

## Graduates/Youths Unemployment Question in Nigeria: A Case Study of Edo State

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**ABSTRACT** It is not new to Nigerian youths that there are various challenges to surmount to become a fulfilled person in life. To gain admission to a university or other institutions of higher learning is a battle. After that is fought and won, you have the battle of unemployment to fight. Though Nigeria is blessed with both human and material resources, our leaders have not been able to utilize them in order to yield maximum economic benefits. This and other factors identified in this paper have been the primary causes of unemployment in Nigeria. This paper analyzed the costs and causes of unemployment on our graduates/youths, and provided useful recommendations that will help to eradicate the monster called unemployment in Nigeria. The paper concludes that if the monies looted by those in government were judiciously utilized in addition to the resolution of other identified factors in fighting unemployment and infrastructural development, the state would not have been in its present bad situation today.

### INTRODUCTION

A World Bank study shows that one out of every five adults in Nigeria is unemployed and just one out of every ten university graduate gets a job (Okoh-Mesarawon 2009). Considering the unpredictable nature of our economy today, unemployment is something any one of us may have to face at almost any point of time in our careers. There is no gain saying the fact that the number of graduates from tertiary institutions in Nigeria is increasing without doubt. This number is a considerable workforce that could positively affect the Nigerian economy (Oshomole 2009).

Year in, year out, the tertiary institutions churn out elites in thousands, and these young men and women should not be left to his or her own fate. It is a fallacy to say that the government does not have the money to employ more hands into the ministries in a nation where some privileged individuals loot billions of Naira of public funds. It is not too much in this kind of situation for Nigerian government to employ a graduate and make his basic salary to be a minimum of one hundred thousand Naira monthly. When this amount is multiplied by at least one million graduates, it will be discovered that the amount is not as huge as the billions of Naira that some single individuals convert to their private personal pockets for their personal use out of the public fund which was entrusted to

them to carry out physical development in our nation.

Government officials in Nigeria have over the years, spanning from military rule to civilian administration, abused the fundamental right of a great number of graduates and non-graduates by denying them the opportunity to be gainfully employed. They have reduced these youths to mere bunch of failures, so much so that people now see unemployed youths/graduates as failures from the school he or she graduated from, and are referred to as a group of never-do-well.

The Nigerian graduates/youths have been made to lie fallow in the unemployment market for too long now, and as a result; the knowledge from school gradually fades away. The lack of profitable job has prevented many from advancing academically, and yet, among these youths/graduates are potential professors, doctors, and great scholars in various fields of human endeavours who have all that are needed to make positive contributions to the growth and development of the country.

The recent report by the World Bank that about 40 million Nigerians are unemployed is disturbing; the global financial institution has classified Nigeria among nations prone to widening poverty and socio-economic crisis arising from effects of the global economic melt-down (World Bank 1998). We decry the worrisome and staggering unemployment

statistics as contained in the World Bank Report. It is a matter that calls for serious and urgent government intervention considering the fact that this huge army of unemployed Nigerians is capable of creating social unrest as we already have in Niger Delta Region, Northern Region as reflected in the various cases of bombings, kidnapping and armed robbery. All tiers of government (federal, state and local government) should be concerned about this malaise that is capable of creating tension in the polity, and find ways of solving it by creating more jobs.

Nigeria was perceived for many decades as one of the richest countries in Africa because of her abundant petroleum reserves and large population. Ironically, the most dominant feature of the Nigerian economy today is unemployment. There is a need for development plan that will revitalize the economy of Nigeria and thereby provide relevant strategies for combating unemployment in the country. Unemployment has been a problem in Nigeria, especially since 1980s, 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 (Okonkwo 2005).

In spite of steady growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Nigeria over the past years, unemployment has been on the increase. The World Bank stated in its study of "employment and growth in Nigeria", that although an impressive GDP growth rate of 7% per annum has been achieved since 2001, there is a general perception that the high growth rate has not translated into commensurate employment in the country, just as it said the absence of credible data base on employment on sectoral and national basis remain a problem (Abdulhamid 2009).

With the current number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, (public, private, colleges of education, polytechnics) and others, one can begin to imagine how many students graduate every year. Considering the number of graduates that have been plunged into the labour market between 1999 and now, a period of twelve years of practicing democracy without a break, one wonders, "What the government has done to absorb the teeming unemployed graduates?"

It is pertinent to mention here that during electioneering campaigns, the politicians always

tell the people that their cardinal programme will be to provide employment for all. However, this has become a mirage, and unfortunately, many of these unemployed, but employable graduates are often used for dirty political games such as hijacking of ballot boxes, intimidation and assassination of political opponents during election year and after that, they are abandoned to their own fate in the labour market.

The former Minister of Labour and Productivity, Prince Adetokunbo Kayode, revealed at the inauguration of the Planning Committee of the proposed National Employment Summit in Abuja that within the past eight years, the nation had witnessed unprecedented increase in national earnings, but unfortunately, this had not translated into job creation and economic empowerment for the people (Kayode 2009).

Nigeria has become a country where there seems to be absence of a coordinating organ between the federal, states and local governments. What we saw under President Umaru Musa Yar-Adua was a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) led Federal Government pursuing 7-point agenda, a PDP Delta state (neighbour of Edo State) pursuing 3-point agenda, and a PDP government in Edo State that pursued no agenda for a period of almost ten years before they were legally driven out of governance by another political party – Action Congress of Nigeria.

When the Action Congress of Nigeria Political Party took over the mantle of leadership in Edo State on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2008, the Governor's intention to employ 10,000 youths was thwarted by the 18 Local Government Council Chairmen of the PDP who did not buy into his policy of employing 10,000 youths, and this disagreement was traced to party differences, and as a result, the unemployed Edolites have remained unemployed. We are aware of other countries that are not as naturally endowed as Nigeria, but are performing and bringing development to their people. Countries like Singapore, Ghana, United Arab Emirate, Brazil and Malaysia that came to collect palm seedling from Nigeria and a host of others are not as naturally endowed as Nigeria, yet they are performing very well.

We are pained to state at this point that until Nigerian government decides to take a proactive step, do the right and take appropriate deliberate option of fixing the nation, we are not going anywhere and the number of unemployed graduates/youths will continue to increase yearly and social

disorderliness will continually be the order of the day. Many of our graduates/youths have now taken to commercial motorcycle riding, (otherwise known as *okada* business), bricklaying, bus driving/conducting, ticket collecting, refuse collecting, casual staff just to mention a few, and of course, the above-mentioned degrading jobs can be done without visiting the four walls of a university. What is the essence of getting a university degree certificate, if that certificate is not useful to the owner, or you have the certificate and the only job you can get is that, that requires ordinary level result or no qualification at all? What an irony of fate for Nigerian graduates/youths.

### Conceptual Clarifications

**Unemployment:** There seems to be a consensus on the definition of unemployment, as the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as numbers of the economically active population who are without work, but available for and ready to work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank 1998).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English sees unemployment as: the state of being unemployed, the condition or extent of this in a country or region (Thompson 1998). In other words, it is the state of not having a job, or a number of people not having a job. Unemployment is also defined as the number of people in a particular country or area who cannot get a job.

Mitra (2004) sees an employed person as one who is 16 years old or older and works for pay for at least one hour per week, people who work without pay for 15 or more hours per week in a family enterprise, or who has a job, but has been temporarily absent are also counted as employed. By contrast, a person 16 years of age or older who is not working, is available for work, and has made specific effort to find work during the previous 4 weeks is counted as unemployed. Unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed divided by people in the labour force. So if 7.8 million people, for example, are out of work and 130 million people are in the labour force, then the unemployment rate would work out to be 6 percent ( $7.8/130 \times 100$ ).

**Costs of Unemployment:** Unemployment clearly has costs for the person who is jobless,

but the costs extend beyond the individual or the family affected as well as the economy as a whole. Unemployed individuals have to go through a tight economic crunch. They are unable to meet their financial obligations and this may lead to a decline in their standard of living, as lack of funds is sure to have a deep impact on their expenses. The consequences of unemployment can be as grave as homelessness due to failure of the unemployed individual to pay for house rents, and in most cases inability to feed.

Underemployment is one of the serious consequences of unemployment; individuals are forced to take up jobs that do not befit their skills, experiences and educational qualifications. A good example is a university graduate taking up a clerical job as a means of livelihood. Another consequence of unemployment is anxiety in the minds of the unemployed people. Sometimes unemployed individuals become pessimistic about life and may have to face psychological trauma resulting from mental stress. Unemployment hampers the economic as well as the social status of the society. Furthermore, unemployment is associated with increasing rates of suicide, domestic violence, drug abuse, kidnapping, health problems, thuggery, rigging and snatching of ballot boxes and a host of others negative vices. The aftermath of these is that the society will never be peaceful.

Okigbo (as cited by Obadan and Odusola 1999) also points out the problem arising from the concept of labour force. According to him, in most countries, particularly Nigeria, people below the age of 15 years and those above the age of 55, who are actively engaged in economic activities are usually excluded from labour statistical survey. All these factors have the tendency to result in underestimation of unemployment thereby making international comparison very difficult, factors such as the preponderance, unpaid family works also contribute significantly to the underestimation of unemployment.

### Comparative Analysis of Unemployment Rate in Some Selected Countries

Table 1 shows that Nigeria has the worst unemployment situation among the selected countries for the purpose of this study. Ironically, Nigeria is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest oil producing nation in the world. While the unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia, an oil producing nation, was 10.8% as

on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010, Nigeria, also an oil producing nation had 21.40% unemployment rate for the same period. Interestingly, Singapore that is not as naturally endowed with mineral resources like Nigeria had an unemployment rate of 2.5% as at 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2005.

**Table 1: Comparative analysis of unemployment rate in some selected countries for a period of five years – 31/12/2006 – 31/12/2010**

S. No.	Countries	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %	2010 %
1.	Brazil	9.6	9.3	7.9	8.1	7
2.	China	4.1	4	4.2	4.3	4.1
3.	Germany	10.2	8.8	7.6	7.7	7.1
4.	Ghana	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
		1.6	0.8	4.7	8.2	10.4
5.	Malaysia	3.6	3.5	3.1	3.6	3.5
6.	Nigeria	12.29	12.70	14.90	19.70	21.40
7.	Singapore	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
		2.7	4.2	4.4	4.3	2.5
8.	Saudi Arabia	13	13	11.8	10.5	10.8
9.	United Arab Emirate	2003	2004	2005	2008	2009
		10	11.8	12.8	13.9	14
10.	United States of America	4.4	5.0	7.3	9.9	9.4

Source: Adapted from various Websites

### Some Causes of Unemployment

Unemployment results from insufficient effective demand for goods and services in an economy. Some believe that structural problems and inefficiencies in the labour market cause unemployment, others believe that regulations like minimum wage laws imposed on the labour market lead to unemployment. Some thinkers believe that unemployment is a result of the law of demand and supply not being applied in case of employing people, decline in the demand for products or services of a company does not result in the decrease in wages of the company employees, and this may strike an imbalance in the economy (Smith 2010).

Generally, unemployment can be caused by any of the following factors:

- ♦ Rapid changes in technology;
- ♦ Recession;
- ♦ Inflation;
- ♦ Disability;
- ♦ Undulating business cycles;
- ♦ Changes in tastes as well as alterations in the climatic conditions. This may in turn lead to decline in demand for certain services as well as products;

- ♦ Attitude towards employers;
- ♦ Willingness to work;
- ♦ Perception of employees;
- ♦ Employee values;
- ♦ Discriminating factors in the place of work (may include discrimination on the basis of age, class, ethnicity, color and race); Ability to look for employment (Free World Economic Report 2010).

### Major Causes of Unemployment in Edo State

- ♦ Currency devaluation of the 1980s in Nigeria;
- ♦ Corruption;
- ♦ Unproductive and unskilled large population;
- ♦ Increased population;
- ♦ Inability of the majority of graduates/youths to pass employment interviews due to the falling standard of education in Nigeria;
- ♦ Declining industries/collapse of SMEs due to environmental factors;
- ♦ Reduced income to the various levels of government.

It is pertinent to state that the major causes of unemployment in Nigeria and by extension Edo State today are: Currency devaluation of the 1980s in Nigeria; unproductive and unskilled large population; increased population; inability of the majority of graduates/youths to pass employment interviews due to the falling standard of education in Nigeria; declining industries/collapse of SMEs due to environmental factors; reduced income to the various levels of government, corruption and visionless leaders who have decided over the years to enthrone bad governance instead of fighting the hydra headed unemployment question in Nigeria in general and Edo State in particular. We must state that the failure of the power sector, insecurity in the country, unfavourable environment for doing business are some of the other causes of unemployment in the country.

From observation, the rural areas, which are mostly the take-off points for the majority of the youths lack the basic amenities which make life meaningful and worthwhile. So every individual wants to leave in the urban areas in search of “greener pasture”. Unfortunately, the employment opportunities existing in the urban areas are too limited to absorb every youth, hence

majority of them are left redundant and unemployed. In Edo State, for example, there are no viable industries or companies to employ the youths, and as a result, only the State Government and a few small and medium scale organizations are there to employ these young graduates and other youths.

### Result of Interviews Held with Relevant Stakeholders

In the course of this study, various interviews were held with relevant stakeholders to elicit their comments and suggestions on the way forward. Some of the significant stakeholders interviewed were: leaders of different political parties in the state, young graduates, students, parents, academicians, entrepreneurs and the result of the interactions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals the categories of stakeholders and the number of respondents interviewed. Also, their perceptions of the causes of unemployment in Edo State as well as suggested solutions were articulated and aggregated for discussing this paper and for proffering necessary recommendations below.

### Unemployment Situation in Edo State of Nigeria

Edo State which lies roughly between longitude 06° 04'E and 06° 43'E and latitude 05° 44'N and 07° 34'N was carved out of the former Bendel State in 1991 during General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida regime. Delta State, which happens to be the twin-sister, bounds the state in the south. The State is also bounded in the west by Ondo State, in the north by Kogi State,

**Table 2: Result of interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders in Edo State**

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Relevant stakeholders</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Perception of causes of unemployment</i>	<i>Suggested solutions</i>
1.	<i>Leaders of Different Political Parties</i>	20	(1) Reduced income and inflation; (2) Increased population; (3) inability of the majority of graduates/youths to pass employment interviews due to the falling standard of education in Nigeria	The world economic recession had greatly affected income to the Federation Account. Government will do its best to create employments
2.	<i>Young Graduates</i>	20	(1) Declining industries; (2) Corruption; (3) Visionless leaders	Government should provide electricity and encourage the establishment of more industries. Also, leaders should be good people who are selfless and corruption free.
3.	<i>Students</i>	20	(1) Corruption by our leaders; (2) Lack of industries in Edo State.	Reduce corruption and establish industries to absorb the unemployed.
4.	<i>Parents</i>	20	(1) Economic recession; (2) Willingness to work by some of our youths	Government should plan for its citizens and provide employment
5.	<i>Academicians</i>	20	(1) Currency devaluation of the 1980s in Nigeria; (2) Corruption	Once the problems of corruption and electricity are solved, all other problems will automatically be solved.
6.	<i>Entrepreneurs</i>	20	(1) Collapse of SMEs due to bad/harsh economic environment; (2) Corruption.	Government should encourage the growth of SMEs by providing enabling environment, as well as eradicating corruption
	<i>Total Respondents</i>	120		

Source: Field Survey 2011

and in the east by Anambra State (Oviasuyi 2007). According to the National Population Census, the State has a population of 3,218,332 which is made up of 1,640,461 males and 1,577,871 females (NPC 2006).

In terms of availability of tertiary institutions in states of Nigeria, Edo State is one of the most blessed as it has 13 tertiary institutions made up of 5 Universities namely: (1) University of Benin, Benin City, (2) Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, (3) Igbinedion University, Okada, (4) Benson Idahosa University, Benin City and (5) Samuel Adegboye University, Owo. It has 4 polytechnics, namely: (1) Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, (2) Lighthouse Polytechnic, Abudu, (3) Usen Polytechnic, Usen and (4) Open Cast Polytechnic, Benin City. Furthermore, there are 4 Colleges of Education, namely: (1) College of Education, Ekiadolor, (2) College of Education, Igueben, (3) College of Agriculture, Iguoriakhi and (4) College of Agriculture, Agenebode. This presupposes that the State produces very high number of graduates every year on state basis in Nigeria, thereby increasing the number of unemployed graduates/youths yearly.

Ironically, the State Civil Service Commission Report for 2006 stated that a total number of 2,190 employees were on the payroll of the State Government in the core Ministries of the State. Furthermore, available statistics indicate that the entire public sector of Edo State has about 11,000 persons employed and on the payroll of the state government out of the population of 3,218,332 of the state. This represents only 0.34% of the entire population (Civil Service Commission Report 2006).

Edo State Government recently employed 400 graduates under the Edo-Youth Employment Scheme (Edo-YES). In the same vein, the State Governor recently noted and emphasized that the greatest weapon to fight crime and criminal activities was through employment. He also noted that there was no issue so important to government at all levels outside job creation, and urged the Local Government Council Chairmen to support the Youth Employment Scheme. Furthermore, he pointed out that the more number of unemployed youths are on the streets, the higher the involvement of youths in crime and criminal activities (Oshomole 2009).

Consequently, in line with the Governor's position on employment, the State Government recently invited applications for graduates'

employment into the State Civil Service. The Chairman of the State Civil Service Commission charged with the responsibility of actualizing the employment process, informed the people of the state that only 600 graduates will be employed, and that over 20,000 applications were received. From the Chairman's statement, we are of the view that employing only 600 representing 3% of the applicants is a far cry from the employment situation in the state.

Unemployment question in Edo State over the years has been a source of worry to many Edolites. The mass retrenchment of employees of the State Government in 2000 compounded the problem of unemployment in the State. Surprisingly, no government in the state has taken serious proactive step in solving this problem until recently when insignificant efforts were made to employ our graduates/youths.

Many of our unemployed female graduates/youths have taken to prostitution all in the bid to survive. Some of the boys have taken to smoking hard drugs to keep them active in criminal activities in order to put their bodies and souls together, and the saying "that an idle mind is the devil's workshop" has started telling on our graduates/youths.

Today, it is one kidnapping to another and these nefarious activities are carried out by these youths who are idle. Pocket pickers/armed robbers are also prevalent in the state. It is very painful to observe that some of these graduates/youths have turned hawkers of *gala*, sachet water, snacks, toilet rolls, groundnuts and so on in the streets of Benin City and other major cities of the Edo State. Also, it is most regrettable to note that some of these unemployed graduates/youths have taken various steps in helping themselves out of their precarious situation by at least getting a little pay through: commercial motorcycle transportation (with many of them dying daily in accidents), labourers at building site, thuggery, bus drivers, conductors, ticket sellers at various motor parks and so on. For how long can they continue in this hopeless situation?

## CONCLUSION

Unemployment is a cankerworm that has resulted in devastating effects on our nation. It is very disheartening to know that after 4-6 years of tertiary education, most times under very harsh

conditions, a graduate cannot pick up a job that would enable him get the basic amenities which would make life worthwhile for him/her, as it was in the 1960s up till the early 1980s. Unemployment has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation's economy. It has resulted in brain drain, militancy in the Niger Delta Region, kidnapping, thuggery, prostitution, armed robbery, suicide bombing, just to mention a few.

In view of the foregoing, how can we blame militant youths in the Niger Delta Region who were involved in blowing up oil installations? How can we begin to blame armed robbers on our highways? How can we begin to blame kidnapers who must survive? How can we even begin to blame young boys and girls who have decided not to go to school, but to diverse means for themselves to make ends meet, since it is now a slogan that after graduation from university there will be no job, as they are now reduced to the level of poverty qua poverty.

Solving the problem of "unemployment" in Nigeria in general and Edo State in particular will go a long way in reducing social vices plaguing the country today. The government must wake up to face the challenges of the power sector, security issues, as well as creating adequate and favourable working environment for investors to invest. Nigerians are very worried about the mass drifting of employers of labour who daily relocate outside of Nigeria because of what they call harsh environmental conditions for doing business, and the negative impact of this trend, is laying-off of staff who were hitherto employed by them, thereby compounding the unemployment rate in the country.

For example, in one year about 100 textile factories closed their shops, Michelin and Dunlop (the tyre manufacturing companies), and many other companies have closed their businesses in Nigeria and relocated to other African countries. Nigeria is no longer a productive state as its economy now provides jobs for outsiders and not the people at home. It has since exported many of its best hands to other countries; unemployment situation is so bad that university graduates stay at home for up to ten years unable to find a job. Education has become unattractive to many Nigerian youths.

Finally, it is our submission that if the monies looted by those in government were judiciously utilized in addition to the resolution of other

identified factors in fighting unemployment and infrastructural development, the state would not have been in its present bad situation today.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In providing solutions to the question of unemployment in Nigeria, Edo State in particular the following proactive measures are recommended for urgent implementation:

- (1) Development of varied industries in Edo State would diversify the country's sources of revenue, and effectively utilizing the abundant labour supply of the unemployed Nigerians. Poverty leads to alienation of poor people, therefore, effectively decreasing the number of Nigerians, especially rural residents living in poverty by creating varied industries in Nigeria, would revitalize the Nigerian economy by providing viable options to combat unemployment in Nigeria;
- (2) In order to reduce unemployment in Nigeria, innovative methods need to be used to successfully tackle it. Tackling unemployment requires development and implementation of programmes that will directly benefit those who are alienated financially;
- (3) Unemployment benefits should be made available to the teeming unemployed youths, unemployment benefits are a temporary relief from unemployment. It will serve as a strong support during the period of one's unemployment. It should be design in such a way that an individual can claim the unemployment benefits if he/she has also been forced to quit a job;
- (4) Government as a matter of fact should carefully analyze the causes of unemployment because the real solution to unemployment lies in analyzing its causes, and thereby providing solutions;
- (5) It is important that all undergraduates, graduates and unemployed youths swallow their pride and embrace jobs that are readily available since the government for now does not have unemployment benefits for the unemployed youths;
- (6) The power sector is a major catalyst of unemployment in Nigeria; therefore, until the issue of the power sector is resolved, the problem of unemployment will still be on the increase. Consequently, the Federal

Government should proactively tackle the issue of power in the country in order to stop the folding up of companies, especially cottage industries and their migration to other countries like Ghana;

- (7) Those unemployed in Nigeria/Edo State should come together to form an association, suggestively, an Association of Unemployed Graduates of Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Related Institutions (AUGNUPRI). Graduates doing casual job or un-gainfully employed or have nothing doing should affiliate themselves to this association with their respective training and ingenuity properly documented. This association could serve as the pressure group for the unemployed in Nigeria that would compare our bad leaders to provide employment for them. Nigeria's unemployed graduates/youths should learn to take the bull by the horn and by extension take their collective destinies in their own hands;
- (8) On the part of the Government at all levels, it should endeavour to revive the agricultural sector, which has the potentials for absorbing the teeming army of the unemployed Nigerians. The Eastern Region was famous in its production of palm oil in the 1960s, likewise the Western and Northern Regions for their cocoa and groundnut production respectively. We must think towards this direction in meeting the needs of unemployed youths in Edo State. Government should go beyond rhetoric, seminars and workshops, and tap our huge agricultural potentials by embarking on mechanized and commercial farming. Fortunately, we have enough arable land for food and cash crop farming, animal husbandry and water for fish farming;
- (9) Government should properly and urgently address the problem of insecurity in the country that is inimical to direct foreign investments;
- (10) To put the nation on an even keel, government must play the role of the midwife,

therefore, government must create a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and provide employment for the over-frustrated graduates/youths of Edo State.

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