
1. INTRODUCTION

The Employment Problem

Any discussion of youth unemployment in Africa must be based on a very clear understanding of the overall employment issue within any given African economy. For the purposes of this paper, productive employment is defined as any occupation or occupations by which an individual can secure a minimum and necessary level of living for himself and his dependents. This concept includes wage and salary employment, as well as self employment in agricultural, and other rural and urban sectors. Specifically, rural employment includes production activities whose returns are not necessarily cash incomes but may include production of food for home consumption and keeping of livestock for various forms of non-monetary exchange. However in discussing such employment, we focus more specifically on minimum returns to labour. An adult who spends his working time chasing one cow, two goats and a sheep of dubious investment value, and with no apparent marketable value to the owner, is obviously under-employed in terms of his ability to generate minimum livelihood for himself and his dependants.

The concern with the employment problem in Africa is based on the complete erosion of the belief that economic growth and welfare are positively related and that, therefore the maximization of growth is also the maximization of welfare. Whatever constituted the basis of this belief, the realities of growth in Africa indicate that even where we have had rapid growth rates (7-9% G.N.P. growth per annum), the objectives of enhancing higher levels of economic welfare, however measured- were not being realized. If welfare is measured in terms of increased incomes for the vast majority, increased levels of living, and increased amenities for all, then it has not been achieved. Issues closely related to rela-

tively decreased welfare are the issues of decreased access to opportunity, and hence increased unemployment. Thus, despite the high growth rates in the fields of investment and industrial output, the growth of employment in urban and rural areas has far lagged behind manpower growth and has become critical.

Employment literature recognizes four aspects of the employment problem:

i. Shortage of work opportunities, which is characteristic of urban unemployment where population growth and inflow from rural areas far outstrips the capacity of urban areas to generate new jobs. This specifically pinpoints those who are fit and available for work but are unable to find work although genuinely seeking it.

ii. The under-utilization and low productivity of the majority of the labour force especially peasants and pastoralists in the rural areas.

iii. The low levels of incomes of those working very hard and strenuously, especially the self-employed in urban and rural areas.

iv. The frustrated school leavers, whose training, expectations and attitudes makes them choosy and makes them ignore what they may consider as unattractive opportunities depending on the skills required and the wages and salaries offered.

The above categories pinpoint a key issue, namely that the concern with employment is with productive employment in the sense that: (a) the activity meaningfully contributes to the total production effort of the society and (b) that this meaningful contribution should be rewarded to such a level that it guards the receiver from relative poverty, un-acceptably low subsistence, frustration from being kept out of participation in development, and societal abuses of being jobless or dependent.

Youth
Employment

The problem of unemployment of youth* has become recognized as perhaps the most critical of all other forms of unemployment owing to the fact that this population includes school leavers, who are the most active job seekers, and the foundation of more efficient and trained manpower.

The data generated for most African countries indicates clearly that 70-80% of the unemployed, especially the jobless, are between the ages of 15-24 years old. This data, as represented below, exposes the problem of youth unemployment in dimensions which development planners have ignored. They have tended to see youth as potential (future) labour force, an army of dependants.

Below is a country by country outline of the magnitude of youth unemployment in some African countries, using conventional definitions of manpower and unemployment.

a Mauritius

In June 1972 unemployment in the population aged 15 years and over stood at 16% of the total labour force of approximately 325,000. However, over 80% of overall national unemployment was among persons aged between 15-24 years of whom 90% were seeking jobs for the first time. Unemployment was highest in the 15-19 age group with 55% unemployed followed by the 20-24 age group with 26% unemployed. Among the male population aged 25 and over, the level of un-

* For the purposes of this paper, the United Nations definition of youth as the population between the ages of 14 years and 25 years will be used. In most African countries this group represents 25-30% of the total population. It is also interesting to note that those between 0-24 years represent up to 70% of the population.

employment was only 5% of the total labour force. Over the period 1962-72 the labour force increased by 28% whilst employment grew by just over 17% over the decade.

(Data from Ministry of Employment, Mauritius at African Workshop on Strategies for Increasing Productive Employment in Africa. Limuru, Kenya, 1973).

b Kenya

The ILO/UNDP mission on employment in Kenya analysis of the unemployment problem distinguishes three forms, two of which have direct bearing on youth unemployment. The first form is the open urban unemployment problem (joblessness). This problem is related to the imbalance between rural-to-urban population inflow pushing urban population growth up to 8.7% p.a. and the rate of urban wage creation (2.7%). The openly unemployed account for 11.4% of the urban labour force. Most of the urban unemployment is concentrated among the youth where for Nairobi 72% of the unemployed are between 16 and 24 years of age.

The second form of unemployment is the problem of school-leavers. Total Form IV (12 years study) leavers jumped from 6,000 in 1965 to 13,000 in 1968 and 19,000 in 1970. Of the 1968 form IV contingent 15% were unemployed in 1970. However form IV leavers have a higher chance of obtaining a job compared to the 180,000 primary school leavers (with 7 years schooling) in 1968/69, 80% of whom could not be absorbed in wage employment.

The least known form of unemployment - rural underemployment is perhaps the major headache of tomorrow. It is generally agreed internationally that a person who spends his full working time chasing two goats or a donkey of very low and

* Data from ILO/UNDP Employment Mission report on Employment, Incomes and Equality, ILO, Geneva, 1972.

dubious investment value is clearly unemployed. Rural unemployment characterized by extremely low and fluctuating incomes (under £20 p.a.) affects over 500,000 Kenyan youths.

(Note that 36% of Kenya's population of 12.9 million is between 0-9 years. 30% is between 10-24 and 66% between 0-24 years. 820,000 rural households are estimated to be below £60 p.a. income level. 330,000 households have an income below £20. This will include an estimated 594,000 youth between 10-24.)

c Sudan

With a population of 15.7 million, growing at the rate of 2.9% (1970), Sudan has 44% of its population under 15 years and only 37% of the population economically active. The 1964-68 household sample survey estimated that about 9.5%, 7.5% and 1.4% of the labour force was unemployed in the urban semi-urban and rural areas respectively (about 88,000 persons). The major unemployed group is that of the school leaver group who form the bulk of rural to urban migrants.

Within the rural areas, the unemployment problem takes the form of under-employment of the agricultural and nomadic labour force. The nomadic peoples, accounting for 15% of the population pose special problems as they move seasonally from one region to another in search of water and pasture or escaping diseases.

(Data from Ministry of Labour, Manpower Division at African Workshop on Strategies for Increasing Productive Employment in Africa, 1973.)

d Botswana

It is estimated that 50% of school age children attend primary schools. Of these only 15% manage to go to secondary schools and post primary training. The 50% who never go to school

mostly follow the occupations of their fathers tilling the soil and tending cattle or occasionally going to work in the mines of South Africa. It is estimated that by 1976, about 6,000 primary school leavers will be thrown into the labour market with no hope for most of them of ever finding any kind of wage employment. Out of a total labour force of 300,000 modern sector employment accounts for about 50,000 and the unemployed are the uneducated and young primary school leavers.

(Data supplied by Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1973.)

e Nigeria

The national overall rate of open unemployment was estimated by the 1966-67 Manpower Secretarial Survey to be 1.7%. The low productivity sector accounts for about 80% of the labour force. About 95% of these are unskilled and predominantly engaged in farming activities. Of these about 20% of the agricultural work force and 18% of non-agricultural workers were regarded as being under-employed. Most of the unemployed were young. In fact 70% of the unemployed were in the age group of 15-23 years and 87% in the age group 15-29. In terms of educational attainment, the unemployed are about 70-80% of total national unemployment.

(Data from Ministry of Planning and also the Federal Public Service Commission, 1973.)