

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND RELATED SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper is focused on youth unemployment and attendant socio-economic problems in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The area comprises Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers States. This is the area that produces the wealth of the nation (i.e. mineral oil). Yet, the rate of youth unemployment is high with its attendant socio-economic, and political problems. The objective of this paper is to discuss youth unemployment situation in the area using Karl Marx theory as theoretical framework of analysis, and to proffer suggestions about how to reduce the unemployment situation and related crime waves in the area.

Niger Delta Region of Nigeria comprise Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States. It has been plagued with numerous problems over the years. Some of the problems are self inflicted like incessant communal clashes, looting of the treasury both at the state and the local government levels, some of the problems are socially related such as armed robbery, kidnapping. Similarly, some of the problems endemic in the area are direct results or consequences of the exploration and exploitation of crude oil by the multinational oil companies that are operating in the area. Based on the foregoing, problems in the Niger Delta could be defined as those conditions that exert negative influence on the greater population of the inhabitants caused by their actions or others. Although, these problems were prevalent before the advent of this democracy but have become pronounced because of added negative activities of the political class. The political class in the quest to retain and maintain their position recruited, ex-convicts and the socially maladjusted to achieve their aims. However, after achieving their aims abandoned this class of people who have little or no basic education or relevant skill for employment. This group of youths in order to eke out a living for themselves resorted to armed robbery, kidnapping of

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expatriates and wealthy citizens, pipeline vandalism and other social vices all these exacerbated the existing problems and resulted to the relocation of business offices of most companies especially the multinational to safer havens. In addition to the above, pipeline vandalism and the blowing of flow stations with dynamites became rife. These resulted in the shutdown of the operations of these multinationals culminating to the drop in crude oil production. The concomitant drop in oil revenue led to the retrenchment and loss of jobs and increase in unemployment in this region.

Unemployment in the Niger Delta

Unemployment could be defined as the condition or situation when an individual is willing and able to work but lack the job to actualize his dream within a given time frame. In the foregoing definition, an individual is fit sometimes armed with the necessary employment prerequisites but is unable to gain employment which may be induced by a lot of forces such as political, social, and economic forces.

Unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen because of the prevailing economic conditions exacerbated by the global economic meltdown. Recently, according to the Finance Minister of Nigeria armed with figures from National Bureau of Statistics announced that the rate of unemployment nationwide stands at nineteen and half percent. The urban unemployment rate is 49% while the unemployment in the rural areas stands at 39.5% for the labour force between 15 years and 64 years, excluding students, full time house wives, housekeepers and retired persons. However Bayelsa State of Niger Delta Region has the highest rate of 41.5%. Unemployment rate for purpose of convenience is measured by the number of unemployed workers divided by the total labour force and expressed in percentages.

Types of Unemployment in the Niger Delta

There are basically two broad types of unemployment in the Niger Delta Region. This bifurcation is sequel to the nature of the unemployment in the mentioned region. They are voluntary and involuntary types of unemployment.

Voluntary Unemployment

This is the type of unemployment prevalent in the area caused by the individual's willingness or decision to stay out of jobs arising from factors ranging from poor pay, insecurity, to unhappiness on the job. In this nexus, most job seekers in the Niger Delta who lost their jobs, did quit their jobs because of the militant activities in the area that made lives and properties unsafe. This life threatening activity coupled with youth restiveness and waves of crime compelled many workers especially those in the oil and gas industry to resign their appointments with their employers. The activities of the militants left many crude oil pipelines vandalized, many workers kidnapped and the hapless ones lost their lives. The fear of death and the unknown made many to run for their dear lives. A variant of voluntary unemployment endemic in the region is, frictional unemployment. This is the time frame between jobs when a worker moves from one job to another or voluntarily switches jobs. This type of voluntary unemployment in the Niger Delta Region is prevalent mostly among those engaged in

the banking industry. They move from one bank to another attracted by higher pay and welfare packages.

Involuntary Unemployment

This type of unemployment is endemic in these states engendered by the socio-economic conditions of the country, however, with more glaring effect on the people of this region. These conditions are prevalent as a result of government intervention through enactment of laws and economic policies such as embargo on employment in government establishments which consequently have resulted to ban on employment, loss of jobs and other forms of economic distress. In addition to the foregoing, since the nation operates an open market system which is subject to the vagaries of market forces and the unpredictable nature of the open market system worsened by the devastating effects of the global economic meltdown has consequently resulted to loss of jobs and most establishments have taken insulator measures against employment and the inability of fresh graduates to secure jobs could be described as the lucid reasons why most youths exhausted in job seeking, turn to armed robbery and other forms of crimes to survive.

Structural Unemployment

Accordingly, it is a type of involuntary unemployment that occurs when the labour market cannot provide jobs for the unemployed due to the mismatch between the skill of the job seeker and the requisite dexterity needed for a job that is open to accept entrants. In this regard, the existence of this type of voluntary unemployment in the region could be explained as a result of the fact that many fresh graduates and secondary school leavers do not have the technical skills and experience needed to be engaged by any employer. The resultant effect is saturation of the labour market in the region.

Classical Unemployment

Furthermore, another type of involuntary unemployment which also contributes immensely to the army of unemployed in the region is classical unemployment. This occur when the actual wage of a job is set above the actual level of wages in an industry which in turn attracts a preponderate proportion of hustlers resulting to too many people chasing few job vacancies. In this regard, most applicants beg to apply in the oil companies because of their jumbo salary while refusing to apply or even accept offers from government establishments. This behaviour contributes to the congestion of the labour market. Employment opportunities may exist but lack qualified applicant is scarce.

Technological Unemployment

The advancement in technology globally has resulted in the establishment of multinational and indigenous companies that utilize machines of high technological nature to perform their daily tasks and in turn the operation of these machines require well trained engineers and technicians and few manpower. In this regard, the manpower

needed in this sector is scarce but the proportion of technical deficient applicants is more resulting to the heavy population of the labour market in the region.

Hidden/Covered Unemployment

This is the unemployment of potential workers that is not reflected in the official unemployment statistics due to the way the statistics are collected (e.g. culled from internet). Due to the paucity of accurate records and insufficient data collection methods from the urban and rural area, most capable hands seeking for jobs are omitted from the list of unemployed by the office of statistic thereby leading to inaccurate records and potential applicants are hidden. In the Niger Delta region, most unemployed people are not captured owing to the terrain and faulty methodology adopted to arrive at the unemployment rate. This hidden unemployment frustrates efforts by government and employment agencies to keep straight records and plan recruitment exercise for the job seekers.

Seasonal Unemployment

Seasonal unemployment occurs according to Scott and Marshall when the change in the season reduces demand for the particular type of employment, for instance, construction workers are usually victims of rainy seasons because rain disallows building and road construction to be easily carried out and this cause retrenchment for the workers and congestion of labour market.

Theoretical Framework

Marxist theory is adopted because of the antagonistic, oppressive and repressive relationship between the ruling class and the followers of the Niger Delta Region. The foundation of the systematic Marxist is traced to Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895) about the middle of the nineteenth century. Marx/Engels sociological and anthropological studies were promoted by a chain of socio-economic problems that characterized the industrial capitalism. They viewed social life as characterized by conflict and struggle between individuals and groups in the pursuit of certain scarce values. The social assets at the crux of the social conflict vary. They may be concrete material necessities of live, such as food, water and shelter or non material things such as power, ideology and prestige (Girigiri, 1998). The attack on oppression, repression and social injustice remains fascinating to those in chains of poverty, alienation of labour, colonial bondage and racial discrimination (Aja Akpuru-Aja quoted in Iwarimie-Jaja, 2001). The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. Ruling class dominance is confirmed and legitimated in legal statutes, religious proscriptions and political legislations. The consciousness of all members of society is infused with ruling class ideology which proclaims the essential righteous, normality and inevitability of the status quo (Haralambos and Heald, 1998).

The unemployment issue in the Niger Delta Region is rather a pervasive scourge that has lingered for a long time without adequate remedies by successive regimes. Economic policies of the ruling class have not adequately enshrined remedial steps that

will reduce the scourge and its debilitating effects on the masses. The ruling class who dominate the less privilege enact economic policies that only address issues that favour the perpetuation of the economic interest of the ruling class and their cronies or allies. This group of individuals who are captains of industries adopt steps that aim at maximizing profits and reducing the workforce through the policy of downsizing and rightsizing their workforce. The consequence is that several individuals are forced out of work and qualified young school graduates are consciously denied employment opportunities. It is a lucid fact that the ruling class are tinted with corruption and the accumulated wealth which they acquire because of their position enable them perpetuate in office. The looting of the states treasury by previous Governors of the Niger Delta States has left their economic and financial state of the region in disarray.

The present day Governors of this region have found it herculean to grapple with the present financial realities, bonus and salaries of State Ministries employees are not paid, staff are owed salaries for several months, and pensioners are owed pensions for several months. These unhealthy situations compel these governments to force many under-employed and employed through retirement and offsite dismissal into the labour market. The embezzlement of state money by the political class drains the coffers of the state and makes the state incapacitated to pay the salaries, bonuses and pension of the retirees. The access to the corridors of power by the few which allows them unfettered access to the treasury makes them squander the state money with impunity and recklessness there by, ushering in an inclement atmosphere of uncertainty for the masses. Similarly due to the corruption of these elites, a high wall of unemployment is constructed restraining employment into state owned establishments within the Niger Delta domain.

Institutions such as OMPADEC, NDDC, DESOPADEC were set up by the government elites to ameliorate the endemic problems of the area. The inability of these institutions to address the issues which engendered their establishment because of rampant corruptions, misplaced priorities, nepotism among the ruling class that are at the helm of affairs of these institutions led to the non-performance by these organizations. They failed to eradicate poverty, disease, inequality and social injustice and unemployment for the youths. The obvious dominance of the ruling class in all sphere of the region result to the exploitation of the employed, the input of the workers is not commensurate with the take home pay. The quest and greed to acquire more wealth to the detriment of the employees have cost workers their jobs. The dominance of multinational companies and their exploitative propensities have saturated the positions of employment available which the indigenes of this region would have occupied with their nationals and the children and blood relations of their agents or compradors. They recruit staff from their home countries and occupy position meant for the indigenes. The government of the region is quite aware of this situation, but because some of them have been 'settled' with the employment of their children and consanguine relations therefore they are not bothered by the conditions of the greater population. Furthermore, these multinationals and their compradors ensure that few individuals are employed and that majority of those engaged are only engaged as service contractors and contract staff which make them highly vulnerable to retrenchment and dismals since they are not full

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employees. The foregoing arguments depict the precarious unemployment situation in the region. In order to maintain the dominance by the political elites, this class ensure that their dominance is continued by their children and grand children after their demise. In this wise after graduation from higher institutions their children are fixed in the best companies including the multinational companies where they have agents while the children of the less privileged are given unrestricted freedom to roam the streets in search of elusive jobs. In this regard, because of the positional advantage of the dominant few, they ignored to plan and implement adequate employment policies to tackle the unemployment issues in the region.

Rate of Unemployment in the Niger Delta Region

The information on the accurate unemployment is not absolutely reliable because of the differences in the figures obtained and the inability of the National Bureau of Statistics to post accurate figures in their website. However, conscious efforts were made to obtain current information from the websites of the states constituting the Niger Delta Region. The rate of unemployment fluctuates from time to time owing to social, economic and political forces. Youth restiveness in the region and related issues have forced companies to relocate to other accommodating states to continue their business. This development has resulted to many youths chasing few openings thus precipitating to unemployment. The global meltdown has also affected many institutions and business organizations leading economic collapse and loss of profit for many. The banking industry retrenched many workers, and the lucky ones had to receive 40% pay out in wages and salaries.

$$\text{Rate of unemployment} = \frac{\text{Number of unemployed} \times 100}{\text{Total labour force}}$$

Table 1: Unemployment Rate for Niger Delta States, 2010

State	Urban Area	Rural Areas
Rivers	6.5%	-
Abia	7.9%	-
Bayelsa	41.5%	-
Cross-River	11.9%	11.1%
Delta	2.9%	-
Edo	N/A	-
Ondo	N/A	-

Source: State Websites

Table 1 revealed that Bayelsa State has the highest unemployment rate with a figure of 41.5% when compared with other states in the region. It is closely followed by Cross River State with an unemployment rate of 11.9%, River State recorded 6.5% in August, 2010 while Abia State has an unemployment record of 7.9%, Delta State has the least unemployment rate of 2.9%.

Comparatively, this table show a remarkable reduction of unemployment rate in this region when compared with the 2001 statistical figures. In this year as shown in figure 3 the unemployment rates were high in the core Niger Delta States (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers) compared to the national average. In the above states, the region is much more critical and the main oil producing states. The situation is much worse in the rural areas where the bulk of the population lives in the riverine areas. The main oil activities takes place in the rural areas of these states. The table reveals that in the rural areas the unemployment rate is 37.1, 24.1 and 35.2 in Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers respectively compared to the national average of 19.8.

Table 2

States	Comp	Urban	Rural
Abia	10.6	8.70	10.8
Akwa-Ibom	36.9	29.8	37.1
Bayelsa	23.6	20.7	24.1
Cross Rivers	16.6	7.30	18.3
Delta	23.3	23.5	19.0
Edo	14.3	24.0	11.8
Imo	22.3	23.8	32.8
Ondo	17.0	14.0	19.8
Rivers	34.2	27.5	35.2
All Nigeria	18.1	14.2	19.8

Source: Federal Office of Statistical News, 2001 quoted in Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa (2009)

Observation

The figure supplied by the National Bureau of Statistics for 2010 and quoted by the Finance Minister may not be relied upon, the outcome reveal that the urban areas have 49% unemployment rate while the rural areas of the entire nation have 39.7%. If this is accurate why will the state have contrary figures as clearly shown in table 1? If the information is correct, then the state unemployment rate will be higher taking into cognizance the average figure the urban and rural areas that constitute each state.

Findings

The entire figures including those posted by the states and the National Bureau of Statistics show that there is an unemployment problem in the Niger Delta Region as shown. It is pertinent to state that there is a remarkable reduction of unemployment rate in the region in 2010 when compared with the 2001 unemployment figures.

Effects of Youth Unemployment

Sequel to the prevalence of unemployment in the region as demonstrated by the statistics in Table 1, 2, though not wholly reliable but there exist some element of truth that unemployment is a lucid socio-economic problem in the area. The effects of this problem manifests in several ways as follows:

Increase in Crime Rate

The crime rate of the region may be described as astronomical due the unemployment of youths. Many youths who cannot gain employment after many years of graduation and without relevant job experience take to armed robbery and kidnapping of high placed individuals. These criminal acts are rife in the Niger Delta Region especially in the urban areas. The youths of Niger Delta area have also indulged in the pipeline vandalism in the rural areas which have led to the shutdown of many flowstations of the multinational oil companies which have engendered the States revenue to plummet.

Brain Drain

The region has witnessed migration of highly qualified personnel from the zone drifting abroad for greener pastures. The foregoing is as a result of dearth of available spaces for them in the multinational companies and some are unwilling to take up appointments with the lowly paying rate establishments. The consequence of this is that they migrate to other areas that may offer them what they need. The outflow of qualified indigenes of the region, such as medical doctors, lecturers, engineers to other states and other countries result to the loss of qualified personnel.

Prostitution

The inability of most women to be recruited in to any company despite their high academic qualifications tend to force them into prostitution, and other illegal trades such as child and human trafficking within ad outside Nigeria.

The trade brings disgrace and bad image to the region and the nation in general. That is the reason many non-governmental organizations have taken a lot of measures to ensure that this social vice is curbed.

Drug Trafficking

Most unemployed indigenes of the Niger Delta Region resort to drug trafficking owing the succinct fact that they cannot be recruited to any establishment because of lack of space. They indulge in drug business which the state and international laws prohibits. Some of the drugs they traffic include heroin, cannabis, and cocaine. In addition to the above they practice this business because of the profits involved. Likewise, many youths indulge in drug abuse as a result of idleness caused by joblessness. The abuse of these drugs have compelled them to commit crimes such as rape, armed robbery influenced by the psychotropic effect of these drugs.

Control Measures

To control youth unemployment and related social problems the following suggestions are proffered:

(i) Establishment of Skill Acquisition Centres

The states which constitute Delta Region of Nigeria should establish skill acquisition centres where the unemployed, the newly graduated, and the unskilled labour will receive practical training in all technical vocations for a period ranging from six to eighteen months to enable this class of people have practical experience and to be financially independent. In order to sustain the programme, government should continue to fund this centres adequately. Graduates of these programmes should be given starter package at the end of their programme to start their own businesses and be self-employed. This will help create self employment and decongest the saturated labour market.

(ii) Creation of Viable Employment Bureau

The state governments of this region should create a viable employment bureau where applicants will be compelled to register and all companies within the region must be mandated by law to regularly inform the agency of vacant positions as vacancies occur. Any company that violates any provision of the bureau will be sanctioned appropriately. With the above development, many idle youths will be employed.

(iii) Provision of Social Welfare Package

In order to alleviate the sufferings of the unemployed and debar them from indulging in crimes, the Niger Delta Regional Governments should approve certain amount of money they will be paying all the unemployed youths for the period they stay without jobs. This will serve as inducement to steer them away from committing crime and other social evils. The government should compile the list of all applicants indicating their biometric data and level of educational qualification. Payment of this arrangement should be done up to 18 months to soothe their financial hardships during apprenticeship in skill acquisition centres.

Conclusion

It has been unequivocally illustrated that unemployment is a major problem in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The types of unemployment endemic in the area have been discussed and data obtained and analysed show clearly that unemployment is a major problem in the Niger Delta Region. The latent manifestation of this problem include high incidence of crime rate, drug abuse and drug trafficking, prostitutions, armed robbery, child trafficking and brain drain. Recommendations were also made for the government of these states to implement suggested recommendation judiciously to ameliorate the social malaise in the region.

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