

## **THE LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL ORDER IN NIGERIA: BOKO HARAM AS FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study used secondary data to demonstrate that the seemingly unmanageable labour market destroys the foundation of social order in the Nigerian State which Boko Haram epitomizes effectively and efficiently. This study is posed to handle the theoretical framework of reference, which tries to situate the whole episode, the labour market and social order that demonstrate the uneasiness in society as a result of the over saturated labour market, Boko Haram: the real issues, this tries to situate the Boko Haram movement within the contest of rebellion against a State that have failed in all ramifications rather than a religious sect, good governance and resource management as the only way out of the quagmire, the study made recommendations that the seemingly unmanageable labour market destroys the foundation of social order in the Nigerian State which Boko Haram epitomizes effectively and efficiently.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The economic inequalities between the rich and poor continues to widen with each passing minute, unemployment and underdevelopment have reached an unmanageable proportions with the educated continuously swelling the ranks of urban unemployed. Recent sociological work on poverty has concentrated on the idea of social exclusion. The issue is that since the poor are excluded by their poverty from mainstream society, they in effect lose the benefits and privileges of their citizen therefore the poor have no stake in society and one of the foundations of social order is thereby undermined. The army of jobless youth and collection of semi and stark adult illiterate scattered all over due to government's inability to provide functional education and gainful employment to the citizens means that not much effort is needed to disrupt the uneasy calm we erroneously call peace in the society. The Boko Haram episode, paints the fragile picture of the Nigerian State. Most Sociologists and Economists believe that the human resources of a place or nation, not its physical capital or its natural resources determines the pace and character of its economic and social development. Therefore, the development of human resources should be the focal concern of any government genuinely interested in the development of its society and nation.

Book Haram is said to oppose and abhors western education, which to them is morally bankrupt and corrupt. But the point is, the outburst of violence is an explosion of pent-up grievances, especially as hunger and unemployment create fertile grounds for unrest. Especially that Boko - western education have not been able to deliver the good life it promised as seen in Europe and America. This study holds culprit, the inability of government and its agencies (represented by western educated elements) to deliver the much needed good things of life to the common man.

### **THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE: THE SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY**

The Social Exchange theory has its roots in economic propositions, especially utilitarian economic theory. This position holds that human beings are rational goal seeking animals that seek to maximize their benefits from every exchange. Other propositions are; that man is not almost always rational, though it may be true that he tries to achieve benefit, it is not always true that he always maximize profit, that exchange relation are subject to external control and that man do not have all the necessary information before engaging in exchange relationship.

While utilitarian economist limited themselves to the market situations, the sociological analysis went beyond market situations to non-market situations such as relationship between husband and wife. To the economic exchange, what sustain the relation is cost - returns - outcome. That once the cost of the relationship is lesser than the relationship, then the relationship can continue but if not, then it is rational for the participant to call the relationship off. In contrast to the cost - returns - outcome analysis, the structuralist emphasized norms and values of society as being the determinant of what individuals get in society. That the individual will continue a relationship once the society prescribe it no matter the cost.

Another idea is the structure of mutual reciprocity that is exchange of goods and services between two people. That is A can do a lot of favour to B and expecting something from B in returns. Mutual expectation is immediate and placed in the individual while the structuralists emphasize the univocal reciprocity. They maintained their ground purely on the generalized exchange. This implies that A can do something for B without expecting anything from B. The expectation of return is not within the immediate relationship, it is placed in the society and the future. The outburst of Boko Haram supports the economic exchange sustained by cost - returns - outcome analysis. That once the cost of the relationship is lesser than the relationship then the relationship can continue but if not then, it is rational for the participant to call the relationship off. The cost of belonging to a nation called Nigeria seems to out weight the returns, so the outcome of this relationship should be dissolution. This is the implied intention of Boko Haram. Nobody except those who benefit from the present exploitative social arrangement will support the continuation of these social relations.

## THE LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL ORDER

Since the 1980s, the Nigerian economy has been experiencing crisis as a result of the capitalist economic crisis which Nigeria is a direct beneficiary as a result of its dependent nature. One feature of this crisis is unemployment, retrenchment and loss of jobs and inability to achieve gainful employment (Adelakun and Onu 2006). In 1984, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime threw several millions of people out of employment in order to reduce public spending (Lakemfa, 1997). By August 1996 alone, over 17,000 Nigerians lost their jobs (Nwabueze, 1997). It is particularly interesting that entering into employment is not that easy, early in 1996, First Bank Plc received over 22,000 applications to fill just a few vacant positions (Nwabueze, 1997). Just recently, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) advertised to fill some vacant positions, it received over 70,000 applications. Rumour has it that these positions were already filled before the advert. The vacancy advertisement was to fulfill all righteousness. The Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) recently advertised and received 50,000 applications. Currently, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps ((NSCDC) is undergoing an exercise to fill about 10,000 vacant positions. It is alleged that the organization received 200,000 applications, which has currently put them at a dilemma as to what to do.

The worsened unemployment situation was acknowledged by Ex-President Obasanjo when he said that, the astronomical increase in the number of idle hands in the population remains one of his administration's greatest challenges (The Guardian, September 23, 2003). The NEEDS (2004) document puts the unemployment rate at 10.8% in 2003 meaning that 6.4 million people were actively looking for jobs without any insight. The numbers of the unemployed has since increased because the educational institutions at all levels have continued to graduate students in their thousands yearly without a fraction of them is being placed in meaningful employment.

What is increasingly being noticed in Nigeria as noted by Smah (2008) is rising unemployment, poverty, social and economic injustice, political repression, community neglect, alienation and abuse and denial of fundamental human and constitutional rights which are precipitants of violence, crime and other social vices inclusive of corruption. There is the crisis of citizenship which is increasingly leading to social exclusion. As described by Alubo (2006),

*...the amalgamation did not; in itself address issues of citizenship or sense of belonging within the new geo-political space. One manifestation of this challenge is the extent to which all the component units feel part of the whole or alienated and disenfranchised.*

The leadership of Nigeria did not only fail to address this apparent citizenship crisis but complicates this fragility by the way they carry on the day to day running of the nation. Ogban-Iyam sets conditions for which social order can be achieved in the society when he said that:

*There is constant struggle among human beings for the determination of*

*what is produced, how, when and for whom? One person determines this process, he does it in his /her interest, a few do so they do it in the interest of the few, many do it they do it in the interest of the many; a majority do they do it in the interest of the majority; and all do so in the interest of all. Security and cohesion are themselves human production. So are national cohesion and national security (Ogbam-Iyam, 2007).*

But for the Nigerian State, the determination of what is produced, how, when and for who is held in the hand of few, thereby excluding the vast majority of the Nigerian people. This exclusion has led to lose of faith in the Nigerian State by the Nigerian people. Resultantly, vandalization and theft of public property is the order of the day (Nkom, 1994). Nkom (1994) further stressed that,

*Those who feel excluded, marginalized or unable to participate satisfactorily in the exercise of power and in the control of resources are retreating to their ethnic, religious or communal enclaves both to challenge the system and insist on certain reforms or to demand for autonomy and self - determination.*

This aptly explains the Boko Haram episode which is clearly an expression of lack of faith in the system that has so excluded them. So, retreating into a religious sect became a shield under which they can effectively challenge the system. From the discussions, it is clear that the seemly unmanageable labour market which is still growing every year, social order will be difficult to achieve, rather it is a breeding grounds for frustrated elements who will vent their anger on the system that so frustrated them.

### **BOKO HARAM AND THE REAL ISSUES**

The story comes from official sources that Boko Haram was against Western education. That Mohammed himself held a University degree is irrelevant for two reasons. One reason is that graduate unemployment is growing in Nigeria. This calls in question the practical usefulness of education even up to university level in the western kind of schools and Universities in Nigeria. This education has a significant falsity which a young person with some education who is unemployed will feel daily with all his nerves (Eskor Toyo, 2009).

Eskor Toyo's (2009) description of the situation fully explains the frustration of most Nigerian graduates who mail the street everyday begging to apply, without any hope of getting one insight. Annoyingly is the fact that, the children of the rich, affluent and powerful in society, walk from youth service into an already prepared and reserved offices in choice parastatals, Banks, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) etc. Without the stress of applying and the humiliation of human beings called interview. Baffa (2009) put it straight, when he said:

*The real issues, in my opinion, are poverty, ignorance, joblessness, frustration, hopelessness, anger and despair, compounded by official corruption, incompetence, arrogance, insensitivity, impunity and generally bad governance, hence, the militancy in order to change the status quo by any means.*

The editorial of Leadership Newspaper of Tuesday, August 4, 2009:3 corroborated the views of Baffa (2009) on real issues behind Boko Haram. He emphasized poor governance and management of State resources as stimulating the emergence of all sorts of messianic groups in the name of providing alternatives to the unemployed, underemployed, hungry, poor, cheated, uneducated and to a certain extent, the unenlightened but educated and rich ones.

What can be seen as the failure of governance is the army of jobless youth and collection of semi and stark adult illiterates scattered all over, due to government's inability to provide functional education and gainful employment for its citizens.

Lawanti (2009) writing under the caption "Boko Haram and the culpability of Northern Elite" put the crisis on the door steps of the Northern elites. He accused the elites of taking pride in seeing fellow citizens live in abject poverty and squalor. He stressed the case furthered when he argued that, *The region remained a leading region in producing the highest number of Almajirai, local manicurists, shoe shiners, manual labourers and all other menial jobs you can think of* (Lawanti, 2009).

The Boko Haram brings to mind the crisis ridden country that we have found ourselves. The nation's problems of erratic power supply, poor drinking water, inefficient civil service, inadequate crime control, inadequate primary health care, and less than average educational system. These situations to Lawanti (2009) compound the existing problems of the North almajirai, street begging (a purely northern affair) 'maula' and many other social and economic problems.

Boko Haram has its roots in the north but the situations that gave birth to it has played adequately in other parts of the country. The Niger Delta militants which are being placated, the spate of kidnappings in country, violent armed robbery including broad daylight robbery of banks have all made headlines on national dailies. The real issue underlying this crisis is a combination of poverty and bad governance.

## **GOOD GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

Take for instance the small Mikang Local Government Area of Plateau State which received N762,644.76 in 1999, today receives close to N100,000,000.00 every month, but nothing would tell the difference between what accrue to the Local Council and the living conditions of the people of the area (Lawanti, 2009).

The critical problem is the problem of good governance and management of the resources, which God so graciously blessed Nigeria with as was noted by Achebe (1983). The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. These issues are well documented in Wilmot (2007).

If nothing is wrong with the Nigerian State, what then are the problems and the way out of these problems? The way out of these problems is good governance

and proper resource management. The production system must be re-orientated in such a way that it is meant for the collective survival and security of all Nigerians. When citizens' needs are satisfied by the State they tend to have a positive disposition to the State. In the present arrangement, it is very difficult for any Nigerian except those few who currently benefit or hope to benefit from the current dominant production system, which cannot produce the survival and security needs of citizens to be loyal to the State (Ogbam-Iyam, 2007).

Nigeria has enough resources that will go round everybody's need but not enough for everybody's greed. Herein lays the contradiction of the present production system which breeds all kinds of competition at all levels. It is this competition that leads to mismanagement, misapplication and outright embezzlement of resources of the State and the flagrant display of ill-gotten wealth by political party officials, Local, State and Federal government officials and others that influences and destroys whatever feeling of nationalism that is left in the minds and hearts of the many Nigerians who are daily being assaulted by the flagrant display of their common wealth by the few who have grappled it through whatever means.

Good governance and proper management of resources would have saved us from the nightmares of 'Boko Haram', the man hours and resources lost in trying to quell the uprising and enabled bodied men and women that died in these processes. Who knows an investor, a scientist, a sociologist, an economist or somebody that would have contributed progressively to the development of the Nigerian State may have been killed in the process.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Economic activity does not take place in a social vacuum rather it occurs in a social - cultural environment that defines the nature and character of the economy. The present Euro-centric way of individualism and competition put so much stress on our norms and values. Nigerians are community oriented not individual oriented. Hence, community based production and consumption will be much more productive for the Nigerian State and people.

Fundamentally therefore, the Nigerian government as a matter of urgency must address the problems of de-industrialization, de-education, de-development and poverty to put back productive hands on production. We as people must re-invent ourselves to our cherished norms and values of respect, probity, accountability and the values of being our brother's keeper. In so doing, the experiences of Boko Haram would have been a blessing in disguised. Other than that, the Boko Haram episode will be a tip of the ice berg of the social disorder, which the Nigerian State will witness shortly.

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