
2. SOME FACTORS CONTRIBUTORY TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The analysis of the key factors contributing to youth unemployment in African countries pinpoints a multitude of factors including:

Education

The problem of unemployment of school leavers has been blamed in part on the educational system, in terms of content of curriculum which alienates youth from their immediate environment and imparts no skills, even those of a peasant farmer or small shopkeeper. Education is also blamed in terms of teaching techniques which do not generate initiative and self reliance, instead it creates youth conditioned to follow instructions and hence effectively socializes them for service with exploitative industrialists.

On another level, employment specialists note a very high correlation both between advanced levels of education and increased access to employment on the one hand, and with levels of incomes and social status on the other. Consequently there exists irresistible social and political pressure to expand education. Parental aspirations push youth up the educational ladder. Any drop outs face constant psychological and material deprivation from parents as they are pushed beyond their competence as determined by the educational and job markets. Given the aspiration of young people, the rewards to education which is biased towards urban employment, and parental pressure on the young, the flood to the cities is understandable. If change is to occur, it must (a) attack the national reward systems which put a high premium on education as it exists (b) change, through political education and value and attitude reform, the aspirations of parents and youth and (c) overhaul systems of education through

teacher training college, curriculum reform centres and development of appropriate teaching materials.

Poverty and Inequity

In Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Zambia, the inherited structure of inequality creating rural-urban differentials and differentials within agriculture and also rural regions have been seen to lead to (a) systematic regional and occupational barriers limiting access to opportunity, which have not been eliminated after independence, causing peculiar regionalized and occupationalized poverty (b) the growth of urban centres of "apparent affluence" forming the reference point for school leavers (c) some sectors which are based on indigenous skills being squeezed and retarded by giant multi-nationals, hence making self employment a poor alternative. Reduced opportunities for self employment put heavy pressure on the few formal wage and salaried job opportunities which accentuates open unemployment or joblessness.

Population

The factor of population growth must be seen within the context of the poverty of the majority of the rural populations. High aggregate levels of economic growth of up to 8% in both manufacturing and industrial sectors must be evaluated against structural arrangement for distribution of such incomes. Empirical evidence shows that the majority have no direct access to this prosperity. It also shows high rates of population growth in relation to limited farmable land and poor technological advance. It is therefore expected that the situation may get worse. This is the reason why many African nations have identified rural development, including increased productivity of land and labour and increased welfare and population programmes, as top priorities in their development plans.

Technology

The explanation for relatively low growth rates in employment compared with that of output is to be found in (a) the increased use of capital-intensive technology, (b) increase in labour productivity, and (c) high rate of growth of labour force.

Investment allowances, duty free importation of capital goods, accelerated depreciation and low interest rates have made the use of capital relatively cheaper than labour, which is mainly unskilled and costly to train. The policy problems raised are threefold:

- i. can planners devise more appropriate instruments for attracting foreign investments other than those which make capital cheaper relative to labour?
- ii. can technologists develop more labour intensive prototypes and techniques which meet the nature of resource endowments of African countries?
- iii. can African countries create work values and an appropriate scientific and technological base which do not merely copy from the west and which reinforce more labour absorptive strategies?

Basic Skills

As shown in the data for Botswana (page 4), and as will be seen later for Kenya (page 17) , a large proportion of school age youth never attend school or even if they do, over 80% never go beyond 7 years of education. By this stage they have mastered some basic literacy and numeracy but cannot relate any specific skill, craft or occupation to their education. They cannot even become poor clerks. They are forced to follow the occupations of their fathers tilling the soil, tending cattle, working in the mines.

Their aspirations, however, are away from the drudgery. As Duodu Cameron (1968) states:

"We respected nothing and nobody, and in turn no one respected us or cared two hoots about us. We had all "finished" school and yet we had no work.....If we had no work we thought, it was not because we were bad, but because there were no jobs. Tell us to go back and work on our parents farm.....to "go back to the land", as the politicians cliché ranand we would say: "Look here, Sir, if we wanted to be peasant farmers, we would not have wasted a full ten years at school learning to read and write.....If we are to be farmers at all, we don't simply want to weed a piece of land and plant yam or plantain or cocoyam or cassava or vegetables on it in the topsy-turvy way we've seen our fathers do for years, but which barely gives them enough food to live on, let alone bring them money. No, Sir. Ask us .. But do you know any better way of farming than your forefathers?" Our answer would still be a big NO.....Our teachers had no specialized training in agriculture. How could they teach us agriculture? They just gave us a piece of plot to plant things on. And the things grew, thanks to the good soil. Any ass can do that".

Taken from Duodo Cameron, The Gab Boys, London, Deutsch 1968.