

The Role of Politics, Policy, and Governance in Tackling Unemployment in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Politics, people-oriented policies, and good governance are the tripod on which sustainable economic activities and employment thrive. However, in the recent past, politics, a faceless sociological contraption that is devoid of emotion and conscience have swallowed up good governance and sound policies that would have tackled the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. It is on this premise that this paper examines policies, programmes and intervention agencies of the Nigerian government that were established to tackle unemployment. Recommendations were made based on the factors identified as being responsible for the failure of such policies and programmes.

Keywords: *Governance; Politics; Unemployment; Policy; Programmes.*

Introduction

Unemployment is one of the challenges that have not spared both developed and developing nations of the world, and Nigeria as a nation have had her fair share of it (unemployment) and its attendant challenges. Considering the rate of unemployment in the country (Nigeria), one is tempted to ask, if any deliberate step has been taken by past and the current government to tackle the issue of unemployment? If yes, then why is unemployment still staring at us in the face? What is the role of politics, policy, and governance in tackling unemployment? Was the triangular relationship between politics, policy and governance (leadership) stifled to the disadvantage of the teeming unemployed youths? Were government policies politicized to the detriment of the genuine needs of the unemployed youths? It is against this background that this paper will X-ray both past and present policies and programmes of the Nigerian government aimed at stamping out unemployment. In the light of the foregoing, it is pertinent to understand unemployment as a concept, causes of unemployment as well as the role of politics, policy and governance in tackling unemployment in Nigeria.

Unemployment according to Lawson (2006) is the state of joblessness experienced by persons who as members of the labour force perceive themselves and are perceived by others as being able and willing to work but cannot find any. The International Labour Organization (2000) defines the unemployed as numbers of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World bank, 2003).

Table 1: Unemployment rate in Nigeria from the year 2000-2012 (in percentage)

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
13.1	13.6	12.6	14.8	13.4	11.9	12.3	12.7	14.9	19.7	12.2	23.9	10.6

Source: www.tradingeconomics.com/ National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria

Table 2: Unemployment rate in Nigeria from the year 2013-2020 (in percentage)

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
10.0	9.7	9.9	13.3	17.46	23.1	----	33.3

Source: www.gfmag.com

Factors responsible for the unemployment in Nigeria

The high unemployment situation in Nigeria is real. Even the government (at all levels) has severally admitted to this fact at different fora (Akeredolu, 2010; Aganga, 2010; Agbaegbu, 2011) as cited in (Kayode, Samuel & Silas, 2014). It is pertinent to identify the factors responsible for unemployment in Nigeria because it will enable us to determine if the steps taken (policies, programmes and intervention agencies) by the Nigerian government were actually designed to solve the problem of unemployment or politics, as it were, mere lip-service.

(i) *Neglect of Agricultural sector:* Ojegbile (1986) in Lawanson (2006) revealed that the more cogent explanation of the growing rate of unemployment in Nigeria is the neglect of the agricultural sector, which could have provided gainful employment for job seekers.

(ii) *Irrelevant Economic Policies:* It has been discovered that a new and profound cause of unemployment also spanned from attempt to manage the economy with policy instruments that are irrelevant, ill-advised and more advanced than our stage of development. Curiously, these policy instruments are fashioned and insisted upon by some international organizations, notably, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The enforcement of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that was imposed upon Nigerian in 1986 is a typical example of such policies (Yesufu, 2000).

(iii) *Rapid Population Growth:* Going by the 2006 census in Nigeria, the nation's population was put at 140,431,790 and projections for the future indicate that the population could be over 180 million by the year 2020, given the annual growth rate of 3.2 percent (National Population commission, 2009). It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labour force, without corresponding increase in job opportunities (Uddin & Uddin, 2014).

(iv) *Mismatch of Curriculum to Societal Needs:* Some scholars and commentators have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigerian graduate is not employable and, therefore, does not possess the skills needed by the employers of labour for a formal employment. This is attributed to the Nigeria's education system, with its liberal bias. The course contents (curriculum) of most tertiary institutions in Nigeria are deficient in entrepreneurial skills development, thereby making graduates become job seekers instead of job creators.

The Role of Politics, Policy, and Governance in Tackling Unemployment Politics

Lasswell (1936), opined that politics is a process engaged by elected officials to determine "who gets what, when, where, and how. On the other hand, Marxist scholars perceive politics as an ideological struggle for power acquisition and distribution of resources. For Mao Zedong (1936) Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed. Unfortunately, Mao Zedong did not live long enough to see that in Nigeria, politics is war with bloodshed (Igho, 2006)

Policy: A policy could be seen as a course of action or a programme of actions, which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems

(Ikelegbe, 2006). Policies made by government are targeted at proffering solution to identified problems such as unemployment.

Governance: Governance is conceptualized as the processes and systems by which a government manages the resources of a society to address the socio-economic and political challenges in the polity. A good governance system is defined by its relationship to some key prerequisites, including accountability, transparency, participation, and predictability (Igbo, 2006). Politics has been defined as the struggle for power, authority and the resources within a polity while governance is seen as the judicious use of legitimate authority (government) to lead the people. On the other, policy is the vehicle through which people-oriented programmes (employment generation) are delivered to the governed. From the above definition of politics, it is evident that politics (especially in Nigeria) is more concerned about the processes that lead to the enthronement of politicians (leadership) and the strategies to perpetuate themselves in office, than tackling economic issues such as unemployment. If politics in Nigeria had human face, conscience and emotion, most of the factors that led to the failure of intervention agencies would have been averted.

The ability of government to create jobs and favourable economic climate for private businesses to thrive depends on the strength of the string that holds politics, policy, and governance together in a triangular relationship. In other words, politics, policy, and governance are the tripod on which sustainable economic activities (employment) thrives. However, in the recent past, politics, a faceless sociological contraption that is devoid of emotion and conscience have swallowed up good governance and sound policies that would have tackled the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. In other words, the over-bearing influence of politics have created a gulf between governance and the people, as such people-oriented policies and programmes that would have tackled the problem of unemployment actually got lost in transit.

The essence of leadership (governance) is to take the people from poverty to prosperity, ignorance to enlightenment (Agunowei, 2013). If this posture is the supposed responsibility of every reasonable and responsive government, then what happened to the Nigerian situation, that we are still finding it difficult to reduce unemployment to the barest minimum? It is the responsibility of the government to employ her teeming graduates (youths) to drive the government business (render essential services and generate revenue for the government) as well as create favourable economic climate for private businesses to excel, which is a panacea for employment generation. In a bid to live up to this social and moral responsibility, so many

policies and programmes have been enunciated by the Nigerian government to create jobs and also ensure that the economic atmosphere is conducive for private businesses to blossom. It is against the foregoing that both the military and democratically elected leaders of this nation came up with different policies and intervention agencies with a view to tackling unemployment. Amongst them are: Better for Life Rural Women, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU WIN), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) a subsidiary of SURE-P and most recently, N-POWER. The question is to what extent has these government policies and intervention agencies tackled the problem of unemployment? To answer this question, it is worthwhile to take a retrospective look at few government policies and intervention agencies established to tackle unemployment.

National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

This policy was enunciated in 1986 for the following purposes:

- a. To provide vocational skills development programme to secondary school leavers and graduates from tertiary institutions.
- b. Special public works programme.
- c. Small-scale Enterprises programme.
- d. Agricultural Employment programme

The policy was targeted at the youths in particular to provide skills for the unskilled with a view to enable the youths acquire vocation. According to Oyemoni (2003) the NDE trained more than two million unemployed and provided business training for not less than 40,000 Nigerians.

Despite the claim of success by the agency, for Samson and Sternly (2014), the programme is almost in comatose as it is not addressing youth employment and vocational skills. It is not doing enough to stem unemployment and enhance skill acquisition among youths. Many youths are not even aware of the policy as such are yet to take advantage of it.

National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS)

It was established in 2004 by former President Olusegun Obasajo's administration. It evolved from the standpoint of Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations to address human development problems. It was also on the basis of Nigeria's long-term goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation, eliminate corruption, enhance good

governance and value-orientation. All the efforts and purported machineries put into this policy were wasted as was a mere symbolic policy. It never functioned at any of the three levels of government meant to implement it (Samson & Sternly, 2014).

Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU WIN)

It is an innovative business plan competition aimed at job creation by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurial youth in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas. The accomplishments of the 1,200 **You WiN** Awardees were celebrated at the Presidential Villa on April 12, 2012. The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (You WiN!) is a collaboration of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication Technology (CT), the Ministry of Youth Development and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development aimed at launching an annual Business Plan Competition (BPC) for aspiring young entrepreneurs in Nigeria, in line with the Federal Government's drive to create more jobs for Nigerians.

Goal of the programme

The main objective of the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN!) was to generate jobs by encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurial youth in Nigeria to develop and execute business ideas that will lead to job creation. The programme was aimed at providing aspiring youth with a platform to showcase their business acumen, skills and aspirations to business leaders, investors, and mentors in Nigeria.

Specific objectives of the programme

The programme had the following objectives.

- i) Attract ideas and innovations from young entrepreneurial aspirants from Universities, Polytechnics, Technical colleges, and other post-Secondary institutions in Nigeria.
- ii) Provide a one-time Equity grant for 1,200 selected aspiring entrepreneurs to start or expand their business concepts and mitigate start up risks.
- iii) Generate 80,000 to 110,000 new jobs for currently unemployed Nigerian youth over the three years during which the three cycles will be implemented.

As of June 2016 a total of 18, 000 young entrepreneurs had been trained in management and business skills for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). About 3, 900 of the trainees, including 1, 200 women, were each given non-repayable take-off grants ranging from N1 million to a maximum of N10 million for businesses of their choice. The third edition of the programme, which

had 1,500 beneficiaries have received the sum of N11.2 billion in funding (Daily post, 28 June 2016).

Failure of Government Policies on Employment Generation Due to Politics without Emotion and Conscience

It is no exaggeration that we have witnessed the establishment of numerous intervention agencies with a view to tackling unemployment in Nigeria, yet the rate of unemployment is assuming frightening dimension in the midst of the numerous intervention agencies. It is against this background that we shall look at some political factors considered to be responsible for the failure of most policies and intervention agencies that were established to tackle unemployment.

Lack of Purposeful Leadership and Good Governance

There is a general agreement among political observers of Nigerian politics, especially in recent times that the nation has not been found wanting in terms of initiating good ideas towards enhancing the welfare of the citizens but lacks the political will to turn these ideas into concrete results. Asaju, Arome&Anyio (2014) affirms that hardly had any administration come on board without a virgin plan professionally packaged to ease the excruciating pains of the masses, although these plans are more active on papers.

Unfavourable Government Reforms

If the nation's social and economic system is malfunctioning, it calls for reform, but when economic reform is devoid of human face, the citizen's welfare will be jeopardized. For example, the public sector reforms embarked upon by the administration of former president Olusegun Obasanjo saw the disengagement of 121,731 workers from the Federal Public Service between 2006 and 2007. More so, it was disclosed that a total of 48,037 officers were severed from the civil service in the first year of Late President Yar'adua's administration (OSGF, 2008). NNPC alone pruned its work force from 17,000 down to just 9,000. One may ask if reform paradoxically means increasing unemployment.

Non-Inclusion of Beneficiaries in the Planning of Employment Policies

Inappropriate programme design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of such policies and programmes has been identified as one of the reasons for the failure of government policies on employment generation. (Aminu &Onimisi, 2014).

Lack of continuity of policy

The phenomenon is always occasioned by change of regime or administration. It has crippled programmes like Better Life for rural women amongst others. This wind of lack of continuity of policy also blew in the direction of YOU WIN and GIS-a subsidiary of SURE-P, not on account of abysmal performance but may not be unconnected with politics without emotion and conscience.

Politics of God-Fatherism

The poor performance of graduates in aptitude test conducted by various employers of labour is a pointer to the fact that our educational system is a contributing factor to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. In a bid to redress the trend, the government came up with various programmes to revamp and reposition the educational sector with a view to churning out employable graduates. Prominent among such programmes is the Universal Basic Education (UBE). But it is regrettable that the politics of god-fatherism have scuttled education at various strata of our society. Democracy could be said to be better as compared to the Military era before the fourth republic, but it has been characterized by godfatherism, politicking of core government policies and programmes vis-à-vis interest of the masses (Attah, Audu& Haruna, 2014). A typical example of how the politics of God-fatherism stamped education is evident in Oyo state. The administration of Rasheed Ladoja (2003-2007) as governor of Oyo State was disrupted by unlawful impeachment despite his achievement in the education sector that would have resulted in producing employable graduates. Below are some of his achievements:

- Introduced 30 student per class policy to decongest classrooms and raise the standard
- Increased the number of secondary schools to 920 from 34
- Cancelled automatic promotion for students in Public Schools
- Recruited 5000 NCE graduates as teachers for primary schools
- Recruited 1000 Non-teaching staff
- Recruited 1500 graduates as teachers for secondary schools
- Promoted more than 700 primary school teachers.
- Promoted over 400 teachers to the post of principals
- Embarked on massive reconstruction and renovation of classroom blocks in public schools
- Additional construction of 1200 six classroom blocks across the state
- Built millennium schools

- Purchase and distribution of vehicles to zonal and local inspectors of education across the state to strengthen quality control
- Purchase and distribution of books worth millions of naira to students in public schools
- Cleared 2 years arrears of leave bonus owed teachers by his predecessors, amounting to millions of naira
- Restored public confidence in public school system in Oyo state such that there was over half a million enrolment of students into 2,000 public primary schools
- Established a new College of Education at Lanlate
- Developed the infrastructure at Oyo State College of Education comparable to any University standard
- Devoted over 30% of the budget to education
- Introduced a system whereby teachers get their leave allowance at the month of resumption.

Conclusion

Tackling the problem of unemployment to a very large extent depends on the cordial relationship amongst politics, policy and governance. But a retrospective looks at the intervention agencies revealed that the overbearing influence of politics on good governance and policy have contributed in no small measure to the failure of most intervention agencies.

Recommendations

To stem the failure of public policies on employment generation in Nigeria, I humbly submit the following recommendations:

- i) Successive governments or administrations in the country should ensure that there is continuity in employment policies and programmes. Regime change should never be allowed to affect the continuation of public policies and programmes. This can be achieved through legislation.
- ii) Government agencies such as NCCE, NUC, NBTC should borrow a leaf from the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council by ensuring that entrepreneurship education is infused into the curriculum of higher institutions to equip our teeming graduates for job creation. Through this strategy our fresh graduates will create job opportunities for themselves instead of seeking for jobs after graduation.
- iii) Government should foster institutional framework to identify genuine farmers before the disbursement of agricultural loans and other incentives to avert diversion by politicians.

- iv) Census survey should be carried out in all the states of the federation to ascertain the reason behind the failure of government policies that were aimed at tackling unemployment in Nigeria.
- v) The unemployment nightmare has been traced to high population growth rate. There is therefore the need to intensify efforts on birth control policy to prevent the population from growing beyond the absorptive capacity of the economy. Future censuses should be depoliticized while vital registration statistics should become a more reliable source of demographic data in Nigeria.

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