

Changing the Narrative of Violent Conflict: Issues of Unemployment and Poverty among the Youth in Plateau State

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Abstract: *As a result of the exponential increase in unemployment and poverty afflicting Nigeria's youth age group, frustration and aggression are common occurrences among the nation's youth. This study focuses on the youths of Plateau State as it examines the socio-economic challenges restraining a flourishing future in Nigeria due to the prevalence of anomalies that have hindered socio-economic growth. Changing the narrative of violent conflict: issues of unemployment and poverty among the youths in Plateau State are examined, despite the impossible task of making a paradigm shift to change the problems that are ravaging and reducing the quality of life of the youths to frustration, aggression, violence, and a demeaning future. The case study will adopt the qualitative methodology. The article argues that the educational system in Nigeria, including Plateau State, is geared toward producing job seekers rather than job creators, which results in depleting human capital rather than being developed to combat unemployment and poverty, among other societal ills. As a result of the divergence theory, the politicisation of youth-related issues is becoming the norm. At the same time, sensitive matters connected to human capital development are primarily ignored by state authorities. This behaviour has exacerbated the state's precarious predicament. Consequently, a pragmatic bottom-up strategy for robust human capital development is urgently required. Again, combating corruption and indiscipline at all levels is of utmost importance and must begin with the fortification of institutions that would maximally punish or penalise political leaders. Anyone found wanting to serve as a future deterrent.*

Keywords: Unemployment, Poverty, Violent Conflict and Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

According to Dongkek and Okoye (2016), citing Shut (2005), paradoxically, Nigeria is the only country among the poorest in the world and one of the largest crude oil exporters. As a result of the exponential increase in unemployment and poverty afflicting Nigeria's youths, frustration and aggression have become a recurring decimal among the country's youths. A genuine struggle for survival against all odds and threats to a promising future has characterised human existence. It is an ongoing struggle and a sustained path to achieving human security and freedom, which in this context entails empowerment to overcome hunger, illiteracy, and idleness—the absence of these points to a difficult time that frequently leads to violent conflict.

When socioeconomic problems such as unemployment and poverty confront human society, and no deliberate efforts are made to confront these problems head-on, the developmental milestones of society are impeded. Olawunmi (2014), cited in Dung, Akaakohol and Akor (2014:305), observed the continuous upward trend in the statistics of unemployment since 2010 in Nigeria, with youth unemployment alone taking up to 50 percent in the country, therefore hampering sustainable development.

This situation is similar in Plateau State, where the expected developmental milestones are at a standstill. It may be the outcome of misplaced appointments of non-technocrats to sensitive offices that are baulk in driving effective policies with the consequences of a bleak future for the youths as against a tenable future of a sustainable path to development. It remains a matter of urgency to set appropriate policies to

address the continuous rise of unemployment and poverty among the youth in the State. It is imperative to adopt a different approach to reverse the previous and current template of handling unemployment and poverty in Nigeria and Plateau State, which has failed and has created a rather exacerbating situation. Intervention must be prompted and procedural with appropriate policy implementation to achieve a positive turnaround.

This research needs to answer the following questions;

- 1) Why is there an increase in unemployment and poverty statistics in Plateau State?
- 2) What template is needed different from the previous and current template to address unemployment and poverty in Plateau State?

This article will attempt to bring to the fore what may be different and has not been explored, which perhaps could be the solution to curb the ugly trend of unemployment and poverty that are the primary drivers of violent conflict in the state, even though this trend has since assumed a global dimension, especially in some developing countries. Ultimately, this research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the rising trends of unemployment and poverty in Plateau State.
- 2) To identify a practical working template different from the previous and current, thereby tackling unemployment and poverty in Plateau State thoughtfully.

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2. Theoretical Framework

The 'Frustration and Aggression' (F-A) theory of conflict by the proponents Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears is the proper foundation for this paper if the proverbs 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop' and a hungry man is an angry man' relating to unemployment, and poverty is true. The central hypothesis put forward in this realm by Dollard et al. (1939) holds that the manifestation of aggressive behaviour often presupposes the presence of frustration and, independently, that the existence of frustration often leads to some aggression. Pastore (1950) posed the question to the theory of whether human aggression is natural or innate. Frustration is thwarting a goal response, and a goal response is defined as the reinforcing culmination of an ongoing behaviour sequence. Occasionally, however, the term "frustration" is used to refer not only to the process of preventing an individual from achieving a goal but also to the individual's response to such an obstruction. This is the direction of this article's argument regarding the present condition of the youth in Plateau State, ravaged by the menace of unemployment and poverty with an upward trend that seems to have no end, which propels violent conflicts in the State recurrently.

This theory asserts that social difficulties such as unemployment and poverty degrade a person's psychological mind, resulting in hostility and any obstacles preventing a person from achieving a goal contributing to pent-up rage. The theory rests on two postulates: aggressive behaviour necessitates a certain level of frustration, and the presence of frustration accelerates aggressive behaviour to a predetermined level. This concept tends to justify aggressive behaviour, which explains why frustrated individuals become angry.

The level of dissatisfaction and the resulting hostility is dictated by a person's condition relative to the point at which a goal is denied or impeded. This concept explains the violent agitations, conflicts, and riots in the State of Plateau due to the use of youth as mercenaries in these pointless activities. This tendency toward violent conflict will degrade and deprive the next generation of a meaningful and peaceful existence if measures are not implemented to stop and reverse youth unemployment and poverty in the State.

3. Conceptual Clarification

a) Unemployment

It is not wrong to say that unemployment is one cardinal driving force to violent conflict, especially in Plateau State. It is the greatest endemic facing the Nigerian economy that has steadily risen over time. The total labour force in Nigeria comprises persons within the age bracket of 15-64 years, excluding students, homekeepers, retired persons or those not interested. Unemployed refers to people willing and capable of working in good health but need help finding suitable paid employment. The classical school of thought, which provides the earliest thought on economic issues, gave a central point of reflection on the undesirability of unemployment. The Keynesian revolution of the 1930s and subsequent modern contributions, which commanded the explosive attack on economic orthodoxy, hold

unemployment as a central issue of great concern. On the other hand, in line with the path of the early philosophers and economists, they expressed severe worry over the threat of the monster called unemployment, poverty and the like.

The population of every economy is divided into two categories: the economically active and the economically inactive. The economically active population (labour force) or working population refers to the population that is willing and able to work, including those in positions of good health and actively engaged in the production of goods and services (employed) and those who are unemployed (Njoku & Okezie, 2011). On the other hand, the economically inactive population are people who are neither working nor looking for jobs.

There seems to be a consensus on the definition of unemployment, keeping in mind the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of unemployed as numbers of the economically capable and active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including those people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998:63). Examples of excluded faction include homemakers, non-paid self-employed, full-time students and invalids, those below the legal age for work, old and retired persons. However, the workability of this definition across countries has been faulted, especially for comparison and policy formulation, as countries' characteristics are different in their commitment to resolving unemployment problems, especially in developing countries (Akintoye, 2008).

b) Poverty

The inability of people to acquire the basic needs of life is likened to the state of being poor. Poverty has no simple concept definition. Several disciplinary approaches and ideologies have been offered in this regard. The dominant Western definition since World War II defines poverty from a monetary perspective, using income or consumption levels to measure poverty and defining the poor by a headcount of those who fall below a given income/consumption level or poverty line (Grusky & Kanbur, 2006). However, this economic definition has been complemented in recent years by other approaches that define poverty in a more multidimensional way. According to the 2012 UNDP Human Development Report, nearly half of sub-Saharan Africans live in poverty (UNDP, 2012).

Poverty is still seen and considered in several aspects; it is a real social phenomenon showing more of the consequences of a lack of income than the lack of income (Ferragina et al., 2016).

Even though predicted poverty reduction scenarios vary greatly depending upon the rate and nature of poverty vis-a-vis policies, the evidence suggests that poverty's depth and severity are still at their worst in Nigeria and beyond (Okunmadewa et al., 2005). Poverty is largely a rural phenomenon, with an average of 62 and 75 percent of the population living on less than a dollar a day, and also tends to be more in-depth than urban poverty in developing countries (Apata et al., 2010). Besides, it has become increasingly evident that within the African region, the poor

often are regarded as alien and that some element of dynamics does exist with a clear distinction between chronic and transitory poverty (Barret et al., 2000).

c) Violent Conflict

Any assault or harm inflicted against a person or group of people by another person or group, thereby undermining the wellbeing of the victim(s), is said to be a violent conflict. Conflict involves actions which may be 'violent or destructive' (Mayer, 2000).

West Africa has been grappling with numerous violent conflicts, civil strife and wars for decades; however, the periods between the 1980s to the new millennium witnessed more violence and protracted conflicts of different magnitude, which destabilised many of its economies (Aning & Bah, 2009; UNSC Report, 2011). This scenario has bedevilled Plateau State for over two decades.

Though conflicts are not always violent, those that have plagued West Africa at community, state and regional levels have been characterised by violence (Afisi, 2009, pp. 59–66). Although conflict may be neutral (positive or negative), the dimension of conflicts that have ruined some communities in the Plateau State is characterised by violence.

d) Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is relatively new but gained prominence from the Brundtland Commission of 1987. It is defined in various terms, but the frequently used definition is from '*Our Common Future*', also known as the Brundtland Report: Sustainable development is that development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In view of the sustainable development theory, the environment is the resource that has to be utilised with consideration, keeping in mind the definition of the concept, which means that if the present generation exhausts the resource without taking into cognisance the welfare of the future, it then means that the society will subsequently be impoverished by not having the available resource to lean on, (Dung et al., 2014, pp. 297-298).

Sustainability is implicitly assumed as the foundation for today's leading global framework for international cooperation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the United Nations (UN) declaration of the 17 SDGs with specific targets to achieve by 2030. The goals and targets are universal, implying that all countries worldwide are involved, not just developing countries. Reaching the goals requires action in all possible ways; governments, businesses, civil societies, nongovernmental organisations, and people everywhere all have a role.

Unemployment, Poverty and Policy Development of Plateau State Government

Every human society is a product of its activities and the chosen decision of what to do, including the pattern of leadership it pursues. Plateau State is sizable with substantial human capital, natural resources, and arable land with excellent and favourable weather and climate. However, the

State is wallowing in increasing poverty and idleness. Adejumo and Adejumo (2014) argued that development within a State involves a physical reality and a state of mind. For any society to ensure meaningful development in the society, there must be a sustained relationship between social, economic, and institutional processes to meet the needs and demands of the population as well as the mutual benefit from the natural resources within the State.

The state of poverty in Plateau is quite disturbing. Quantitative and qualitative measurements attest to the increasing prevalence and severity of poverty in the nation (Okunmadewa et al., 2005). This dreaded situation, however, presents a paradox, considering that the State is endowed with vast human and physical resources. Even more disturbing is that despite the enormous human and material resources that successive governments and regimes have devoted to reducing poverty, remarkable progress is stalled in this direction.

Over the years, the State has developed novel ideas to address poverty and unemployment. These ideas were expected to initiate sustainable development and restore human dignity. One of the recent initiatives is the partnership with a German-based organisation on their GIZ-SEDIN Programme aimed at improving the employment and income situation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). These efforts may have yet to meet their expected impact on the majority of the youth on the Plateau. Despite various government-initiated attempts to develop programmes, many youths do not readily respond to the tailored programmes, which are self-employment and vocational training opportunities offered by governmental and non-governmental agencies. The lack of response is because these opportunities often need to meet their aspirations, goals and expectations.

Plateau State has also benefitted from National Development Plans of the country like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986 to provide financing, training and guidance for unemployed youth and Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2002 to address the problems of rising unemployment in society, boost the economy productiveness and ensure that Nigerians are provided with steady sources of income, quality education and water. The Millennium Development Goals (2000), amongst other goals, was primarily to reduce by half the number of people living below USD 1 per day.

Scholars like Anger (2010), Oshelowo (2011), Banwo and Oluranti (2013), Adejumo and Adejumo (2014) observed that these national development initiatives had a negligible effect at the state and national level and had not facilitated the developmental goals for which they were meant to achieve. For instance, despite the numerous development initiatives, there has been a steady increase in poverty, unemployment, corruption and lopsided income. The NBS Survey Report (2014) submitted that out of the 2,084,700 labour force population of Plateau State, 620,815 constituted the unemployment rate. The achievement of this goal is faulted for not achieving the desired result because of the many unemployed/underemployed below the poverty line.

The irony remains that the poorest people in any given population are the most affected by the high price of food, lack of basic needs, and economic crises. The policy position of the State is weak and ineffective, especially when the pledge of “live no one behind,” a commitment to end extreme poverty in all its forms, seems to have no place in the policy projection of the State. There must be a deliberate effort to ensure that socio-economic policies are designed to bring on board the youth and less privileged to cushion the effects of these socio-economic ills and offer a new beginning of hope and prosperity.

However, the challenges to effective and impactful policy formulation and implementation, according to scholars

(Alabi & Ojor, 2011; Cyprian et al., 2013, p. 509; and Terugwa and Akwen, 2014:115), are a result of corruption, inadequate database, policy inconsistency, inadequate coordination of programme and insincerity in governance. These may be the apparent challenge of Plateau State as it relates to its inability to curb the increasing rate of poverty and unemployment.

A typical illustration of the number of unemployment and underemployment in Plateau State is the 2020 4th quarter Labour Force Statistics on Unemployment and Under Employment Report is shown below:

Number of Labour Force (As at 4 th Q 2020) - 1,284,574			
Work 40 Hrs+ per week	Work 20 -39 Hrs per week	Work 1-19 Hrs per week	Work 0 Hr per week (Did Nothing)
607,157	335,864	187,381	154,172
Fully Employed	Under-employed	Unemployed	

Source: Labour Force Statistics, Unemployment and Underemployment by state - Q4 2020

The labour force population covers all persons aged 15 to 64 years willing and able to work regardless of whether they have a job. The definition of unemployment, therefore, covers persons (aged 15–64) who were available for work during the reference period, actively seeking work but were without work. Accordingly, one is unemployed if he/she did nothing at all or did something but for less than 20 hours during the reference week.

Violent Conflicts *vis-a-vis* Rising Unemployment and Poverty in Plateau State

In their submission, Joshua and Jegede (2013) state that for over a decade, violent conflict has been a circle of events in Plateau State, and over 4,000 people have been brutally killed in Jos and other surrounding cities and villages in Plateau State. These situations often become challenging and worrisome with little or no effort to address them by those concerned, such as the political, traditional, and religious leaders and responsible agencies. One may wonder why these threatening issues to human life, such as violent conflicts, remain a frequent occurrence at short intervals in the State. The violence that has over the years erupted in various parts of the State hosts several issues into play, but often are being politicised (Lamle and Audu et al., (ed.) 2014:100).

The high level of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment among the youth has become a decisive factor in the outbreak of violent conflicts, not restricted to Plateau alone but Nigeria as a whole (Onuoha et al., 2010). Careful observation has shown that where there is frequent violent conflict, there is usually a high level of unemployment/underemployment and poverty that perhaps assumes a pattern of escalation, which signals a threat to human futuristic priority.

The article by Marks (2016), citing Goodhand (2001), explains that poverty and conflict are closely interconnected, with poverty making societies more prone to civil dispute and armed conflict, weakening governance and economic performance, thus increasing the risk of conflict relapse. Often, poverty can lower resilience to conflict by weakening

government institutions, stripping capacity for public goods provision, and limiting the projection of power and authority, whether soft or coercive. Poverty also compounds vulnerability to insurgency at the individual and community level by lowering the opportunity cost of mobilising for violence. High rates of unemployment and inequality, combined with low levels of education and development, are thought to soften the ground for recruitment and provide motives to fight (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008). These individual correlates of poverty often follow systematic patterns that lead to ‘horizontal inequalities’. Horizontal inequalities occur when members of ethnic, religious, or other identity groups have unequal access to public goods, opportunities and resources. Group-level inequalities can generate social and economic polarisation that increases the risk of violent conflict (Østby, 2008; Stewart, 2009). Noting the existence of violent conflict in a society, two significant schools of thought, among others, argued that local factors accounted for violence being the root cause. On the other hand, lack of adequate economic growth and governance deficit are also potent causes (Lamle, 2015, p. 65).

Growth and Development in Plateau State: The Missing Link

Sustainable human capital is an inclusive and holistic framework anchored on human development. The GDP per capita indicator compares countries' poverty level and measures poverty from year to year within the same country. It is calculated by dividing a country's GDP indicator by the number of inhabitants. If the wealth of the country's 10% of the wealthiest inhabitants increases, the GDP rises, and therefore, the indicator will rise. However, in reality, there may be no significant improvement to the situation of the country's poorest people.

It may not be wrong for Dudley Seers, as cited in Otaha (2010:93), to pose some questions about the situation of a country's development:

What has been happening to poverty?

What has been happening to unemployment?

What has been happening to inequality?

Furthermore, if all the three have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, it is a period of development for that country. On the other hand, if one or two of these problems have been worsening, especially if all three have, then it is strange to call the situation development, even if the per capita income doubles. It means that actual development happens when poverty is reduced or eliminated, unemployment declines, and the levels of inequality are reduced. Of course, reducing these three development indicators will undoubtedly increase citizens' well-being and quality of life. It implies that for human development to occur, some or even all of these social ills must be dealt with considerably. In light of this, the lack of available opportunities and the high unemployment rate, especially among the youths in Jos and Nigeria, have exacerbated tensions (ICG, 2012).

The implementation plan for growth and development in Plateau State is designed to be lopsided, with the scheme of 'unbalanced development'. Developing a radical youth-target development model to address the 'unbalanced development theory' that will later transform into a ladder for other sectoral and age-brackets development is imperative. The immediate focus should be on the youth of the Plateau State because, in this perspective, they remain the active tool for violent conflict if left in this undeveloped situation. However, otherwise, the future stability of building a peaceful State and country with sustainable development is assured.

A paradigm shift in tackling unemployment and poverty in plateau state

The quest for sustainable development is not without its challenges; this explains why over some decades, nations and some responsive organisations across the globe have pushed to reference and monitor their closeness to what they see as sustainability, Dung, Akaakohol and Akor (2014). Several factors are inhibiting human capital formation among Plateau State youth, primarily corruption, indiscipline, poverty and unemployment. Human capital is a component of development that includes various indices such as knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training and retraining and so on endowed by a country's population. It has been dubbed in this regard a cornerstone which all spheres of development anchored on social, economic, and technological (Ifejika, 2017).

The previous and current templates for addressing unemployment and poverty in Plateau State have by no means proven to be tenable to practically fix the socio-economic needs and welfare of the youth in Plateau State, judging from the trend. The template has not met the mark for creating the path for sustainable growth that will trigger a continuous drop in unemployment and poverty. Most policies aimed at tackling unemployment and poverty in the State have adopted the top-bottom approach instead of a bottom-up one. In cases where it attempts to be bottom-up, it is geared to address a selective system instead of a youth-inclusive and participatory one.

The State's educational system has worsened poverty and employment because the system is designed towards creating mere job seekers rather than job creators, such that human

capital is downgraded and drained instead of built to address unemployment and poverty, among other social vices. The quality of education has deteriorated with no genuine commitment to revamping the educational system in the State. Unemployment among the youth cannot be viewed as an isolated problem. There must be a nexus between educational curricula and job market requirements. This effort will align with the submission of some advocates of human capital, like Harbison (1973), that assert quality education to mean the totality of energies, skills, and knowledge, which are potentially applied to producing goods and services.

Government and policymakers must ensure that policies are in place to ensure equal access to social amenities, equal distribution of infrastructure, equal benefit of natural resources, and implementation of programmes to improve human capital development. A concerted effort must ensure ease of doing business to encourage investors to invest in the State, thereby creating meaningful job opportunities to absorb the unemployed youth.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The existence of unemployment and poverty often propels violent conflict. The situation in Plateau State is worrisome and pathetic. It is fair to fault the government as it has failed to curb the devastating rise in poverty and unemployment. The teeming youth and graduands in the State keep increasing geometrically with minimal employment opportunities. The social welfare and development index keeps degenerating, an unfortunate development but a reality Plateau State must address.

The system of educational curricula, bad governance, and unpatriotic behaviour of residents contribute to exacerbating the unpleasant scenario of unemployment and poverty. Again, revisiting the educational curriculum by redesigning it in such a manner that aids human capital development skills acquisition and attaching a high value to practical, instead of the previous and current curricular that turns out theory graduands and job dependents in Plateau state.

Developing human capital is the project of building peace that translates directly to tackling unemployment and poverty. It must accompany indices that checkmate ill policy framework, deficit governance, and indiscipline at all levels, alongside shifting priority to a bottom-up approach to empower and equip the grassroots. This effort will go a long way in decongesting township and state capital, thereby improving rural life.

The aspirations of the youth need to be recognised and echoed in policies and programmes instead of merely paying lip service to the potential of youth. Genuine effort is needed to understand youth aspirations and concerns and ensure their participation and leadership in community and national policy-making and development.

Hence, the paradigm shift in changing the narratives of violent conflicts by eliminating unemployment and poverty to radically reduce these socio-economic ills to the barest

minimum through a herculean task achievable in the State must be prioritised.

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