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YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is very serious and intractable socio-economic problem that has engulfed Nigeria. The work examined the problem of youth unemployment and its numerous effects on the Nigerian society. It identified the causes of youth unemployment and appraised various strategies used by various administrations to compact this social monster. The work adopted both descriptive and historical methods and relied on secondary data in assessing this social phenomenon. Findings revealed that the cosmetic strategies such as NDE and SURE-P programmes used by the government could not solve the problem of youth unemployment in the country. It is the view of this work that unemployment in Nigeria will persist if Nigerian government and youths insist on relying on strategies and devises applied in the western world to eliminate youth unemployment. It is recommended that youth unemployment in Nigeria can be eliminated by the youths themselves through a psychological revolution. It offers a broad proposal on how the revolution can be brought about without a gunshot. This includes disengaging themselves from and abandoning the imperialistic cosmology of the western world.

Keywords: *Youths, unemployment, strategies, revolution*

Introduction

For quite sometimes now youth unemployment has been a matter of social concern to both individuals and government of Nigeria. A person is considered to be youth in Nigeria if such a person is between the ages of 15 and 30 years. Available record from National Bureau of Statistics shows that Nigeria has a very large youth population. With youths aged between 15 and 24 making up to about 64 million of Nigeria's

population, Nigeria is considered one of the 10 year youngest countries in Africa. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) put the percentage of unemployed youths in Nigeria between 60 and 80 per cent (Nation 2016). The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2016) puts the rate of unemployment for youths ages 15 -34 at 12.1 per cent and underemployment at 19.1 per cent for the first quarter of 2016. Granted, where there were employments for such number of youths it would have been an asset to the nation. However, the records have shown that majority of youths in Nigeria are unemployed and this has created dangerous condition for the nation. While there are many other reasons that have contributed to insecurity in Nigeria, it is not wrong to infer that unemployment among youths in the country constitutes irreprehensible part of this.

The problem of unemployment in Nigeria is not a recent occurrence but a cumulative one ranging over many decades. Not even the outrageous profits from oil boom years which enhanced the nation's financial status had been able to cushion to significant level the effect of unemployment in the country. Various administrations in Nigeria had made several attempts aimed at reducing the unemployment rate through the adoption of several strategies but none of them had been able to create significant impact on combating this social phenomenon. The work examined why the problem of youth unemployment persists despite all the efforts made by various administration to reduce it.

The Conceptual Issues

Unemployment or joblessness occurs when people who are able and willing to work is unable to find employment. The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2007) 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, 1998). Concurring with the World Bank, Adebayo (1999) opines that unemployment exists when members of the labor force wish to work but cannot get jobs. Deducing from these definitions, youths unemployment, occurs when youths with diverse background who are willing and able to work cannot find employment. When the supply of labour among youths outstrips the demand for labour, it causes joblessness and youth unemployment. Available records show that youths unemployment is very high in Nigeria and at times assume alarming rate. For instance Central Bank of Nigeria in its official report claims that between 60 and 80 per cent of Nigerian youths aging between 15 and 34 years are without employment. Unemployment among youths has resulted in high crime rate in the

country such as kidnapping, thuggery, armed robbery, stealing, and other anti social vices.

Many types of unemployment have been identified by Miller (1999) and O'Sullivan and Sheffrin (2003). These are frictional, seasonal, cyclical, structural and disguised unemployment. Frictional unemployment occurs when a person is not really willing to do any job that is available but look for a job that matches his qualification, test or status. In this regard the jobs are readily available but the unemployed does not have a desire to do such job since it is not up to his test or does not match his qualification. Seasonal unemployment is a jobless situation created by periodical circumstances. When one who once worked is rendered jobless due to the fact that the work is available only on seasonal basis such person is affected by seasonal unemployment (Miller, 1999). For example, in Nigeria those employed to work in the farms are always disengaged during rainy season only to be re-engaged during harvest season. In other words, just as they are enjoying seasonal employment, they also suffer from seasonal unemployment.

Cyclical unemployment happens due to economic conditions such as economic recession. When such happens, the most affected are those who had already worked but are laid off due to inability of the firms which employed them to cope with the present economic condition (Sullivan and Sheffrin, 2003). For instance in Nigeria due to political and economic conditions of the nation many workers were laid off by both public and private firms including multinational companies such as Exxon Mobil multinational Company. Those who lost their job and become jobless in such circumstance are affected by the cyclical unemployment. When people with skills could not get job due to the fact that such skills are outdated because of new innovation or any other similar circumstances such people are said to be under structural unemployment. For example with invention of computer many people who were typists and were familiar with the use of typewriter who could not operate computer were relieved of their jobs. Such companies did no more have needs for typists but for computer operators. In such cases those who could not cope with the new technology were rendered jobless. Disguised or hidden, unemployment is the unemployment of potential workers that is not reflected in official unemployment statistics, due to the way the statistics are collected. Youths in Nigeria are affected by all these forms of unemployment (Jhingan, 2012).

Theoretical Bearing

Unemployment in Nigeria is explained within the context of theory of Surplus Value (Bhatia 1981). According to Karl Marx, unemployment is inherent within the unstable capitalist system where periodic crises of mass unemployment are to be expected. The function of the proletariat within the capitalist system is to provide a "reserve army of labour" that creates downward pressure on wages. This is accomplished by dividing the proletariat into surplus labour (employees) and under-employment (unemployed). This reserves army of labour fight among themselves for scarce jobs at lower and lower wages (Jhingan 2012). At first glance, unemployment seems inefficient since unemployed workers do not increase profits. However, unemployment is profitable within the global capitalist system because unemployment lowers wages which are costs from the perspective of the owners. From this perspective low wages benefit the system by reducing economic rents. Yet, it does not benefit workers. Capitalist systems unfairly manipulate the market for labour by perpetuating unemployment which lowers labourers' demands for fair wages. Workers are pitted against one another at the service of increasing profits for owners. This theory is relevant to this work in view of the fact that the system operators in Nigeria are all core capitalists who are not only benefiting from condition of unemployment since such condition creates downward pressure on wages but do everything to perpetuate it for their businesses to thrive.

Youth Unemployment: The Nigerian Situation

Akande (2013) observed that, in terms of age, younger youth struggle even more to find jobs: He asserted that at least two-thirds of unemployed youth are between 15 and 24 years of age. And, in terms of gender, available statistics show that a majority of unemployed youth are female. As shown in Table 1, women accounted for more than 50 percent of unemployed youth between 2008 and 2012. Analysis of youth unemployment by NISER (2013) indicates that youth unemployment is mostly in rural areas and rapidly growing: From 2010 to 2011, the share of unemployed youth in rural areas increased from 47.59 percent to 59.95 percent. The population of unemployed youth in rural areas rose from 2.9 million in 2008 to about 5.9 million in 2012.

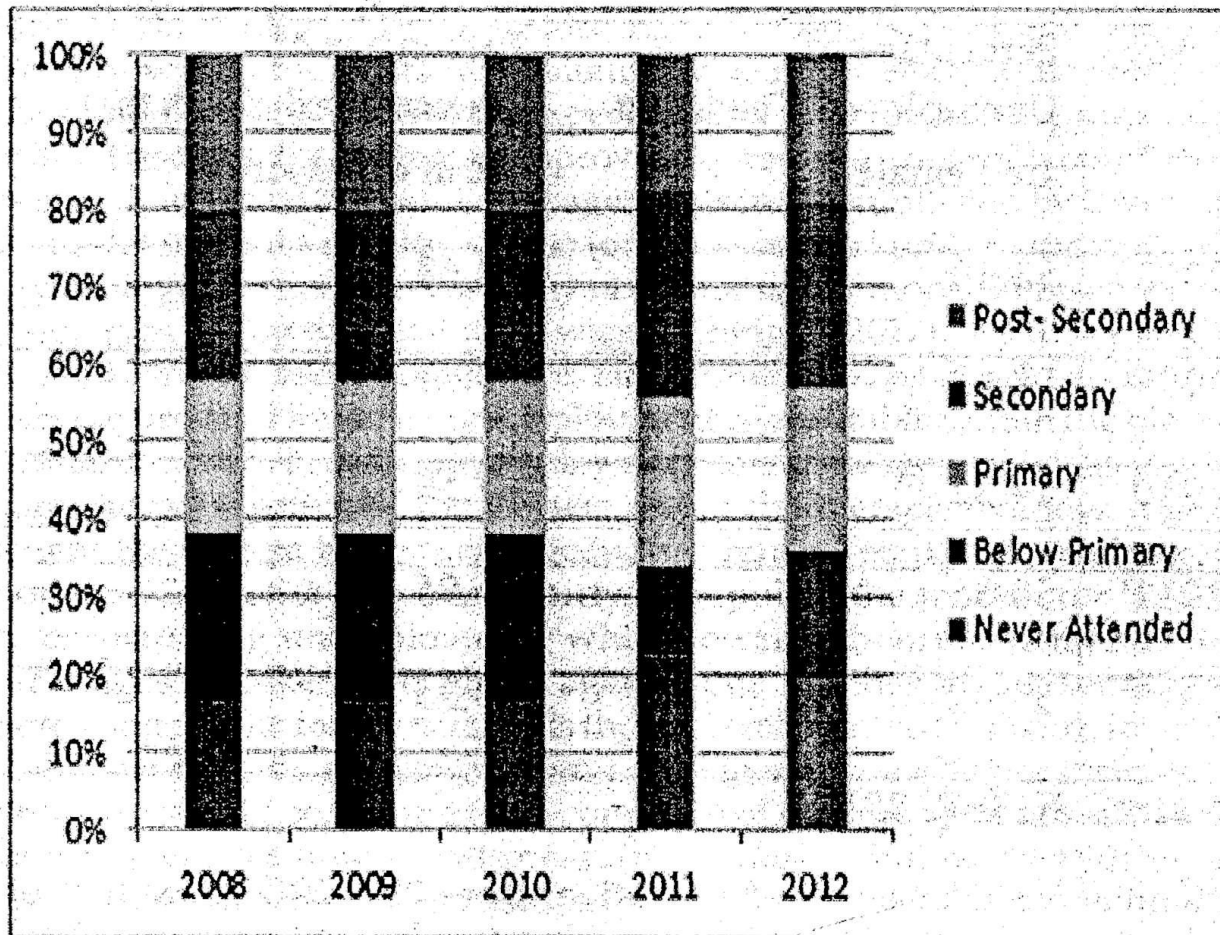
Table 1: National Youth Unemployment Figures by Gender and Geography, 2008-2012.

Year	Percentage of Unemployed Youth that are Female	Percentage of Unemployed Youth that are in Rural Areas
2008	58.50	54.68
2009	57.82	50.77
2010	54.52	47.59
2011	50.85	59.95
2012	55.42	53.25

Source: NISER, 2013

In similar vein, in terms of education, from 2008-2012, over half of unemployed youth did not have an education beyond primary school (see Figure 1). This particular group has consistently accounted for over 50 percent of all unemployed youth. However, graduates of tertiary institutions also seem to be badly hit by unemployment too – making up about 20 percent of youth unemployment and often remaining unemployed for upward of five years after graduation (NISER, 2013).

Figure 1: National Youth Unemployment Figures (15-34 years) by Education, 2008-2012



Source: NISER, 2013

From the above analysis, it is observed that, the situation is tragic in more ways than one. To start with, the number of people that are employed is by far too small. Short of the application of automation and cybernetics to the means and processes of production, distribution, and service, percentage engaged in employment cannot produce enough to make life comfortable in the nation, not to talk about making the nation attain self-sufficiency. There is no wonder that life is as difficult as it is in the country.

For another, youth is the age for active service and maximum productivity. Young people are energetic and powerful. They have tremendous capacity for endurance, hard work, and alacrity. An economy which does not absorb the youths looks against itself a source of invigorating and stimulating energy. It burdens itself by having inevitably to support these citizens who, though well and able, lack the opportunity to make positive supportive input into the system. This is what is happening in Nigeria. Youth unemployment retards

development and systematic efficiency in the country. It entrenches conservatism and stagnation. Psychologically, unemployment abnegates human existence. It provokes a frustrating feeling of wasting away and the worthlessness of life. That is why unemployed youths occasionally commit suicide. Unemployment demoralizes the individual with a dampening effort on his sense of patriotism and nationalism. Herein lies one explanation for government's concern about youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Causes of Unemployment in Nigeria

Studies by Okafor (2011), Akande (2013), Asaju et al, (2014) and Iwayemi, (2014) reveal that unemployment in Nigeria is caused by many factors. Okafor (2011) identified the rapid population growth as a major cause of unemployment. 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). With this population, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa. It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labor force, which is far outstripping the supply of jobs. Unemployment in Nigeria is equally attributed to ineptitude, corruption, fraud and general failure of leadership (www.onlineresearchjournals.com). The collaboration of the political elites, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from the oil sale in the last 50 years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the unemployed in various sectors of the economy (Okafor 2011). Achebe (1983) in one of the findings in his book "The Trouble with Nigeria, emphasized that the cult of corruption formed by the ruling class, and their insatiable quest to loot the national treasury has sailed the nation into the ocean of economic confusion and unemployment. In his observation, it is true that a Nigeria free from corrupt rulers would be Nigeria freed from unemployment.

The growing rate of unemployment in Nigeria is equally attributed to government lackadaisical attitude toward encouragement and development of indigenous technology. Nigerian government is not sincere in its propaganda for the consumption of locally made goods since government or its officials have not patronized the products of the local craftsmen and indigenous traditional industries. Such attitude discourages indigenous technology and generality of people because people see government as a major source of opinion or opinion

leader as well as attitude builder. The outdated school curricula and lack of employable skills are other major factors for unemployment in Nigeria. Given the general economic condition of the country and the style of funding educational institutions and programmes resulting therefrom, the country is still far away from the achievement of an appreciable level of skill development which the national education policy contemplate. This has resulted in a situation where most graduate from Nigerian educational system lack skill and proficiency required for employment.

Youth unemployment according to Akande (2013) is also caused by lack of vibrant industries that could absorb youths on their graduation (www.brookings.edu). Some industries are forced to closed down because of unfriendly economic conditions such as lack of basic amenities, the activities of militants and insurgents as well as economic recession. The close down of some industries in itself has deprived the youths of the affected areas of simple macro-economic multiplier effects which were also sources of employment. This condition has made public service the only reliable source of employment in the country. Besides, industrial sector in Nigeria is heavily dependent on external sources for raw materials, such dependent on external sources lead to the closure of industries with serious economic consequences wherever the nation's capacity to import is impaired. Another cause of unemployment in Nigeria is high cost of governance which is adjudged to be one of the most expensive in the world. It is confirmed that from 1999 till date, Nigeria has had recurrent expenditures budgets far outweighing capital expenditures. Thus Anyanwu (2009) could lament that while less than one million Nigerians, comprising the Armed Forces, public and civil servants, and government machineries are steadily shown access to about eighty percent of Nigeria's gross earnings annually, other over 140 million citizens are made to battle for pittances. Surprisingly, the same 17,500 Nigerian Project managers and their employees turn round to dip their hands into the twenty percent wealth, grudgingly left for over 140 million Nigerians, through the instrumentality of loot and plunder. This explains why there is no fund for creation of jobs for the unemployed.

There is also dearth of up-to-date and comprehensive data about employment issues. For instance this researcher was to engage in endless bureaucratic procedures before any information about unemployment could be given to him by the agencies responsible for it. Another reason might be that policymakers have had to confront inadequate information and data that can form the basis of effective planning. As reported in other studies (Asaju et al. 2014 and Iwayemi, 2014), employment data are very hard to obtain, even from statutory

institutions and agencies established for gathering socio-economic data. Where unemployment registers exist at all, they are limited to urban areas, and, in fact, not all those searching for employment attempt to register. In the absence of such data, according to these authors, policymakers tend to rely on cross-sectional household surveys, which are often inconsistent and full of errors. This lack of data makes it difficult for policymakers to understand the nature of the employment challenge and make informed decisions on how to support young people in the labor market. The scarcity of data on informal employment and entrepreneurship in particular is a major obstacle, given the importance of this sector for youth employment.

Government Efforts to Arrest Youth Unemployment

The establishment of the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) demonstrates the federal government concern about and the desire to solve the problem of youth unemployment in the country. Other establishments like the Directorate for Social Mobilization and the People's Bank did participate in the war against unemployment. The SURE-P is recent effort to provide job opportunities to graduates of tertiary institutions. It is more or less a whole range of activities and programmatic schemes, including the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Community Services Scheme (CSS), Vocational Training Scheme (VTS), and Community Services, Women and Youth Empowerment (CSWYE), among others. The most concentrated and frontal attack on the problem of unemployment, however, comes from the National Directorate for Employment (N.D.E.). Before one begins to hope against hope on these programmes, it is necessary to take a second look at the strategies vis-à-vis the target problem. The objective of NDE was to promptly and effectively fight unemployment by designing and implementing innovative programmes, which are directed towards the provision of training opportunities through the guidance and management support services to graduate farmers and small scale entrepreneurs. This Directorate which has an office in each state, runs several programmes calculated to solve the problem of unemployment among the nation's youths or reduce the hardship caused by same. Four of these programmes deserve attention here. There is a Youth Employment and Vocational Skills programme. Under this programme young persons are trained in marketable skills, placed in employment, or given loans to establish their business.

Another programme is the Special public Works Programme. In this scheme, the N.D.E. employs graduates as well as School certificate or G.C.E. holders and deploys them to serve in Local Government Areas of

the State. Initially, the Directorate paid them a stipend of N200.00 for graduates and N150.00 for school certificate and G.C.E. holders. The amounts are, however, increased from time to time. The beneficiaries pick regular employments when and as they become available. A third scheme is the Agricultural Programme. There are two plans under this arrangement. The first schedule caters for degree and H.N.D. holders in agriculture. At initial stage, qualified youths who were interested in this programme were given loans up to a maximum of N15, 000.00 to establish and run their own farms. The second plan is the School Leavers Participant variation. In this programme, West African School certificate and G.C.E. holders are recruited and trained for two years at N.D.E farms. At the end of this training, they are given loans up to a maximum of N6, 000.00 to set up their own farms. The amounts are increased periodically.

A fourth plan is the Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Programme. Graduates and people who have retired from service are the main target of this scheme. N.D.E. officials contact young graduates at their National Youth Service Corpse orientation camps. Those who are interested in the scheme write the feasibility studies of their proposed business and send them to the N.D.E. office in Lagos. Loans totaling up to a maximum of about N50, 000.00, in the case of graduates and N200, 000.00 in the case of retired persons, are granted to successful applicants to finance their projects. The amounts are readjusted from time to time.

Government's Efforts So Far

So far between 2008 and 2011, the records from NDE (2010) shows that two million six hundred and twenty five thousand and sixty nine (2,625,069) persons had benefited from the programme. Similarly, about 50,000 graduates according to Akande (2013) were selected for the first phase of the GIS scheme out of some 85,000 applicants and a total of 123,049 have so far benefited from the programme, whereas about the same period from 2008 to 2012 close to six millions entered job market. The federal government and its agents, the National Directorate for Employment and other agents meant for employment deserve commendations for all the efforts directed at the liquidation of youth unemployment in the country. As already posited at the beginning of this work, however, the conventional strategies adopted in tackling this problem are only a cosmetic treatment. They cannot provide a cure. A major impairment is that Nigeria's values, politico-economic system, and the entire socio-cultural life are structured within the cosmology of the Western world. The nation's leaders look at the country through western binoculars. Accordingly, they approach the nation's domestic

problems as if Nigeria were England or America. There is need to re-emphasize that the present problem of youth unemployment in the country has, as its progenitor, western colonialism which, as Nigeria became independent, has changed its form to neo-colonialism all within the ambit of imperialism. In this colonialism guise, countries of the western world, the former colonial over-lords, and their economy benefit from youth unemployment in Nigeria. In view of this kind of relationship and analyzing this within the principle of homeostasis, drastic and rapid reduction of unemployment in Nigeria will increase unemployment in some of the western countries. As this will also mean increase in goods produced in Nigeria, part of the Nigerian market will be shut against imported goods. Furthermore, Nigerian goods will increase the competition in the world market against western goods.

Western countries cannot, therefore, allow this to happen. America, for instance, has learnt her lesson from Italy, Japan, and China which are almost shutting the world market, and even the American domestic market, against her in leather wears and electronic goods (Ashok, 2009). Given all these facts, to try to improve the Nigerian economic conditions, including the elimination of unemployment, by strategies devised or applicable in the western world is to engage in futility. Further still, those devices which are designed to solve the problem of youth unemployment in the country are such as would work effectively in England or United States or indeed, most of the countries of the western world. Nigeria lacks the sort of psycho-cultural ingredients or national traits that shore up such strategies to produce the desired effects as in the western world. The politico-economic environment and behaviour are also different. Planners often ignore these important factors. Which sizeable number of youths have undergone training under the scheme only very few of them got loan under reselect scheme.

Another problem is that of loan recovery, as most loan beneficiaries see the loan as part of their share of national cake. Related to this is the issue of loan diversion to other uses as soon as loan is granted and received by the beneficiaries. Others are late disbursement of loans to prospective beneficiaries as some unemployed graduate trainee granted loan under NDE Start Your Own Business Loan Scheme found it difficult to get loan on time.

There are also problems of logistic such as the one which has to do with the smooth execution of activities e.g. monitoring vehicles are not there for every movement of officials to monitor the progress of the beneficiary from time to time. The programme is not also free from nepotism, corruption, and favouritism as is always witnessed in other programmes which are also being bandied about in this country. With

such socio-cultural disposition, the programmes are doomed to fail. Moreover, Nigeria's economic system fails within the capitalist model which depends on unemployment as one of its sources of support and strength. Whatever the Nigerian governments has done or propose to do does not obliterate youth unemployment. As can be seen from the programmes of the N. D. E., if it can be said that they fight unemployment, it cannot also be denied that they also attempt to raise petty capitalists for the society and the economic system. Perpetuation of capitalism, ipso facto, means acceptance and regularization of unemployment in the country.

For the loan schemes, one is still to wonder what kind of meaningful business a beneficiary can establish with the proposed amounts, having regard to the present devaluation of naira and its effects on the prices of goods. Here, it is also worthy of note that it is one thing to own a business, and it is another, in fact, the main thing, to earn from it a reasonable level of income that enable the entrepreneur to maintain a comfortable standard of living. The N. D. E. sponsored nouveau capitalists must give serious thinking to this fact. Ademù (2006) and Chinedum (2006) had opined that factors such as inadequate funding and late release of funds from the federation account among others, have impaired the effectiveness of the NDE agricultural programmes.

Again, not to be ignored is the possible negative impact of the acrimonious and antagonistic attitudes together with the practices of unfair competition often found among the Nigerian businessmen. The margin of optimism generated by these loan programmes should therefore, be informed by a recall of the performance of the agricultural loans of the not-too-far-away yesteryears. Besides, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) had no openings of its own to engage unemployed youth, providing only vocational training to young school leavers. There have been insufficient funds to provide start-off capital for the youth who complete their training. Recent public policies directed at addressing youth unemployment have also faced different challenges including finance, the absence of good administration and implementation, inconsistent policies, unimpressive responses from would-be trainees, and unqualified resource personnel handling the training programs.

New Direction

This work canvasses the view that youth unemployment in Nigerian can only be solved by youths through revolutionary measures. For reasons, this can only be done by the youths themselves. They are the direct

victims of unemployment. They can, therefore, see a revolt against the phenomenon as self-seeking and a struggle for survival. For another, the adults, particularly the bourgeois adults who man the upper echelon in politics, government, business, and social or institutional establishment will not do it. There are two reasons for this. First of all the adults and bourgeois are victims of western cultural and economic imperialism (Kulski, 1964). That is why they view the nation with western binoculars and consider western tactics as the best strategy to address domestic problems. Secondly, they are the beneficiaries and captains of the nation's plutocratic capitalist system which, as earlier posited, waxes stronger with a large margin of unemployment. In other words, they own the system, and are comfortably stationed within it and can, therefore, cope with it without pains. This leaves only the youths for the battle.

The revolution in contemplation here is far from violent or armed. It is, first of all, psychological. As a first step, the youths have to disengage from and abandon the imperialistic cosmology of the western world which has so far determined Nigeria's values in all its entirety. They have to return, psychologically, to Nigeria and see the nation with all its internal and external ramification from within the country. It is only then that they will know the nation's resources, capabilities, and true needs. They will then be able to fight unemployment from a Nigerian cultural base using Nigerian resources and at the level of the nation's needs. History supports this approach. America, Russia and China did not develop in the world market place as Nigeria is trying to do. There was a period in the history of the development of these countries when each returned to herself to properly see and structure itself and its domestic life. It formalized and synchronized its culture. Finally, it built itself from that cultural base. In other words, each formed her cosmology which guided and still guides her in her development. With their number, the youths can do this.

After having developed the new and true cosmology for the country, the youths must live in Nigeria within this new and realistic dispensation. That means that they revolutionize themselves psychologically by abandoning the present ostentation style of living of the bourgeoisie. They have to live and consume as Nigerians but not as if they were Americans, English or French. That also means that the beneficiaries of the N. D. E. loans scheme should plan their business enterprise within the new context and orientation such that they source their raw materials, and where possible, equipment from the country. In dialectics as in pedagogy, the point of departure is the thesis which provides the take off pedestal to the antithesis and progresses from there

to the synthesis. The Socratic formula states the same notion as from the known to the unknown. In development terms, that means to start where most of the people are. This same principle applies to the method of fighting youth unemployment in the country.

There is in recent time, the growing propaganda for the consumption of made-in-Nigeria goods. It is, however, observed, with regret, that the propaganda is limited to the products of the big industries. Because the conception, planning and establishment of those industries were informed by the western cosmology in earlier references above, most of them now stand as monumental wastes. As evidenced in every state of Nigeria, even structural Adjustment Programme (S. A. P.) or the belated idea of local sourcing of raw materials cannot save them

The government should extend the propaganda for the consumption of made-in-Nigeria goods to the products of local craftsmen, local farmers, and indigenous traditional industries. More to that the Nigerian governments must lead not only by precept but also by percept. It should, for instance, that having banned champagne, the government should make palm wine or any other locally produced wine the king or queen of all wines for the country and serve it as the Nigerian wines at all social circles and public functions. The government, for example, should furnish all the baby wards in the general hospitals and maternity homes

way locally produced baskets should be used in public offices instead of imported container. Artifacts of local industries and craft centres should form important part of the furniture of public offices and gatherings.

Apart from bestowing a definite image and identify on the nation, the effect of this on the economy is obvious. As it is well known, a capitalist system of economy produces not for use per se but for profit. It produces the things that consumers want only if producers see the possibility of profit in the undertaking (Raymon and Paker, 1963). Increase in demand and the broadened market will make the production of these goods profitable and turn it into lucrative business likely to attract new investors and additional labour from enterprising people including some of those who are now in the unemployment pool.

Using the dialectical paradigm again, this level of technology, industry, and production is the thesis stage. The increased demand and the profit accruing from the industry are likely to enhance the capacity of the producers to acquire improved tools and materials for their industry. Increase in the number of people attracted into the business because of its lucrative nature and the competition among them to control the market are likely to force producers to improve the quality of their

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