment opportunities and ensure a more inclusive labour market.

3. Reform the Educational and Skills Development System:

There is a need to realign Nigeria's educational curricula with market demands by integrating vocational training, entrepreneurial education, and digital skills into all levels of schooling. Strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and industries will ensure better employment outcomes.

4. Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Accountability:

Effective implementation of any policy framework requires competent institutions. Government should invest in building institutional capacity, improving data systems for labour market analysis, and establishing mechanisms for transparent monitoring and evaluation.

5. Enhance Stakeholder Participation:

Sustainable unemployment solutions demand the involvement of multiple stakeholders—including civil society, private sector actors, local communities, and development partners. Collaborative policymaking will promote ownership, innovation, and broader support for policy execution.

6. Design Long-Term and Resilient Policy Frameworks:

Rather than episodic interventions tied to political cycles, employment policies should be designed with long-term vision and mechanisms to ensure continuity across administrations. This will foster consistency, trust, and sustainable outcomes.

7. Link Employment Strategies to the SDGs:

National employment strategies should be explicitly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), to ensure coherence and accountability in development efforts.

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