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# **LABOUR MARKET PROCESSES AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE POST-SAP ERA: POLICIES FOR EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCES UTILIZATION**

**OKON J. UMOH**  
DEPARTMENT ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITY OF UYO

## **INTRODUCTION**

Labour market processes involve the demand for labour, the supply of labour, the allocation of labour, the determination of wage, trade unionism and collective bargaining. These processes determine the organisation, institutions and behaviour of the labour market in a developing economy. Even in the post-structural adjustment programme era, labour market processes have resulted in pervasive unemployment in Nigeria. This paper is an explanation of this phenomenon and a provision of policies for Effective Human Resources Utilization.

An overview of the macroeconomic setting of the policy will be helpful in discussing the problem and proffering solutions to it. The Nigerian economy has been characterized by macroeconomic instability over the past three decades. The inability of the economy to maintain sustained and moderately impressive economic growth and in consequence any significant rise in employment generation to absorb the rapidly growing labour force is clearly evident (Iwayemi, 1994).

There was significant fluctuation in economic growth over the past three decades. The rate of economic growth which was 3.1% in the 1960s rose to an average of 5.2% in the 1970s during the temporary oil boom era and then collapsed to an average rate of 1.8% in the 1980s. The estimated growth rate of the economy was 1.3%, 2.2% and 3.25% in 1994, 1995 and 1996 respectively. There has been lack of sustained long-term upward trend in the overall economic performance. Economic growth was characterized by large variability over time, with negative implication for employment generation.

One of the significant factors which explains the deterioration in the economic fortunes of Nigeria relates to the collapse of the oil export boom of the 1970s which provided the main stimulus for rapid economic growth during this period. The oil sector was the most dynamic production sector, and real oil income growth was the main determinant of output, income and employment growth in the economy.

Following the global oil glut in the late 1970s, the petro-dollar empires collapsed all over the world. No doubt the petro-naira empire in Nigeria also collapsed like a pack of cards signalling the advent of various economic problems in the country. This significant instability and decline in the oil sector performance substantially eroded domestic prosperity and contributed immensely to the gap between growth in gainful employment and growth in the number of job seekers.

There has also been the problem posed by the limitation of the other two key production sectors namely the agricultural sector with its near stagnant growth and the inefficient industrial sector based on import substitution. These factors in combination with the explosive demographic patterns compounded the unemployment and underemployment problems and their depressing effect on income and income-earning capacity of the population.

Over the past three decades, investment growth was highly unstable. From an impressive 9% between 1960 and 1980, it declined to an annual negative growth rate of -8% between 1980 and 1990. Furthermore the average investment ratio which increased from 15% in 1960s to 25% in 1970s fell in 1980s to 13%. Such low trend in investment implies lower output and labour absorption, *ceteris paribus*.

The essentially monocultural nature of the Nigerian economy, the volatile nature of the oil market and the weak intersectoral linkages between the oil and other sectors of the economy have made the oil sector a fragile device for sustained structural change in Nigeria.

## **2. THEORETICAL ISSUES**

### **2.1 LABOUR DEMAND AND SUPPLY**

The demand function for labour is a negative function of the real wage because the marginal product of labour declines with increased labour.

The downward sloping demand curve for union labour is interpreted by Rees (1971) as showing the numbers of union member employers will choose to employ at each wage with unchanged demand for their product. The number of persons employed is dependent on the wages rate, otherwise the Union Labour demand curve would be a vertical line.

However, as the union raises wages, it will in fact set in motion forces tending to reduce the number of members at work. How many people are employed depends on how much they are to be paid especially in the long run. The demand for labour is therefore a function of real wage.

$$D_L = f(W/P)$$

Where  $D_L$  = demand for labour

$W$  = money wage

$P$  = price level

In addition both employment and wages are crucially influenced by workers productivity. This implies that, if in the long run wages are greater than the value of marginal product of labour (contribution of workers services to the value of output), employment in certain firms will decrease. It can therefore be said that the demand for labour is derived from the demand for goods and services which labour helps to produce.

Where a small percentage increase in the wage will cause a large percentage decrease in employment the demand is said to be elastic. If the forces reducing employment are weak, a small percentage increase in the wage will cause a smaller percentage decrease in employment. The demand is then said to be inelastic. While unions are interested in both raising wages and having a large membership, employers are interest in reducing employees, maximizing productivity and maintaining the highest wage that would maximize profit. The demand for union labour relative to its supply and the imbalance which has persisted between both can be resolved once it is possible to resolve the conflicting motives of unions and employers.

During periods of rising employment, especially if accompanied by rising prices, wage increases will usually have an effect on employment. The effect may not be that of an absolute reduction in employment, but of a reduction in the rate of its growth, when employment is falling, economic constraints press closely on the union and there is little room for political maneuvering in the formation of wage policy. Employment of union members can fall due to a contraction in general business activity.

Many a union could go out of existence at such times, others could lose control of much of their jurisdiction. The employer would then assume more powers pertaining to union labour demand as well as the wage rate. The prediction of economic theory about union impact on relative wages are based on the elasticity of demand for union labour. These predictions follow from the Marshallian theory of derived demand in which the demand for labour is derived from the demand for the final product and the supply of other factors of production. The more inelastic the demand for union labour, the smaller the effect of a given wage increase on employment and therefore the larger the probable influence of a union on relative wages. Marshall (1920) maintains that there are four conditions which affect the demand for union labour. The demand is more inelastic;

1. the more essential is union labour to the production of the final product,
2. the more inelastic the demand for the final product,
3. the smaller the ratio of the cost of union labour to the total cost of the product and
4. the more elastic the supply of the other factors of production.

The supply of labour is determined by the decisions of individual workers about how much of their time to spend working. Some people have the alternative of spending time away from work. The real wage determines the incentive to work. At higher real wage, the incentive to enter the labour market is stronger and on that account, people will want to work more. However, for most people, wages are the dominant source of income. At higher wages, they are better-off. People who are better-off choose to spend more time at home and away from job. On this account, higher real wages bring lower labour supply. These two contrasting influences are the substitution and the income effects.

Many labour economists have attempted to measure the size of the income and substitution effects in the labour supply by looking at individual behaviour. The earliest studies were based on samples of individuals for a single year. More recently researchers have used panel data sets in which the hours of work and the wage rate of thousands of individuals are observed for a number of years. Other recent studies are based on negative income tax experiments in the 1960s and 1970s. In these experiments, groups of individuals were given a cash grant and faced the normal tax rates. By

comparing the experimental groups with the control groups, the size of the income effect and the substitution effect could be directly estimated.

## **2.2 SUBSTITUTION EFFECT**

As a thing becomes more expensive, people substitute away from it. In the case of labour supply, as time at home becomes more expensive (at its opportunity cost, the real wage, rises) people substitute away from time at home and toward time in the labour market. The real wage provides an incentive for work and people substitute toward work when the real wage rises. The labour supply schedule gives the amount of labour offered in the labour market for various levels of the real wage. At higher real wages, the incentive to work is greater but people have more income, and this tends to offset the incentive. The evidence suggests that the labour supply schedule is almost vertical.

## **2.3 INCOME EFFECT**

As income rises, people tend to consume more of most commodities. In this case, they consume more of their own time at home and offer less of their time in the Labour Market. Higher real wages make people better-off and they work less on that account. Pencavel (1987) reveals that the net effect of the substitution and income effects of the real wage on labour supply is roughly zero, not however that each of its component is zero.

If the substitution effect is large, then an increase in work incentives without an increase in income could increase labour supply dramatically.

Carter and Marshall (1972) however submit that with higher wages, some workers may be tempted at first to work more hours if they have the opportunity, and some persons who ordinarily do not work may be drawn into the labour force if the rewards are sufficiently attractive. The supply of labour in the short run is highly inelastic for the economy as a whole and within the range of likely wage movements, it may perhaps be backward-bending.

## **3. LABOUR ALLOCATION**

According to Carter and Marshall (1972) the market system in a modern industrial economy performs its allocation and distribution feats in a relatively

efficient manner. If a perfect labour market were to exist, then the following would be its attributes. From the supply side:

- (a) workers would have full and perfect knowledge of the market, including information on opportunities available and wage rates
- (b) workers are entirely rational, and respond to differences in rates of return (including wages and non cash benefits).
- (c) workers are perfectly mobile.
- (d) Labour is not organised, and each labourer makes his own decisions on accepting jobs and wages offered.

Similarly, on the demand side of the labour market:

- (a) Employers have full information as well as perfect information on wage rates by other employers.
- (b) Employers are rational and attempt to maximize their profits.
- (c) Each employer represents a small enough share of the total demand for labour that his decision will not influence the market as a whole.
- (d) Employers are individually, and not in concert, in determining their wage and employment level.

Given the above conditions the market would perfectly allocate available labour resources.

#### **4. LABOUR MARKET IN NIGERIA**

The labour market in Nigeria is the market where labour is bought and sold. Labour is supplied by households and demanded by households, firms and the governments. The Nigerian labour market is characterized by the following imperfections:

- (a) Employers of labour compete in the hiring of labour and such competitions are not without hindrances and encumbrances.
- (b) Workers are allocated with friction-laden mobility and cannot therefore be said to be allocated in accordance with market demand. This implies that workers do not have full information on the labour market and they do not have free movement in the market from one hirer to another and from one region to another. Such immobility is partly due to geographical and pecuniary factors and partly due to human factors such as favouritism, nepotism, tribalism and the so-called Federal character and National spread in issues pertaining to employment.

- (c) Due to constraints on free entry into and exit from the labour market, compensation of employees does not reflect productivity in most cases.
- (d) Labour is therefore not efficiently allocated due to the difficulty in attaining mutually achieved and joint decisions of employers and workers.

Under the Nigerian imperfect labour market model, labour unions, management and even governments influence the allocation of labour and the workings of the labour market. This brings about, within the labour market, the sub-labour markets the boundaries of which are defined by institutional forces as well as workers preferences.

## **5. HOW EFFICIENCY ARE IMPEDED IN THE NIGERIAN LABOUR MARKET**

Efficiency in the labour market are impeded due to fundamental shifts in labour demand and supply. Problems arise because changes in labour demands are normally not met by changes in supply. Furthermore new entrants to the labour force do not respond quickly to new labour market needs.

Moreso, both employer and the union practices militate against the efficiency of the labour market as an allocative mechanism for seeking the best jobs, the jobless seeking the right jobs and employers finding the best workers.

Most employers in Nigeria insist that applicants must have many years experiences on the job in other establishments. This "experience" syndrome restricts many new entrants into the job market to the unemployment bank and aggravates the excess supply problem.

## **6. TRADE UNIONISM AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

The prevailing economic crises in Nigeria re-echoes the need for self-survival both at the individual and national levels. In time of economic crises trade unions face serious problems in trying to reduce the retrenchment of its members. They also try to ensure that the economy recovers. Hence, the most trying period for unions is during prolonged economic crises. Unions also face problems when trying to bargain for better conditions of service for their members during periods of prosperity. Trade unionism which is an organisation of workers formed for the purpose of advancing their members'

interests can be found in almost all sectors of an economy in which workers are endeavouring to earn a living. In Nigeria, trade unionism is as old as the country itself and has a chequered history of mass protests in demanding better working conditions for workers. In the manufacturing, agricultural, mining, education sectors trade unions exist.

Unions in Nigeria have struggled under various regimes - Colonial, civil and military. Today, in Nigeria, trade unions are struggling for survival because of the character of the existing social formation. They struggle for the survival of their members who are constantly being retrenched, and they also struggle for the survival of the Nigerian nation.

Unfortunately, trade unionism has reached the highest state of inactivity after the period of Structural Adjustment. Government has played the role of repressing the trade unions and their activities. In fact, most of the unions only exist in name and not in action! Several aspects of agreements reached between some unions and government have not been implemented by the later. In some cases, negotiations between unions and government for better conditions of service broke down. For any serious trade union, the matter of embarking on strike is a last resort; strikes become inevitable after all negotiations have broken down. However, union leaders now shy away from embarking on strikes for fear of arrest and imprisonment.

Collective bargaining has virtually not been in use by unions for a long time because the government seems not well disposed to it. What we have had for some time now has been retirements, retrenchments and lay offs by government and private sector employers at their whims and caprices. Currently workers receive wages which are fixed by government and other employers without inputs by the workers represented by their unions.

## **7. UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

By unemployment we mean that some people are either out of job or are seeking jobs. It implies excess labour supply or insufficient labour demand relative to supply. A person's decision to seek work may be independent of the business cycle or the demand for labour. Who actually finds work is determined by a complex of institutional and competitive labour market factors.

In Nigeria where investment "CROWDS OUT" and government expenditure is dampened while consumption reduces drastically, aggregate demand is bound to reduce, leading to unemployment.

Unemployment begets poverty. Obadan (1997) lists many causes of poverty in sub-saharan Africa, among which is inadequate access to employment opportunities. The urban poor, according to him, are particularly vulnerable to job losses resulting from the recessionary effects of reductions in absorption, from job cut-backs in the public sector, or from the decline of industries adversely affected by shifts in relative prices. They also lose from the removal of food subsidies and other welfare provisions.

Most of the structural adjustment programmes in African countries have involved substantial reductions in government expenditure on social sectors and reductions in public sector employment. These measures have imposed a severe burden on the poorest groups in the society. In Nigeria the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) implemented in 1986, aggravated the incidence of poverty among vulnerable groups in the society. The situation has not changed in the PostSAP era. As an integral part of the economic growth strategy for poverty reduction, economic growth must generate income earning opportunities for the poor, make job creation possible, and thereby make use of their most abundant asset which is labour. Sancho (1996) observed that well-paid employment is the only means through which the poor will cease to be poor. A lucrative job ensures that the poor have sufficient income to satisfy their basic needs. This view is shared by Burkey (1993), Levine (1974) and Bourguignon (1991).

## **7.1 CAUSES OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

- (a) Insufficient total demand for goods and services leading to insufficiency or inadequacy of GNP in sustaining employment. Even an increase leads to a reduction in employment when there is no compensating increase in the overall demand. This could occur either because wages do not rise sufficiently or because the rise in productivity fails to be transmitted into higher investment and growth. The potential conflicts between productivity and employment growth can be averted by appropriate policies.

- (b) Structural imbalances and/or personal characteristics of the economy. For instance some areas are more depressed than others or some workers are too distant or too unskilled to fill job vacancies. The unskilled, especially those in the minority areas are discriminated against and thereby suffer unemployment. Thus the families headed by people in this group are classified among the poor.

For a basically weak and primary production dominated economic structure, policy-induced distortions in the market for labour, capital and foreign exchange associated with import substitution industrialization has had a significant adverse impact on employment generation and consequently accentuated the current employment crises.

The compelling nature of the employment problems epitomized by pervasive imbalance between the job expectations and opportunities of an increasingly frustrated class of educated unemployed and underemployed raises a host of important and challenging policy question for which socially optimal responses based on a robust and sound analytical framework must be sought. A key factor is the appalling gap between growth in productive employment opportunities and growth in the total labour force (Iwayemi and Afeikhena, 1996).

- (c) The most prominent structural factor in the gross under-utilization and poor mobilization of idle labour resources in Nigeria which reflects the inability of the economy to absorb a rising proportion of the labour force concerns fundamental weaknesses in the development policy and strategy aimed at a rapid transformation of the economy.
- (d) Another factor concerns the phenomenon of macroeconomic instability illustrated by unstable economic performance, fiscal and current account disequilibria and inflation and its impact on the trend in employment.
- (e) The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) embarked upon since 1986 has had three lasting effects on the Nigerian labour market:
- (i) A slow down in job creation leading to a profound increase in open unemployment and underemployment.
  - (ii) A change in the types of jobs created. Although, this is less visible it has led to the expansion of the urban informal sector which now includes the newly unemployed who are unable to find jobs in the formal sector and new entrants to the labour market who fail to find steady and better paid jobs.

- (iii) A drop in the real wage rate as a result of the depreciation in the standard of living.
- (f) The cumulative effect of rapid population growth and the age structure of the population in the significant over-supply of labour resources at sectoral, regional and national levels, has also been an important causal factor in the employment crises in Nigeria.

Therefore analysis is restricted to data on urban unemployment. Even the available data must be accepted with caution as they depict those who care to register as unemployed.

The labour market situation in Nigeria is such that the educated unemployed prefer to stay in the urban setting. According to Ekpo and Osakwe (1991), the rate of unemployment decreased from 6.2% to 1.1% from 1974 to 1980. There has been a drastic increase in the unemployment rate since 1981. In 1982, it was 4.1% and attained its maximum in 1986 when it hit 11%.

These figures must be seen as conservative estimates especially when one considers the fact the labour market is grossly inefficient and most job seekers do not register as such.

**Table 1: National Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (1985 - 92)**

Year	Composite	Urban	Rural
1985	5.26	9.25	4.1
1986	5.8	10.0	4.8
1987	7.4	12.2	6.2
1988	4.75	10.0	3.8
1989	4.2	8.1	3.7
1990	3.2	4.8	2.8
1991	2.9	4.4	2.6
1992	4.0	5.8	2.6
1993	3.4	5.8	2.9
1994	2.0	2.30	1.9

**Source:** CBN Annual Reports and Statement of Accounts (Various years)

Between 1985 and 1987 the urban unemployment rose from 9.25% to 12.2% while rural unemployment rose from 4.1% to 6.2%. The urban unemployment declined to 10.0 in 1988 and further 10.0%, 5.8% in 1992 and 1993 and 2.3 in 1994. The rural unemployment rate also declined from 6.2% in 1987 to 3.8% in 1988 and further declined to 2.6% in 1992 (Table 1)

**Table II: Unemployment Rates by Level of Education in Nigeria (%)**

Level of Education Year	1985 Urban
Non	2.5
Primary	5.2
Secondary	30.5
Tertiary	5.2

Source: CBN Annual Reports and Statement of Accounts 1985.

Table II above shows that unemployment is relatively low for the work force without any formal education, increases for those with primary education, peaks for those with secondary education but is lower for university graduates.

High unemployment among educated youths in Nigeria can partly be explained by the possession of a school certificate. It raises expectations that make youngsters withhold their labour while they queue for white-collar jobs. Over time, however, they lower their job aspirations and reservation wage and are eventually absorbed in the labour market (Vandemoortell, 1991).

Educated unemployment may result from a static urban labour market which is characterized by a relatively high wage differential on the combined primary and secondary job markets. Youths in Nigeria are particularly vulnerable to rising unemployment. It has been the educated youths in particular who suffer from increased unemployment. Furthermore unemployment seems to be positively correlated with the level of education.

## **8. POLICY INSTRUMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCES UTILIZATION**

I share the opinion of Essenberg (1996) that labour market distortions and rigidities need deregulation and related institutional reforms as the most

important options for improving the employment situation. Furthermore, there is need for corrective macroeconomic actions to tackle unemployment arising from insufficient effective demand for labour.

Since unemployment in Nigeria also results from cyclical factors, then there is need for structural reforms such as the reform of social policies and labour market institutions. Labour market rigidities such as employment protection legislation, minimum wages and taxes and social charges raise the cost of hiring labour. Therefore shifts in macroeconomic policies must feature as a prominent way to solve the unemployment problem.

That an agricultural/informal sector centred development strategy offers a better and more socially desirable economic growth and employment generation in Nigeria in the medium and long term than other options has already been advocated by Iwayemi and Afeikhena (1996), Adelman (1984) and Ashoff (1991). There is need for a transition from a monoprodukt to a multiprodukt-based agricultural export structure which should be anchored on processing in domestic agro based industries to strengthen intersectoral linkages.

The need to develop rural infrastructure including extension services, adult education, vocational training, roads and water to boost rural sector productivity need not be overemphasized in the new strategy of development based on small-scale, rural and informal section expansion. There is also the overwhelming need to enhance small and medium-scale enterprises by establishing a specialized bank for them.

Perhaps, as a priority to unemployment problem in Nigeria, the views of Onimode (1991) need to be taken seriously. These include:

- (i) scrapping expatriate quota and banning foreign labour recruitment unless there is proven evidence of non-availability of local substitutes.
- (ii) all beneficiaries of import license and foreign exchange to show evidence of increased unemployment.

There is need for an integration of the Human Resources Driven (HRD) variables-manpower, education and employment into the development plan. The associated human-resource-driven strategy assumes developmental and instrumental conceptions of man in the development process.

Structural Adjustment Policies have had a restrictive influence on employment and human resources utilization in Nigeria especially the policy

of reduction in the public sector participation in the economy. This trend needs to be reversed. The human-resource driven strategy calls for a re-orientation, placing more premium on Human Resource Development and employment, subordinating the growth objective to it. In terms of development planning, the human-focused orientation of the strategy necessitates the mutual integration of economic planning and human resource planning, development and utilization (Oladeji & Adebayo, 1996).

Finally, it is pertinent to appeal to government to always honour agreements reached with unions and also embrace the process of collective bargaining and dialogue in dealing with workers' grievances. The dignity of labour must be restored if Nigeria must achieve our vision of a virile, and developed economy as well as an egalitarian society.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

During the last three decades the undesirable economic setbacks that beset Nigeria have had a devastating impact on the labour market situation. The major symptoms of the crises include stagnating employment in the modern sector, retrenchment in the government establishment, wage erosion, compressions in the wage structure, widespread youth unemployment and the near saturation of the informal and agricultural labour sponges. Informalization has been the most marked feature of the Nigerian labour market during this period.

There is therefore the need to integrate labour market issues in government development programmes. There seems to have been in the past a greater focus on the provision of incentives in the product and capital markets. The basic assumption was that lower labour costs would automatically lead to higher employment levels because of downward sloping demand curve for labour. However, despite the downward wage flexibility, there are no signs of renewed employment growth. The challenge that lies ahead is to better integrate labour- market dimensions into comprehensive programmes of policy reforms.

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