

“Active Poor” Phenomenon and Youth Unemployment in Cross River State, Nigeria – Some Diagnosis

Uwem Essia¹ & Abubakar Yusuf²

¹ University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

² National Iron Ore Company, Itakpe, Kogi State, Nigeria

Correspondence: Uwem Essia, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. E-mail: uwemessia@unical.edu.ng, uwemessia@yahoo.co.uk

Received: August 27, 2012

Accepted: August 12, 2013

Online Published: October 8, 2013

doi:10.5430/ijfr.v4n4p118

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/ijfr.v4n4p118>

Abstract

Many youths in Cross River State, Nigeria are described here as “active poor” because they are unable to secure stable jobs or start and manage businesses. An attempt is made to model the “active poor” phenomenon in the context of Hegelian dialectics. It is hypothesized that the “active poor” phenomenon in Cross River State, Nigeria, is the outcome of demographic misfortunes, an insensitive and ill-equipped education system, and paucity of social security/welfare products. The methodology adopted was both dialectical and descriptive; the dialectical approach was used to show that the dominant social and religious orientation internalized by people in the State promote rapid population growth and strong preference for leisure. The descriptive approach was used to make the case for giving special consideration to the “active poor” and other disadvantaged persons. The paper demonstrates the utility of a multidisciplinary approach to diagnosing development problems as against adoption of any form of partial analysis. More specifically, the study shows that reduction in births, provision of feeding subsidy for school children, and improved health seeking behaviors for the entire population, will deliver a healthy and demographically balanced population, while an inclusive and well rounded education system will free people from fear and superstition, and make them more productive.

Keywords: active poor, youth unemployment, Hegelian dialectics, reification, Malthusian thesis, demographic misfortune

1. Background Issues

Cross River State is one of Nigeria’s 36 States. It was created in 1987 and has 17 out of the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria. Its estimated population was 2.75 million people (2010). Cross River State is situated in the South-South and Niger Delta regions of Nigeria; within three vegetation belts of mangrove swamps, tropical rain forest, and savannah. The State has diverse mineral, agricultural, and forest resources that can be harnessed sustainably for development, but skilled manpower is a major constraining factor.

Since 1999 the State has experienced unprecedented and nationally unmatched transformation; from a largely public service economy to a fast growing tourism destination, and its clean and green ancient capital city, Calabar, is a preferred conference capital in Nigeria. Cross River State launched its first medium term economic plan, Cross River State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (CR-SEEDS 1), in 2004. But implementation of CR-SEEDS 1 commenced in 2006 and the terminal date was extended to 2008. CR-SEEDS 1 focused on tourism, health, education, job creation, and poverty reduction. Between 1999 and 2007, the State invested heavily in tourism development, agricultural modernization, and road construction. The tourism sector created over 5,000 jobs in 2006, out of which 3,000 were specifically created from heavy construction work in Tinapa alone. Notably, many of those engaged were from other States, while several youths of Cross River State origin remained unemployed.

In 2008, the *Economic Blueprint* document was launched. It identified a *7 Point Development Agenda* that emphasized agriculture, private sector participation, tourism, infrastructures, education, health, and environment as priority areas. Thereafter, CR-SEEDS 2 (2009-2012) and the perspective plan, Cross River State Vision 2020 (CRS V2020) 2009 -2020, were launched in 2009. In line with the World Economic Forum framework, three stages of development were identified in CRS V2020, as follows; factor driven stage, efficiency stage, and technological

sophistication stage. Cross River State was believed to be in the first (factor-driven) stage in 2009, and it was envisioned that the State would, like India and Dubai, leapfrog the efficiency (industrialization) stage to the technological sophistication (tertiary) stage by 2020. Such a quantum leap required a human resource base with requisite skills and competencies (SBS, 2012; SPC 2010:1, 2012, 2010:2, and 2009).

The “active poor” describes youths, particularly in the age brackets 14 to 24 years, who are physically energetic but lack the mental and emotional competencies and resilience to effectively compete in today’s challenging world. ILO (2011:1, 2011:2) describes some of such persons as the ‘working poor’, meaning those who belong to households that live on less than USD2 per day. It is argued here that the “active poor” phenomenon is principally the outcome of three sets of factors: firstly and majorly, many young persons are deprived of sound parental care due to early death, morbidity or poverty of their parents; Secondly, the education system is insensitive to the initial conditions and needs of disadvantaged youths on the one hand, and the changing skill requirements of the economy on the other hand; and thirdly, breakdown of African Solidarity and growing scare of child witches have skewed the balance of sympathy away from disadvantaged children. Arising from these shortcomings, many youths are generally ill-prepared for life in an increasingly challenging world.

Data for the study was gathered from desk review of related literature, particularly; publications of the Cross River State Planning Commission (SPC) and State Bureau of Statistics (SBS), the National Bureau of Statistic (NBS), the National Population Commission (NPC), and the International labour Organization (ILO). The approach adopted was both dialectical and descriptive. The dialectical approach was used to form the conceptual underpinning, which is the subject of Section 1. Section 2 uses descriptive statistics and other information to link the “active poor” phenomenon to the demographic pattern, the education system, and paucity of social security/welfare products. Section 3 explains how to deal with the “active poor” phenomenon in the State and elsewhere, this is followed by the concluding remarks. The study focused on Cross River State, Nigeria, but the “active poor” phenomenon, and youth unemployment, is of global importance. The paper is thus useful to similar sub-national entities in Nigeria and other countries. However, determining the size of the active poor population in the State, although necessary and strongly recommended for future study, was not an objective of this work. In any case, data on youth unemployment and other microeconomic fundamentals indicated strongly that the “active poor” population may be quite large.

2. Conceptual Underpinning

The Malthusian population thesis posits that mankind is permanently trapped by the ‘passion between the sexes’ on the one hand, and the desire to ‘substitute leisure for work’ on the other hand. Sexual drives cause population to grow at geometric rate, while preference for leisure causes production to grow at a much slower (arithmetic) rate. Together, both tendencies can lead to the “Malthusian trap”, when unchecked. But food production grew faster than Malthus predicted in the 19th century Northern Europe. Equally, absence of adoption and fostering, popular use of contraceptives and abortion, treatment of pregnancy as a time of unpleasant sickness, and veneration of material wealth accumulation, together, provided preventive checks to growth in population. The social consciousness that explains the 19th century successes in Europe is widely associated with Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). It was widely believed that Protestants were wealthier, had fewer children, and generally more devoted to secular vocations that were seen as an “end” or “calling”, which made wealth accumulation much easier. In addition, Protestantism supported literacy and scientific researches, as demonstrated by the fact that many 18th – 20th century inventors were Protestants; an indication that Protestantism was not distanced from science and technology (Wikipedia, 2012:1; Macfarlane 2012).

The current situation in Cross River State, Nigeria, is quite different. People widely prefer early pregnancies and marriages to reduce risks of child birth complications. There is limited use of contraceptives and child birth is widely celebrated as a divine miracle. Most families would prefer to have at least 3 children regardless of their income. Children are indeed seen as a ‘blessing’, and source of emotional and material satisfaction. The worldview propagated by the new “Pentecostal Movements”, that dominate the mindset of many, can move Cross River State, Nigeria towards the Malthusian trap, by encouraging population growth and at the same time denigrating hard work and commitment to honest public service. Moreover, being “called” or “elected” is most commonly associated with full time preaching, in contrast to the earlier Protestantism where those notions majorly described total devotion to one’s secular work, sterling capacity for industry, and a culture of piety, thrift, savings, and honesty (Essia, 2012:1).

Equally, the new “Pentecostal Movements”, see wealth and success as “gifts” or “blessings” from God, and associate failure or misfortunes to the Devil (and not laziness). Fighting the Devil requires time consuming prayers and fasting sessions, and regular payment of tithes and offerings. This worldview stands Weber’s *Spirit of Capitalism* on its head, and drives a needless wedge between some Christian doctrines and science; as the scope for questioning required in

scientific researches is narrowed. The new “Pentecostal Movements” are more or less ‘spiritual super markets’ where it is believed that every success can be shopped for, including; political appointment/winning elections, promotion at the work place, marriage, healing from sickness, winning court cases, and so on (Essia, 2012:2). Such oversimplification can adversely influence attitude to work and life, health seeking behavior, and socioeconomic development generally, and is capable of making conditions rife for the “active poor” phenomenon to thrive in Cross River State and elsewhere.

Hegelian dialectics provides the framework for explaining how the social consciousness promoted by the new “Pentecostal Movements” can dampen attitude to work and life, and lead to undesirable mental colonization. Mental colonization is eased by reification, which is reduction of the human phenomena to mere ‘things’. This allows people to act and think around what they are made to believe with little or no reference to what is real or realistic. With reification, an intellectual activity such as reading the Bible or studying to become a preacher, for instance, may not imply seeking for the truth, because the mindset is colonized by ‘stereotyped facts’ or doctrines from the logic and morality of the reified structures. Reification is possible because the individual achieves conscious realization in reference to some structure of social equilibrium, and religion is a very potent medium because it arouses the sensation of the divine. Indeed, the easiest way to have controlling influence over others is be masked as ‘god’.

Thus members of the new “Pentecostal Movements” obey their pastors or leaders, and imbibe the doctrine they dictate because of the moral authority that is recognized in them, regardless of whether such ideas and methods are Biblical. The adverse impact of such doctrines on the individual is often ignored or justified as worthwhile sacrifices. Consequently many abandon their families, go through several torturous activities, and even go to war or die in defense of their leader. Reification, in that respect, offers a spiritual channel for social pressure to exercise itself, and is possible because human beings are often duty bound to respect what they believe can affect them positively. This is particularly so when the prescriptions take the form of a command, which is preemptory and leaves no room for hesitation (Essia, 2012:2).

3. The “Active Poor” Phenomenon

The factors that sustain ‘active poor’ phenomenon in Cross River State - demographic misfortune, insensitive and ill-equipped education system, and inadequate social welfare products – are described below in the following three sub-Sections.

3.1 Demographic Misfortune

Available statistics support the hypothesis that many youths lack sound parental care, nurturing, education, healthcare, and childhood love due to early demise, morbidity or poverty of one or both of their parents. As Table 1 indicates, more people in the State are in the age brackets 0 to 40 years. About 50 percent of the population is composed of dependants (below 15 years), which weighs heavily on both public and private resources.

Table 1. Household characteristics in Cross River State

Household Parameters	Value
<i>Age/Distribution (Male & Female):</i>	
% of 0-14	47.06%
% of 15-39	43.74%
% of 40-54	5.95%
% of 55-above	3.24%
Average Household size	7 persons
Average income (monthly)	N13, 194.88
Income/Household size	N1,884.98
Daily Average Household purchasing power	N62.83
Gini coefficient (0<Gini Coefficient<1)	0.53
Life expectancy at birth	47 years
Adult Morbidity Rate (> 40 years)	20%
% of young women aged 15-19 likely to be pregnant	18%

Source: Cross River State Economic Performance Review, SPC (2009), SPC (2010:2)

The next largest group are those in the 15-39 age brackets (43.74 percent). Put together, the population below 40 years make up 90.80 percent of the population, leaving the remaining (parent stock) age groups at only 9.19 percent (40-54 years was 5.95 percent, and 55 years -above 3.24 percent). Generally, males begin child bearing around 25 years old while females may start much earlier. The age-sex structure presented above strongly suggests that fewer parents are alive to groom their children to adulthood. Equally, average family size of 7 persons and average daily household purchasing power of N62.83 indicate high level of household poverty, while the Gini coefficient score of 0.53 shows substantial income inequality. Considered together, the statistics support the hypothesis that many youths lack good parental care, nurturing, nourishment, education, and health care to prepare them for healthy and balanced adulthood.

Life expectancy at birth of about 47 years implies that a man who had his first child at the age of 25 years is likely to die on the 25th birthday of his first child. If he had his last (probably the fifth) child at the age of 35 years, the child would be about 15 years when the father dies. Similarly, morbidity rate of 20 percent implies that about one fifth of the adult population (above 40 years) were physically or mentally incapacitated and thus unable to contribute optimally to family income, and were therefore effectively dependent on others; most probable the under aged children. The fact that 18 percent of girls 15 – 19 years were pregnant indicates high incidences of unwanted pregnancies and early marriages for adolescent girls who ought to be in school. Early marriage is also suggestive of poor parental care and possible commercializing of sex. Generally, the major causes of low life expectancy and high morbidity - stroke, hypertension, diabetes, vehicular accidents, blindness, and ignorance – are preventable.

Table 2 shows comparative demographic statistics for the south-south States and Nigeria (the other south-south States are Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, Delta, and Akwa Ibom States). Literacy rate (female) of 70 percent for Cross River was lower than south-south average (78 percent), but much higher than Nigeria's average (58 percent). Fertility rate was only higher in Bayelsa (5.8 percent) than in Cross River (5.4 percent), but comparable to the national rate of 5.7 percent. Use of family planning of 16 percent exceeded the national average of 10 percent. Maternal health care (urban/rural) in the State (68/44) performed poorly compared to Edo State (91/80), and immunization coverage was higher in Cross River State (42) than south-south (36) and national averages (23).

Table 2. Comparative demographic characteristics 2008

Demographic/Health Statistics	Nigeria	South-South	Akwa Ibom	Bayelsa	Cross River	Delta	Edo	Rivers
Literacy (Women)	54	78	80	72	70	77	76	84
Literacy (Men)	74	89	85	96	79	89	88	95
Fertility Rate	5.7	4.7	4.0	5.8	5.4	4.5	5.3	4.3
Use of Family Planning	10	16	18	8	16	15	19	14
Maternal Health Care (urban/rural)	58/39	70/56	67/44	35/22	68/44	78/62	91/80	67/64
Immunization Coverage	23	36	32	20	42	38	39	37
Stunting	41	31	28	29	32	35	38	29
Comprehensive knowledge of HIV Prevention (male/Female)	23/36	26/37	15/25	42/69	37/34	24/26	39/50	17/36
Household Drinking Water	56	59	65	27	26	72	60	69
Household sanitation Facilities	27	22	39	6	10	22	30	20
Access to Electricity	50	56	58	51	32	64	74	53

Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey Fact Sheet (South-South Zone), National Population Commission (2009)

The rate of stunting among children in Cross River State (32 percent) was comparable to the south-south average (31 percent), but lower than the national average (41 percent). Comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS (male/female) was 37/34 in Cross River, 26/37 in the south-south, and 23/36 nationwide. Access to household drinking water for Cross River (26 percent), was poorer than south-south (59 percent) and national (56 percent) averages. Household sanitation facilities and access to electricity were generally poorer in Cross River than the south-south and national

averages. Clearly, high fertility and low infant mortality ensured increasing life births, while low life expectancy, high rate of adult morbidity, and poverty led to fast depletion of active parents. The combined effect of high number of life births, and depletion of active parents, was poorly nourished and ill-nurtured children who took charge of their lives too early and were ill-equipped for the challenges of adulthood.

3.2 *Insensitive and Ill-Equipped Education System*

The involvement of Crossriverians in the private sector has remained generally low. Government is the largest employer of labour, and viable indigenous private businesses are few. In the mining sector, for instance, few Crossriverians own functional quarries and the expertise for repairs/maintenance of equipments and machines is sourced from outside the State. The transporters are mainly from other States, and very little or no processing takes place in the State. Agriculture is majorly at subsistence level, and appreciable value addition in marketing is controlled by non-Crossriverians.

It is hypothesized here that incapacities of the education system have adversely affected active participation of Crossriverians in economic activities. Generally, the colonially inspired education system in Nigeria, designed principally to train support staff for the colonial government, has remained largely unreconstructed decades after independence. More specifically, the education system is strait jacketed; being founded on the erroneous assumption that pupils/students have similar initial conditions, and consequently ill-equipped for meeting the peculiar education needs, and tolerating the idiosyncrasies, of different kinds of disadvantaged and vulnerable persons, and more seriously failing to ensure that those who come out of schools acquire employable skills and competencies. These incapacities, of the education system, further victimize the victims of demographic misfortunes discussed earlier, thereby leading to high rates of youth unemployment and fewer business start-ups among Crossriverians.

Table 3 compares unemployment rates (15-24 years) in the State with the national rates, and presents disaggregated unemployment data by gender, location, and level of education in 2011. Unemployment rate in Cross River State (35.9 percent) was higher than the national rate (23.9 percent). Rural unemployment rate (37.3 percent) exceeded the urban rate (31.5 percent), and there were more unemployed youths in the Central than South and North senatorial zones. Lastly, graduates of tertiary institutions constituted the largest proportion of unemployed persons (31.74 percent) in the State.

Table 3. Youth unemployment rates in Cross River State 15-24 years (2011)

Cross River State/Nigeria(%) : 35.9/23.9
Rural/Urban (%) : 37.3/31.5
South/Central/North Zones (%) : 29.09/43.96/26.96
Primary/Secondary/tertiary Education (%) : 7.97/28.55/31.74

Source: State Planning Commission, 2012

Table 4 presents comparative statistics of employees (in private enterprises), ownership of enterprises, and the number of skilled technicians/craftsmen by State of origin for Cross River, Akwa Ibom, the South East States (that is, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, and Enugu States), and other States. The study area was Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. Cross River State had the lowest number of employees (6.87 percent) compared to 64.63 percent from Akwa Ibom, 13.7 percent from the South East, and 14.8 percent from other States. Crossriverians also owned the least number of enterprises (7.02 percent) compared to 19.30 percent, 33.36 percent, and 40.33 percent owned by people from Akwa Ibom, South East, and other States respectively. Equally, skilled technicians/craftsmen of Cross River origin (10.25 percent) were fewer than those from Akwa Ibom (62.7 percent), the South East (16.68 percent), and 10.37 percent from other States.

Table 4. Employees, enterprises, and skilled technicians/craftsmen (by state of origin)

States	Employees (%)	Enterprise Owners (%)	Technicians/craftsmen (%)
Cross River	6.87	7.02	10.25
Akwa Ibom	64.63	19.30	62.7
South East	13.7	33.36	16.68
Other	14.8	40.33	10.37

Source: State Planning Commission, 2013

Table 3 and Table 4 point to existence of substantial skills/competencies deficit that needs to be filled to raise the employability of Crossriverians and increase business start-ups. Whilst the abundant resources of the State are not fully harnessed as reflected in the insignificant growth of manufacturing and low value addition in agriculture discussed earlier, youth unemployment rates remained high and the number of skilled technicians/craftsmen of Cross River State origin were few. These statistics instructively point to two levels of human resource deficit; firstly, a large proportion of Crossriverians lack employable competencies, and secondly, the competencies youths acquire from schools may not be what employers require. Dealing with both levels of deficit, generally, call for incorporation of more technical and vocational education and training (TVET), alignment of training curricula with employers' labour needs, ensuring that young people spend adequate number of years in school, and rendering the business environment generally hospitable. It is also needful to create institutional structures for identification and rehabilitation of out-of-school youths (such as drug addicts, ex-convicts, neurotics, and so on), who are not in the labour force due to some physical, mental or emotional disabilities.

Human resources deficit is also linked to the more general global challenge of non-inclusive or jobless growth. World Bank (2012), European Union (2011), and ILO (2011:1, 2011:2) identify inadequate skills, mismatch of the qualifications of young people with labour market needs, rapidly changing labour market conditions, and structural economic shifts that displace labour for capital as major causes of jobless growth. Other sources of jobless growth include *casualization* of labour markets, technological advances, and growing *servicization* of production, which together lead to reduction in labour demand relative to capital. Equally, more establishments require temporary employees, and increased demand for professional specialists and unskilled labour in the growing service industries have caused new opportunities to cluster at the top end, in the professional and advanced technical sector, and at the bottom end, in the low-tier service industries.

WYR (2003) reports also that while demand for educated workers generally tends to lag behind supply, growth in educational participation has increased the number of youths obtaining university degrees. This has led to "qualification inflation", whereby many qualified persons are forced to "trade down" and accept inferior forms of employment. There are also problems of mismatch of university degrees with demand occupations, caused by many students graduating in disciplines that do not apply directly anywhere, which makes them unemployable without serious retraining. These anomalies have sustained the situation where abundance of unemployed graduates exist side-by-side scarcity of highly skilled professionals.

3.2.1 Restructuring the Education System - Lessons from 'Europe 2020'

As noted in World Bank (2012), European Union (2011), and ILO (2011:1, 2011:2), the most dramatic increases in youth unemployment rates in recent years occurred in the developed economies and European Union, growing from 13.9 percent up to 17.7 percent. This realization prompted the European Community (EC) to include restructuring of the education system as a flagship initiative under its agenda for new skills and jobs in the 'Europe 2020' programme. The major causes of youth unemployment were grouped under supply-side and demand-side factors. The supply side factors are mainly low school-leaving age, skill gaps, and skills mismatches, while the demand-side factors are unfavourable macroeconomic policies and business environment, excessive labour market regulation, and ineffective social security systems.

On the supply side, it is assumed that spending longer years in school exposes pupils/students to more complementary skills, thus rendering them more employable. This however assumes that schools are equipped for balanced learning; in terms of curriculum development, culturing of technical/vocational skills, emotional competencies, and social/communicational knowledge. Equally essential is educational institution-employers interaction, and flexibility in the design of programmes to take into consideration entry conditions and vulnerability of different intakes. Labour supply inhibitions are also removed by easing labour mobility and making information on existing vacancies more accessible. On the demand side, incentives to employers for further training of the workforce (particularly in the technical and senior cadres), measures to ease doing business, promoting business formalization, checking child labour, and ensuring that only those with reasonable level of skills and competencies get into the labor market are important.

The major causes of unemployment identified among the EC countries, the relevant 'Europe 2020' initiatives for addressing them, and the lessons for Cross River State, Nigeria, are summarized below.

1). Early school leaving

The major causes of early school leaving identified in 'Europe 2020' were dropouts caused by failure in promotion/qualifying examinations, and poverty. To reduce dropout rate in Latvia and Greece, pupils/students who

have failed end-of-term exams are re-taught to ensure that they move on and not lose interest. In Luxembourg there are 'second chance schools' for youths aged 16-24 years, and assessments adopt a portfolio approach that considers the overall condition of each student. Compulsory (9-year) basic education is provided for by the universal basic education scheme (UBE) in Nigeria, but no policy directly targets reduction in school dropout rate. There are also stringent qualifying conditions for university admissions (high cut of points, state of origin, credit passes in English language and mathematics, etc). Consequently, average school dropout rate in Cross River State, Nigeria, is 40 percent. Early school leaving was also found to be related to financial reasons and household poverty in some European countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, and France. In France the 'Hope for Suburbs' plan, targets young people from underprivileged areas; 200 schools were piloted by an academic success programme that involved intensive training and individual support for pupils from underprivileged homes and those lagging behind. Education at all levels is seen as a private/merit good in Nigeria. Primary and secondary education is generally subsidized or free in some States. However, there are few initiatives for targeting the poor to sponsor their education from nursery to university level.

2). Skills/competencies deficits

'Europe 2020' recommends that EC countries reform the structure of their vocational training systems to ensure that young people entering the labour market do so with adequate skills. VET is considered derogatory and not essentially a part of formal education in many EC countries. 'Europe 2020' called for mainstreaming of VET into formal education, to ensure that young people entering the labour market have employable skills and knowledge. In Hungary, specialized and workshop-based education is introduced straight after primary education (in JSS). In Macedonia, secondary education is being reformed to incorporate VET. In Germany, an extensive system for VET exists, including a one-year school based preparation programme for apprenticeship training, and a one-year occupational-based preparation (particularly in technology and engineering). In Nigeria, the legal framework for VET exists in the National Education Policy, but implementation is generally weak. The framework for providing VET for dropouts of the formal education system needs to be developed.

3). Sensitivity to the needs of unemployed youths

Few EC countries made special allowances for youths, and only a few had specific active labour market policies (ALMPs) for young people. In terms of social security, few countries made special allowances for young people and they are entitled to unemployment benefits under the same terms as older age groups. Some countries provided other forms of financial support, including support for those who participate in education/training opportunities. Some countries had implemented measures to promote and support self-employment that were specific to young people or target young people through a broader scheme. These measures include financial support and loans to set up businesses, and entrepreneurship education/training. 'Europe 2020' encouraged the EC countries to adopt ALMPs suitable to their respective local conditions. There are no ALMPs for young people in Nigeria. There are also no social security products, allowances for young people, or incentives to support young people going into self employment; by way of easing access to affordable loans and entrepreneurship training.

4). Recognition of non-formal and informal learning

'Europe 2020' encouraged youths who were engaged in formal education to pick up complementary skills, with certification, from activities that take place outside the classroom (e.g. voluntary activities or summer jobs). In Estonia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia there is already a system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Finland had moved towards a personalized curriculum that recognized non-formal and informal learning. In Spain professional certificates can be acquired through recognition of prior learning, and in Norway it is possible to achieve a certificate of complete apprenticeship through validation of prior learning. In Nigeria, young people are at risk of leaving school without any type of qualification or exposure to certificated out-of-classroom learning. Generally, there are few legal frameworks for giving recognition to non-formal and informal learning. People have to go through formal school to be certified. Where opportunities for certifying non-formal learning exist, the requirements are too stringent with cocktails of irrelevant pre-qualification requirements. Everyone is forced to go through familiar strait jackets, thus making the certificate frenzy unnecessarily exalted.

3.3 Inadequate Social Welfare Products

In a number of countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, Ghana, South Africa, Mauritius, etc., social security is given priority. Special consideration is given to ensuring that acceptable standards are maintained across the different social and economic strata of education, food and nutrition, healthcare, housing and sanitation,

etc. In such countries, many public schools are equipped with free/subsidized meals, books and other learning aids, healthcare and regular checkups, exchange/holiday programmes, etc., to promote the quality of life generally and enhance the performance of young people particularly. In Nigeria however, public schools are generally in poor state with outdated facilities and poorly monitored and motivated teachers, inadequate learning aids and support infrastructures for electricity supply, ICT, and water and sanitation. In a number of private schools where facilities are fairly improved, fees are exorbitant and generally unaffordable to the poor. Children have to depend on their parents/guardians for everything, and those from poor homes are doubly victimized.

Social security/welfare packages for the poor and vulnerable groups are not guaranteed by law in Nigeria. Equally, mechanisms for identifying and supporting poor and vulnerable persons either do not exist or are susceptible to abuses, and displacement of the poor by those who are already well off is very common. The situation is worsened by growing dysfunction of the extended family system and the age long “African Solidarity”. Moreover, questioning of authority based on age, associated with growing individualism, have skewed the flow of sympathy away from young people generally, and disadvantaged children in particular.

In decades past, appellations such as ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘uncle’, and ‘auntie’ had social meanings beyond the actual biological relationships. More seriously, the appellations reflected strong socio-cultural ties based on kinship, religion, ethnic group or state of origin. It was possible for well placed persons to take up sponsorship of poorer members of the society on the basis of such non-biological ties. But the extended family system and “African Solidarity” have overtime lost the ingredients of patriarchy and gerontocracy, which allowed the idiosyncrasies of young people to be assumed away as childishness and ignorance. But the surge of individualism and commodity fetishism associated with unbridled capitalism now compel everyone to be financial responsible regardless of age. Moreover, young people increasingly find it much easier to earn higher incomes, which accord them respect that runs counter to the social consciousness that sustained the “African Solidarity”, and increasingly older persons rely on the younger ones for succor. In other words, capitalism has caused the basis for respect to shift dialectically from age to money; and richer persons are assumed to “wiser” regardless of their ages. These developments have worsened conditions for the “active poor”.

Future disaffection towards young people is facilitated by strong association of misfortunes with witchcraft, and the belief that vulnerable children like orphans, the disabled, and other disadvantaged persons are witches or agents of the Devil. Child witch accusation and discrimination exacerbate poverty by further weakening the African Solidarity and distancing children of poor homes from avenues that should offer them help. Fewer well-to-do persons associate with close family members in recent times due to fear of being inflicted with misfortunes. Many parents disown their children when witchcraft accusation is strong; hence the growing number of street and de-parented children. There is no doubt that several “active poor” are likely to be victims of child witch accusation.

4. Empowering the “Active Poor” Population

Cross River State is a fast growing tourism and conference destination in Nigeria. The State equally has enormous natural resources that can support self sustaining development. But its large youthful population urgently needs empowerment to enhance their employability and capacity for business start-ups. Currently, government is the largest employer of labour, while few private sector jobs are taken up by non-indigenes. The State has a perspective plan document (CRS V2020) that seeks to leapfrog it from a largely subsistence-based agrarian economy, to a service-led tourism and agribusiness economy by 2020, and a critical stock of human resources with requisite skills and competencies is inevitably required. This means many youths that are now described as “active poor” need to be re-socialized to avail the economy of the human resources required for making CRS V2020 a reality. But as explained earlier the “active poor” lack the mental and emotional capabilities due to demographic misfortune, insensitive and ill-equipped education system, and paucity of social security products. These three sets of forces explain why many youths in Cross River State are unable to secure well paying jobs or own viable enterprises. To accumulate the critical skills and knowledge required for attaining the State Vision of being the preferred destination for business and leisure by 2020, the following recommendations are pertinent:

Firstly, development planning and policy making need to take cognizance of the current demographic structure of the State; that is, a fast growing youthful population that peaks in the middle ages and declines thereafter at a fast rate. This leaves several young people without healthy parents or active adults. Accordingly, planned reduction in births (particularly from unwanted pregnancies), and feeding subsidy for the poor, particularly children in public schools are needful. Equally needful is continuing health education for all, to promote adoption of improved health seeking behavior (for reducing morbidity and increasing average longevity rates). Improved health seeking behavior calls for

easing access for affordably quality healthcare for all categories of persons. Exposing children to proper sanitation facilities and hygiene wares will also support cultivation of lifelong health seeking behavior.

Secondly, a sensitive, equipped, and well-served education system will take into account the life history of pupils/students, including; parental status, religious affiliation, medical history and health vulnerabilities, and talents or natural advantages. All pupils/students ought to be exposed to adequate measure of pedagogic and action-learning components of education, and given ample opportunities to reveal their specific preferences. Regular guidance and counseling sessions are important to guide pupils/students to their desired life dreams. People generally perform better in professions that are linked to their natural advantage or talents, which could be as socially determined as may indeed be hereditary. Repeated failure in end-of-year examinations should not be a reason for dropping out, but rather justification for moving the affected pupil/student to other institutions where he/she can perform better. The existence of several 'second chance' opportunities should reduce dropout rate. It is equally important to reassess entry qualifications to various programmes to eliminate all forms of irrelevant conditionality and rigidities. For instance, requiring that all entrants into universities have credit passes in mathematics and English language need reconsideration as each student on admission into a programme naturally learns the English language and mathematics relevant to that discipline. Such requirements are often unnecessary, and in a number of cases counterproductive, because they prevent many youths from studying their most preferred courses.

Thirdly, progressive break down of the extended family system and its impact on young people particularly, need to be modeled into development planning with a view to introducing new social security/welfare programmes for disadvantaged and vulnerable persons. Establishment of well maintained orphanages, old persons' homes, and support institutions for various kinds of disabled persons need to be considered. Equally, challenges posed by child witch accusation need to be tackled with continuing public enlightenment and enforcement of existing Child Right Laws and Conventions. It is also needful to closely evaluate what religious organizations teach and preach with a view to ensuring that the aspects that encourage fanaticism and other forms of destructive mental colonization and enslavement are reviewed. This calls for regular government-religious groups' dialogue and effective communication. More importantly education at all levels, whether formal or non-formal, should seek to comprehensively develop the whole man. It is not enough for persons to acquire a combination of academic and vocational knowledge; enrichment of education with general knowledge that embodies philosophy, world religions, metaphysics, mysticism, music, economics, fine art, photography, among others, is absolutely essential for warding off ignorance and superstition.

5. Concluding Remarks

Cross River State, Nigeria is endowed with huge solid mineral and agricultural resources, and an emerging tourism culture, but few youths secure well paying stable jobs and much fewer start new businesses. This has promoted the situation where several energetic Crossriverians remain unemployed and poor; thus the "active poor" phenomenon that needs to be redressed urgently for the State to attain the Vision of becoming the preferred destination for business and leisure by 2020. The "active poor" are so-called because they are physically energetic, but lack critical mental and emotional capabilities and are therefore less venturesome, and generally uncompetitive.

The paper argues that the "active poor" phenomenon in Cross River State, Nigeria, is precipitated by three set of factors. Firstly, many youths are incapacitated by poor initial conditions occasioned by early death, morbidity and poverty of their parents. Secondly, the education system is insensitive and ill-equipped for meeting the development needs to many children, particularly those with unfavourable initial conditions, and thirdly, paucity of social security products alongside depreciation of the extended family system and the menace of child witch accusations have made it difficult for disadvantaged youths to get help. Accordingly, it is recommended that development planning addresses the "active poor" phenomenon with the following measures:

- 1) Check demographic misfortunes by mainstreaming reproductive health education in the secondary school curriculum and promoting improved health seeking behaviours by: enforcing existing legislations against under-aged marriages; legalizing termination of unwanted pregnancies as part of normal gynecological procedures; daily free meals and multivitamin supplements for public primary and secondary schools pupils/students; routine medical checks and free treatment; exposing pupils/students to appropriate sanitation facilities and hygiene behavior; and rendering healthcare services accessible to the entire population.
- 2) Render the education system more sensitive to development: ensure regular curriculum development for balanced academic and practical content; raise efficiency of guidance and counseling; create several 'second-chance' opportunities in the education system to reduce dropout rate; ensure that all students learn at least two complementary vocational skills before leaving secondary school and continue to learn more at

the tertiary level; and create institutional framework for certificating and recognizing non-formal and informal learning.

- 3) Achieve a welfare system that is supportive of the poor: create and sustain social welfare/security programmes to meet the needs of different categories of disadvantaged and vulnerable persons; promote regular government-religious institutions dialogue to check the spread of fanaticism and destructive mental colonization; mainstream general studies into formal and non-formal education at all levels to promote general knowledge of philosophy, world religions, metaphysics, mysticism, music, economics, fine art, photography, and so on.

The paper focused on the “active poor” in Cross River State, Nigeria, but the conditions described apply to other States in Nigeria and elsewhere in the rest of the world. A major value added by the study is the attempt to show how social consciousness, mental models, and belief system affect attitude to work and life, and how the economic status of an individual (that is, whether an individual is rich or poor) is influenced by demographic conditions, the education system, and socio-cultural factors. This indicates the need for adoption of multidisciplinary approach in development studies.

References

- Cross River State Bureau of Statistics (SBS). (2012). Unpublished Cross River State GSP Estimates June.
- Cross River State Planning Commission (SPC). (2009). Delivering on the State 7 Point Agenda. *Cross River State Economic Performance Review*, 2(2).
- (SPC). (2010:1). Pathway to the Service Revolution in Cross River State. *Cross River State Economic Performance Review*, 3(2).
- (2010:2). Survey of Unemployed Persons, December.
- (2012). Spotlight On Cross River State. An Unpublished Summary of Economic Statistics For 2007-2011. June.
- (2013). Analysis of Required Skills and Enterprises’ Employment Preferences for a new Polytechnic in Cross River State, Nigeria. Being Report of a Study Sponsored by the Cross River State Government, February.
- Essia, U. (2012:1). The Social Economy of Child Witch Labeling in Nigeria: The Case of Akwa Ibom State. *Nigeria Science Journal of Psychology*. Retrieved from <http://www.sjpub.org/sjpsych.html>
- Essia, U. (2012:2). A Spiritual Reconstruction of Modern Economic Thought. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(3), 422-430. Retrieved from <http://www.europeanjournalofsocialsciences.com>
- European Union. (2011). Reversing the sharp decline in youth employment Being a report of Committee on Economic Affairs and Development Doc. 12626, Croatia (June). Retrieved from assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc11/EDOC12626.pdf
- ILO. (2011:1). Estimates and Projections of the Economically Active Population: 1990-2020. (Sixth Edition) Methodological Description (October) [Http://Laborsta.Ilo.Org/Apply8/Data/Eapep/V6/Ilo_Eapep_Methodology_2011.Pdf](http://Laborsta.Ilo.Org/Apply8/Data/Eapep/V6/Ilo_Eapep_Methodology_2011.Pdf).
- ILO. (2011:2). An Introductory Guide for Employers’ Organizations: Tackling Youth Employment Challenges. Being a Publications of the International Training Centre of the ILO. Retrieved from www.ilo.org/public/english/.../youth/tackling_ye_guide_en.pdf
- Macfarlane, A. (2012). Thomas Malthus and the Making of the Modern World. Retrieved from http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/TEXTS/Malthus_final.pdf
- National Population Commission. (2009). 2008 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, Fact Sheet South South Zone. Retrieved from www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/sr173/sr173.pdf
- Wikipedia. (2012). The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism. Retrieved 12/03, 2012 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>
- World Bank. (2012). Reducing Youth Unemployment through Skills Development in Sub-Saharan Africa South-South Knowledge Exchange Hub. Retrieved from <http://wbi.worldbank.org/sske/result-story/2160>
- World Youth Report. (2003). The Global Situation of Young People Being A publication of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com.ng/books?id=aOUBnx7RZFAC&pg=PA55&lpg=PA55&dq=Youth+Employment+World+YOUTH+Report>