

GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: THE CHALLENGE OF FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Graduate unemployment in Nigeria: The challenge of functional education and national development is a study that discussed the causes of graduate unemployment in Nigeria which include the discovery and over-dependence on crude oil, problems created by tertiary institutions of learning, and agriculture-related causes of unemployment. The study analyzed the Federal Government of Nigeria's intervention measures to cope with graduate unemployment with a case study of the National Directorate of Employment's activities in Akwa Ibom State. The study recommended that the country should not overly rely on crude oil; Nigerian graduates should begin to look inwards for employment instead of depending on white collar jobs which are scarce; tertiary institutions should prepare graduates for job creation; among others.

It is generally believed that the chain of production is not complete unless and until the goods produced have reached the hands of the final consumers. Similarly, it should be noted and seriously too, that the process of education is not complete until the learners have gained employment in their chosen fields of endeavour. Unfortunately, for years now the Nigerian education system has continued to litter the streets with unemployable and unemployed graduates who recently choose to employ themselves in societal vices hence making the society more unsafe than ever before.

The present rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria has reached an alarming and embarrassing level that concerted efforts and more dedicated measures need to be taken, and promptly too, to stem the tide from becoming worse with all the consequences that will accompany the helpless situation. This paper serves as a timely warning as it helps to identify the root causes of graduate unemployment in Nigeria,

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assess intervention measures by government, and also proffer functional solutions to the enigma.

Causes of Graduate Unemployment in Nigeria Discovery and Over-Dependence on Crude Oil

Naturally, one would expect that the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria would boost the already robust and buoyant economy which was the envy of other countries of the world during the colonial era and shortly after independence in 1960. Unfortunately, this source of wealth has become a source of woe! Since 1980, Okonkwo (2005) observed, when Nigeria'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. The resultant poverty has posed questions about the wisdom of conventional strategies for national development with unemployment as its immediate consequence.

Problems of Academic Institutions

It is sad that Nigerian universities and other higher academic institutions have contributed significantly to graduate unemployment in Nigeria. Akhabue (2010) lamented that institutions of higher learning in Nigeria are instrumental to the present day graduate unemployment in the nation because there are too many graduates in the humanities and social sciences; which is one reason why our country is not developed. To him, the graduates in the fields of science and technology receive little practical training while in school. Again, because the country is not industrialized, the students of science and technology have limited opportunity to acquire relevant industrial/field experience.

Recently, experience shows that Nigerian universities run academic programmes that neither qualify the graduates for National Youth Service Corps nor employment on graduation. When this happens, the helpless graduates from these "consultancy programmes" of the universities end up more frustrated in the labour market than their actual graduate counterparts. This however informed Bayo (2010) to observe that in Nigeria, year after year, graduate unemployment rate in the country keeps going higher and higher as fresh graduates pass out from their various institutions of higher learning only to meet with a long queue of their predecessors who had earlier passed out from their various universities and polytechnics and are still unemployed, as there are few jobs to go round the vast unemployment population in the country.

The case of Nigerian graduates of recent years is made much worse as most of them are not employable by potential employers of labour. This may be due to their lack of core technical knowledge about their discipline or poor result (Bayo 2010). Recently, the Director of National Youth Service Corps lamented that it is sad to observe that some youth corps members (graduates of Nigerian universities) cannot fill common personal data forms at the NYSC camps (NTA News 9/10/2012:900pm). This

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situation is, in part, a function of our higher education system where institutions admit more students than they have facilities for, so that they may benefit from the fees and levies of the students so admitted. A visit to some of our higher institutions reveals unacceptably large class sizes per lecturers.

Agriculture-Related Problems

Okonkwo (2005) stated that Nigeria has sufficient land mass and labour resources to become a great location for labour-intensive industries, and thereby provide employment for the masses. Cost cognizant industries can easily be developed and located in places with the most poverty stricken people in order to take advantage of low-cost labour and land, and as a means of economic development.

With a total land mass of 923,768 square kilometers (Dada, Jibrin & Ijeoma, 2006) comprising 13, 000 square kilometers of water and 910,768 square kilometers of land, Nigeria climate varies from equatorial in the south, to tropical in the center, and arid in the north. Okonkwo (2005) claimed that the variation in climate results in much of the land not being arable and such makes the agricultural sector unappealing as a viable source of employment opportunities for Nigerians. Hence, the country is not as agriculturally blessed as it would seem.

However, this claim has suffered attacks from various quarters. Notably, Mr. Rochas Okorochoa, the Executive Governor of Imo State, in his public enlightenment programme on Imo State (NTA programme, Jan. 16, 2013) noted that Nigeria is so climatically blessed that it is the only country in the world where plants (weeds) grow, even on roof-tops. Additionally, Musa (2007) observed that Nigeria is so richly blessed climatically for agriculture that “in some parts (of Nigeria) you do not need to water a thrown away seed (say mango, palm, etc) for it to germinate, grow and start bearing fruits. We neglected this (sector) just because of the oil”. We strongly agree with these criticisms of Okonkwo (2005) because a cursory look at Nigeria reveals that a great percentage of southern Nigeria’s palm trees, raffia, mangoes, cashew, guava, etc. are spread by birds and animals, and not consciously cultivated by humans.

Another serious handicapping condition regarding the utilization of agriculture as a means of providing employment opportunities for underprivileged Nigerians is that a great proposition of land in rural Nigeria where agriculture primarily occurs is not quite accessible or not fully utilizable because such are lineage, sacred land, privately held by large landowners, etc. In addition, land is usually loaned or rented in rural communities in Nigeria. By this arrangement, many poor rural residents do not own sufficient land to make farming in particular, and agriculture, in general, a profitable venture and do not have the opportunity to accrue capital on loaned or rented land. Additionally, Dennis (2010) deeply mourns the conditions of the rural farmers who toil for long hours each day but their greatest challenge remains their inability to convey their goods to the market due to bad and unmotorable rural roads. Even when they surmount the hurdle of bad roads, the value attached to their goods is

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unfortunately quite little. Above all, there are no storage facilities for the rural agricultural products. Hence, the clarions call for acceptable policy to assist the teeming subsistent farmers.

Intervention Measures

In complete acknowledgment of the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria, the Federal Government initiated several intervention measures to alleviate the scourge which consequences on national development are hydra-headed. These measures include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the Subsidy Re-investment Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), among others.

Available records at the Planning, Research and Statistics Division of the National Directorate of Employment, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State reveals that since the establishment of the Directorate in 1986 primarily to address the problem of mass unemployment, the NDE has over the years introduced a number of intervention programmes designed to mitigate or reduce the scourge of unemployment in Nigeria. Such areas of intervention, in order to actualize the mandate of the NDE, include the four (4) articulated employment creation programmes, namely:

- (a) Vocational Skills Development (VSD)
- (b) Small Scale Enterprises (SSE)
- (c) Rural Employment Promotion (REP)
- (d) Special Public Works (SPW)

The objectives of these programmes are achieved through the delivery of the following training strategies:

1. Vocational Skills Acquisition
2. Entrepreneurship/Business Training
3. Rural Employment Promotion
4. Labour Based Works
5. Employment Counselling and Linkages
6. Enterprise Creation through Resettlement (NDE, 2012)

A. The Vocational Skills Development (VSD)

This programme provides vocational skill acquisition training for unemployed school leavers and drop-outs in over 80 trades across the country. Such school leavers are attached to master craftsmen and women as apprentices under the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS) for periods long enough for them to acquire necessary skills (between 3 months and 24 months). In the rural areas, where master craftsmen and women are inadequate or non-existent, well equipped mobile training workshops are deployed to train the unemployed youths for the period under the *School-On-Wheels* (SOW) Scheme. Other schemes are RLS, CBSAS, etc.

B. The Small Scale Enterprises (SSE)

This focuses on unemployed graduates of tertiary institutions as well as retired public and private sector workers who still want to engage in economically productive activities. These target groups are exposed to *Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP)*, *Start-Youth-Own-Business (SYOB)* now called *Enterprise-Start-off-Development Training Scheme (ESDTS)* and *BBT* (now *Micro-business Skill Training Scheme (MBSTS)*).

After the training some of the successful participants are provided with soft loan to set up micro enterprise businesses while many others are linked up to credit institutions for loan.

C. Rural Employment Promotion (REP)

This programme was established in a bid to awaken the interest of the unemployed youths in agriculture to explore the tremendous opportunities for employment and wealth creation in agriculture sector and consequently, stem the rural-urban drift of the youths. Examples of such are *Rural Agricultural Development Training Scheme (RADTS)*, *Rural Handicraft Training Scheme (RHTS)*, and *Integrated Farming Training Scheme (IFTS)*.

D. Special Public Works (SPW)

This programme aims at providing temporary employment for unemployed youths until such a time they could secure wage employment or become self-employed. This is achieved through the use of labour-based light-equipment supported method of construction and maintenance of rural infrastructure. Under the *Graduate Attachment Programme (GAP)*, some unemployed graduates are attached to industries, companies, firms, hospitals, financial institutions, etc. to gain practical work experience to assist them to get either permanent employment or establish their businesses based on the experience gained. The Department of SPW also runs other schemes such as *Environment Beautification Training Scheme (EBTS)* and *Community Development Scheme (CDS)*, etc.

New NDE programmes/Schemes Area:

1. SETS - Solar Energy Training Scheme
2. WETS - Water Energy Training Scheme
3. WEST - Wind Energy Training Scheme

[Renewable Energy Training Scheme (RETS)]

4. EFCC - Enterprise and Financial Counselling Clinic
5. SURE-P - Subsidy Reinvestment Empowerment Programme
6. YOUWIN - Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria
7. Qik-Qik
8. Easy Biz
9. Lady Chauffer Training Scheme
10. Music Training Scheme

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New Names for Old Programme/Schemes

S/N	Old Name	New Name
1.	SYOB	ESDTS (Enterprise Start-Off Development Training Scheme)
2.	BBT	MBSTS (Micro-Business Skill Training Scheme)
3.	NOAS	B-NOAS (Basic National Open Apprenticeship Scheme) A-NOAS (Advanced Training) National Open Apprenticeship Scheme
4.	PGPS	GAP (Graduate Attachment Programme)

In December 2006, NDE gave the following distribution of registered unemployed graduate by state:

Table I: Distribution of Registered Unemployed Graduates By State

S/N	State	No. of Registered Unemployment Graduates	Percentage (%)
1.	ABIA	3035	1.52%
2.	ABUJA (FCT)	497	0.25%
3.	ADAMAWA	866	0.43%
4.	ANAMBRA	3604	1.80%
5.	AKWA IBOM	4120	2.06%
6.	BAUCHI	627	0.31%
7.	BAYELSA	2718	1.36%
8.	BENUE	6264	3.14%
9.	BORNO	3521	1.76%
10.	CROSS RIVER	4262	3.13%
11.	DELTA	5755	2.88%
12.	EBONYI	1678	0.84%
13.	EDO	4572	2.29%
14.	ENUGU	4610	2.31%
15.	EKITI	4284	2.14%
16.	GOMBE	791	0.40%
17.	IMO	2648	1.33%
18.	JIGAWA	2955	1.48%
19.	KADUNA	4816	2.41%
20.	KANO	3962	1.98%
21.	KATSINA	1399	0.70%
22.	KEBBI	1812	0.91%
23.	KOGI	4946	2.48%
24.	KWARA	4254	2.13%
25.	LAGOS	80028	40.06%
26.	NASARAWA	2749	1.38%
27.	NIGER	1232	0.62%
28.	OGUN	869	0.44%
29.	ONDO	3420	1.71%
30.	OSUN	5904	2.96%
31.	OYO	8137	4.07%
32.	PLATEAU	2289	1.15%

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33.	RIVERS	8805	4.14%
34.	SOKOTO	2498	1.25%
35.	TARABA	4005	2.01%
36.	YOBE	1154	0.58%
37.	ZAMFARA	691	0.32%
	TOTAL	199785	100%

In Akwa Ibom State, the National Directorate of Employment gave the following statistics.

Table II

Year	2007	2008	2011	Total
Total number of registered unemployed graduate	4120	16900	21830	42850
NDE intervention				
SPW	75	-	62	137
SSE	65	93	4824	4982
VSD	866	-	354	1220
REP	100	-	100	200
Total number of graduate salvaged				6539

Table II above shows that in the years 2007, 2008 and 2011 that NDE kept records of its intervention measures, the total number of registered unemployed graduates was 42850, while the various intervention programmes including SPW, SSE, VSD and REP in the three years absorbed only 6539 just 15.3% of the registered unemployed graduates in the State.

However, although there are many other employment agencies in the State, data were not available for the study including the State Civil Service Commission which employment activities are highly political.

The Way Forward

Apart from reliance on the highly advertised hope of employment for all by the magic year 2020 (vision 2020), these authors believe that the following measures should be adopted to check graduate unemployment in Nigeria, namely:

Nigerian graduates should begin to look inwards and think of how they can cater for themselves through self-employment instead of overly relying on white collar jobs which are scarce and difficult to come by.

Effective land tenure reform and development training in agriculture related industries commensurate with unskilled Nigerians can possibly make agriculture a more viable source of employment opportunities and wealth creation for citizens. Similarly, governmental organizations and landowners should be motivated to make

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land available to poor but willing Nigerians on a more equitable basis for agricultural related industries.

Considering the enormous manpower lost to national development, unquantifiable wealth and hope lost to parents and guardians of unemployed graduates and social malaise which occasion graduate unemployment, as they offer ready manpower to crime and political thuggery, university programmes should be tailored towards functional employment and wealth creation.

Creation and utilization of employment opportunities to the masses is a sure means of ensuring participation of all citizens in the process of national development. Accordingly, government should develop non-petroleum industries as a strategy for economic development.

As alternative to dependence on the oil sector, cost conscious industries should be developed and located in economically depressed areas in Nigeria to take advantage of low cost labour and land as a means of national economic development.

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