

Workers in Nigeria's Social Development Experience: A Critique of Current Mythologies

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Résumé: Un ensemble important d'ouvrages sur la classe ouvrière s'est appesanti sur sa position privilégiée. Ainsi l'ouvrier fait partie soit de la coalition de l'élite urbaine, soit d'un groupe social puissant qui s'est adjugé une part démesurée des ressources nationales. Ces dernières années, cette position s'est déplacée vers le centre de l'explication de la crise africaine, et a souscrit aux instruments de politique liés à l'ajustement pour corriger cette anomalie. Le présent document examine la validité de cette caractérisation du travailleur africain et soutient que ces arguments ne sont pas étayés par les preuves empiriques dont on dispose, pas plus qu'ils ne sont valides sur le plan conceptuel. L'étude s'intéresse au marché du travail, au revenu, au statut-identité, à la pauvreté, à l'accès à l'éducation, à la santé, et aux soins de santé.

Introduction

A central aspect of the conventional wisdom in the explanation of worker aspect of the African development crisis is the idea that workers are elements of the privileged, consumptionist labour aristocracy or the urban elite coalition. De-constructed, it presupposes a privileged labour market defined by stable employment and income giving greater accent to workers' existing privileges over the peasant farmer or the 'semi-proletarianized worker. A reproduction of the Japanese myth of 'job for life' is fostered as existing for the 'modern' sector. Mobility between the 'formal' and 'informal' sectors is often precluded, and a false impression of the experience of 'modern' sector labour process as blissfully privileged is conveyed. Furthermore, elements within the old variant of this explanation, most typified by the writings of Emmanuel Arrighi and John Saul, suggest that in income, social status, and self-identification, the labour aristocrat-worker identifies with other urban elites, not the "urban poor". Social welfare spending is skewed in favour of the urban areas further accentuating the privileges of the worker-aristocrat. The characteristics are deemed antithetical to accelerated development! In this paper, I examine the labour market experience of the Nigerian worker, his/her location in national income distribution profile, poverty and workers' self-identification. While cast as a specific critique of the conventional wisdom, issues of employ-

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ment, wealth and income inequality, poverty, etc. key indicators of social development.

The specific manifestation of these opinions have been treated elsewhere and therefore need not delay us here¹. Significant though, is the use of these ideas to explain the African crisis and to rationalize the imposition and implementation of the structural adjustment programme of the World Bank and the IMF. While the articulation of the ideas by Arrighi (1967), Arrighi & Saul (1973a, 1973b, 1973c), Berg (1969), took the form of intellectual discourse, by the late 1970s and the 1980, the conventional wisdom had become the basis for policy instruments (Lipton, 1977; Bates, 1984; World Bank, 1978, 1981).

Workers, Status and the Labour Market

The image of the labour market situation of the African worker one gets is of someone abandoning the 'worthwhile' existence of the village for the neon lights and glamour of the city in the Bank's wisdom. The creation of huge state-sourced waged jobs, depletes the rural areas of the necessary manpower creating distortion in education market by inducing the prospective-city targeter to demand for qualifications and skills relevant to the white-collar jobs. The new-recruits marching on the cities, can then be expected to walk into well paying jobs with privileged status. Neat and precise, maybe - and the script may be a prospective Hollywood box-office hit - but it simplifies what is a very complex process, and creates myths. First, the development of the western education in Nigeria was greatly restricted. The number of secondary schools were limited even by the 1940s, and the first university did not exist until 1948, and then after intense agitation. The development of the 'skill market' was restrained for a number of reasons; the colonial regime's narrow definition of what an African needs to get through the day, restriction on the development of a trouble-making educated class, etc. By the late 1950s and 1960s, these policies were resulting in serious manpower shortage at various levels. So for one, it was hardly a case of over-production of white-collar personnel². When the AG Western Regional government in 1952, and the Federal Government in 1976 decided to make primary education universal and free, the motive was raising the literacy level to enhance basic skill. The rapid expansion in primary and university education in the early 1980s was motivated by similar desires. The job market situation up to the 1970s suggested a supply

1 Cf. Adesina, 1990c, 1991. See the *References* for some sources.

2 The attempt by the emergent political class to expand education, at regional and federal levels, was constrained by fund (Awokoya, 1969).

constraint on several fronts, which became acute in 1976 after the creation of new states.

It is true that most young persons with primary and secondary education emigrate from the rural areas. It is also true that job aspiration at the time of entry is usually the formal sectors (Ndegwa & Powelson, 1973; Fapohunda 1978a), but the desire usually wears out for most and the majority end up in the informal sector. Migration, more significantly, is a result of absent job prospect in the rural area, which seems to me a perfectly logical market-led behaviour! As Fapohunda's survey in Lagos showed, 53.6 per cent of the respondents left to look for work in Lagos, another 28.7 per cent to school or learn a trade (Fapohunda, 1978a). We confront another aspects of the myth when we look at some unemployment figures. In 1935 in Lagos, for instance, 56 per cent of the self-registered unemployed were born in Lagos, not immigrants (Hughes & Cohen, 1978, p.49). Figures for the subsequent years might not be so concentrated but it is quite instructive.

For the category of immigrants we are interested in, job prospect hardly extends beyond the lower echelon of the private or public sector enterprises. Insertion into the labour market for most of them starts with taking up residence with kinsmen or relations. Contrary to the assumption of the LAT, a working class residential exclusivity from the (the rest of the) 'urban poor' is not supported by any of the studies on Nigeria. Our immigrant-job seeker takes up residence with others in the mainly urban poor neighbourhoods; (formal and informal sector) workers, informal sector operatives, etc. He or she depends on them for sustenance and job market information. Some will secure jobs in the formal sector, but most will end up as workers in the informal sector. As confirmed by Peace's (1979) study at Agege, on the outskirts of Lagos, the cycle of responsibility shifts to the newly employed. Often they will be supporting new immigrants or others who become unemployed, "constitut[ing] a drain on whatever financial surplus permanent workers may accumulate" (1975, p.288). This is in addition to repatriating money to relatives in the rural area, no matter the constraints of urban life. As Callaway remarked:

in many cases, those school leavers who have found paid work show remarkable restraint and save a high proportion of their low incomes, often sending money back home for the education of younger brothers or sisters. (1969, p.142)

The image of a full proletarianized working class which cuts itself away from extended family obligations is of doubtful validity³. As will be

3 Saul's response to these evidences was to turn the relationship round: in place of selfish aloofness, supporting others is indicative of patron-client relationship!

discussed later, there is very little to show that these workers constitute a privileged group with 'high-status' and income.

In assessing the labour market experience of workers there is also the need to appreciate the inappropriateness of a skill/unskilled dichotomy. Most process jobs in the industrial sector require very little pre-employment skill beyond basic literacy, and this has been an integral part of investment programme of the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in Nigeria. Here, the BAT subsidiary, the Nigerian Tobacco Company is an example of this trend in the 1940s and the 1950s. As Kilby noted, the choice of technology within the protected Nigerian market 'has been governed by the motives of sales maximization... The ability to expand output and capacity rapidly... provide a full range of brands... [and] to have uninterrupted supply". (1969, p.84-85). High automation was combined with unskilled local manpower, most with little more than primary education. No substantial training outlay was required other than attaching them to 'skilled operators' with greater "experience and demonstrated ability" on the machines (*ibid.*). Braverman (1974) has noted that this "skill" amounts to little more than dexterity at machine tending. Although designated a skilled worker, the 'skill' is not easily transferred beyond the specific labour process. In terms of educational qualification, the workers were no more qualified than those in the secondary or tertiary labour markets. A loss of job in the core labour market, means a return to the cess pool of unemployment. The precarious character of remaining in the core labour market firm has a sobering effect on individual workers and capacity for collective action. By contrast, it facilitates the development of a very authoritarian managerial control of the workforce. This is the aspect that is often missed in the celebration of the "enlightened" managerial disposition of these firms⁴.

These features of the core labour market jobs were equally evident in 1986 in the Warri Refinery, in southern Nigeria (Adesina, 1989a). Except for individual educational qualification, the skill basis for workforce stratification is tied to the refining labour process, and is even less transferrable given the wide peculiarities of refining technology. Within the first six years of operation, about 25 per cent of the mainly junior staff were fired. With the squeeze in the labour market after 1984, sacking became a prominent form of disciplining the workforce (*ibid.*). While career mobility may be better than in the informal sector, this can easily be exaggerated. Highly structured occupational boundaries, marked by formal educational qualification, predefine the limit of such mobility (Adesina, 1989a, ch.5). The experience of the labour process, among these 'privileged' workers is

4 And I should know; I grew up in an "NTC home". My parents met in the 1950s as shopfloor workers in the Ibadan factory.

often as physically excruciating as it is in emotional terms. This is more so among shift workers, where their total existence rotates around work and getting ready for work (*ibid*, ch.4). Many expressed the feeling of being caught between the authoritarian control of work, its dead-end nature, etc., and the horrors of unemployment (Adesina, 1989c, 1990). The 'privilege' of work derives more from the greater danger of 'being out on the street'. Again the experience of the refinery workers may not apply to all industrial workers much less civil service workers, but it is instructive⁵. The assumption that formal sector employment is *ipso facto* evidence of privilege, is pure tautology. Someone does it because it is privileged, it is privileged because someone does it. Again it mystifies rather than illuminates.

The problem with becoming unemployed is the dependence on relatives and neighbours, which as evident in Peace's (1979) Agege study is largely made up of co-workers circulating between jobs, petty-commodity producers, artisans and other informal sector operatives. That many workers end up in the informal sector is not to suggest that the workforce of the big firms show evidence of instability; the reverse is most likely the case. The point is that this circulation between the labour markets - apart from income distributional and residential issues - does not allow for the status demarcation assumed in the LAT and some of the NCW, to solidify⁶. This is more so given the relative permanence of unemployment as a feature of the Nigerian working class. As I noted earlier, by the mid-1930s there were about 4,000 registered unemployed in Lagos alone. Majority were born in Lagos, and many were clerical and skilled workers (Hughes & Cohen, 1978). Whatever privileged status existed, relative to the informal sector operatives, has a way of being pruned by unemployment. Labour market instability was a recurring feature of the 1940s and the 1950s: from the labour surplus of the 1940s, to the labour shortage of the 1950s in Western Nigeria, as a result of the cocoa market boom (Weeks 1971b). It would seem that, rather than being trenchantly urban bound, job boom in the rural areas does relocate employment seekers in that direction.

From the late 1950s, however, unemployment among unskilled, semi-skilled and process workers became a permanent feature. In 1956 there were 11 job seekers for every job available. By 1960 and 1966 the situation had worsened to 16 and 24 persons, respectively for every vacant job on the labour exchange register (Fajana, 1975b, p.160). The extent to which this

5 The labour process experience of the glass factory and the steel plant workers in the town were remarkably similar to that of the refinery workers.

6 One should not confuse this with workers who move up the firm's occupational ladder into petty-bourgeois level, and thus emigrate outside the 'working class' A factory hand rising to become divisional manager for instance.

reflects the situation on the ground is circumscribed by a number of factors. First, labour exchange statistics reflect only those registering for employment and those declaring vacancies. In the absence of unemployment benefits there is little incentive to register, so the real level of unemployment is under-represented. This is evident in the returns made by the labour exchanges across the country between 1986 and 1988. In late 1986, the military regime established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to coordinate the implementation of a number of job creation programmes. Prospective beneficiaries of the projects were required to register with the labour exchanges. Unemployment figures for 1987 revealed a sharp rise of between 50 per cent and 1200 per cent in labour exchanges across the country. While some of the registered unemployed (fresh registration in Table 1), can be accounted for by those in unfulfilling or underemploying jobs, there is little doubt that a substantial proportion are those previously uncaptured by labour exchange-based unemployment statistics⁷. Between 1986 and 1987, total (national) registered unemployed rose by 70.37 per cent, mostly accounted for by the 155 per cent rise in those registering for the first time. A year after the NDE directive, total registered unemployed fell by about 20 per cent, and *fresh registration by over 62 per cent*. By contrast those re-registering - perhaps not absorbed by the NDE projects) rose by 96 per cent.

Second, vacancy declaration may reflect available jobs in the formal capitalist sector and under-represent job openings in the petty commodity sector. For the purpose of our analysis, however, we can surmise that the latter sector will have to absorb the 'surplus' labour, although the capacity to do so is extremely limited (Fapohunda 1978a, 1978b). If it does, then the workers are subsumed under informal sector entrepreneurs, by no means your big time capitalist. With the mobility between the two sectors, the assumption of a privileged or aristocratic working class is circumscribed. Given the caveats in interpreting the labour exchange data, the situation for the 1970s and the 1980s reflects the continuation of a labour surplus market.

As Table 1. shows, at no time were less than two people competing for every vacancy declared. This trend is captured by the row on per capita jobs available. By 1985, there were more than 90 registered unemployed for every registered vacancy. Except for 1987 - which reflects the NDE projects - the chance of securing jobs through the labour exchange has been declining since 1979; from 67.26 per cent to 17.7 per cent in 1988. The proportion of those re-registering confirms the precarious nature of employment raised earlier. The over-riding picture is that while SAP

7 Cf. my "Adjustment, Unemployment and Urban Women: quantitative problems, impact and emergent issues" (mimeo, Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, 1989).

**Table 1 - Registered Unemployed and Vacancies Declared
(Lower Grade Workers) 1973-1988**

Classification	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Total Registered	15196	14648	15740	99824	86023	75918	88565	86397	81438	106496	112588	120945	81277	85158	145084	116162
Old Registration	...	...	...	14203	16265	13810	17317	22883	21609	15688	25131	30670	27926	27210	33967	66625
Fresh Registration	...	...	...	85621	69758	62108	71248	63514	59829	59256	55339	50108	28116	31273	79718	30003
Re-registration	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	31549	32118	40167	25238	26675	31399	19534
Vacancies Declared	2921	4799	2680	32196	36280	45482	26599	23714	21935	19943	18310	14612	6348	13050	16502	14154
Placements	...	...	...	13902	13351	27517	17891	13826	11131	8276	7394	3865	1755	2378	4988	2506
Per capita Jobs Available	0.19	0.33	0.17	0.32	0.42	0.6	0.3	0.27	0.27	0.19	0.16	0.12	0.08	0.15	0.11	0.12
Fresh Registration as Percentage of Total	...	...	...	85.77	81.09	81.81	80.45	73.51	73.47	55.64	49.15	41.43	34.59	36.72	54.95	25.83
Percentage Chance of Placement	...	...	...	43.18	36.8	60.5	67.26	58.3	50.75	41.5	40.38	26.45	27.65	18.22	30.23	17.71

Source: 1973-1975, 1982-1988 figure: CBN, *Annual Reports and Statement of Account*, relevant years. 1976-1981: FMLP: *Quarterly Bulletin of Labour Statistics*, 1981, 1-4

...: Data not available or cannot be computed due to missing values.

N.B.: 1985 and 1986: January - September. Last three rows computed from available data.

aggravated the unemployment situation, the trend has always been there. Oil boom never quite translated into sustained expansion in the labour market, and whatever gains were made in employment petered out by 1979. The boom largely passed the workers by.

When we link the above with the trends in employment and productivity growth in Nigeria's industrial sector, some long term features become evident. The key industries that registered substantial growth in productivity in the 1963-74 era never marched this with job expansion⁸. This confirms the continuity of the capital-intensity of Nigeria's import substitution industrialization that many authors noted in the 1960s. If unemployment is combined with the insecurity in jobs, limited career growth, and decline in real earnings, the case of a privileged high status worker may be less correct than its advocates suggest. The proportion of Nigerian workers in the informal sector is also too high to support the aristocracy thesis, on their location in the social status structure of the society.

Workers, Income Distribution & Poverty in Nigeria

The privileged status argument is often made in relation to assumed income differential between workers and peasants. First there is need to emphasize the analytical crisis in such comparison. To focus on distinctions between two segments of the dominated social bloc in two separate modes of production may be politically comforting to the advocates of the dominant social bloc, but it is fraudulent. It involves the decentering of production⁹ as the analytical starting point of social inequalities and poverty. Politically it pitches one segment of the dominated bloc against another. But how empirically valid is the claim?

Two sensitive studies of rural-urban income distribution, and workers' location in the distribution pattern can be cited. One was in Northern Nigeria by Hinchliffe (1974). This study include Kano. The other study on Lagos was conducted by the ILO (1982). The concentration of industrial output and employment in Kano and Lagos, as a feature of Nigeria's industrial growth, justifies their usefulness in assessing the national trend.

8 Cf. Table 3.7 in my *Labour in Nigeria's Development Experience: a critique of some explanations of the African Crisis*, (CODESRIA Monograph Series, forthcoming) and "Wages and Productivity in the Explanation of an African Crisis: myths, statistics and lame lies", in Thandika Mkandawire & Eghosa Oshagae (eds.), *Between the State and Civil Society*, CODESRIA Books Series (forthcoming).

9 This refers to the abandonment or non-recognition of the mode (or more appropriately, the sphere) of production as defining the modes of appropriation of surplus and the reproduction of *social life* for a preoccupation with the sphere of circulation and modes of distribution/appropriation. Weberian sociology, like neo-classical and keynesian economics, has the decentering of production as its defining characteristic.

The data for Hinchliffe's study is from three sets of data collected between 1966 and 1972, at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The first set on three villages in the North Central State (now Katsina & Kaduna), covered "income, hours of work and division of output among the members of the rural family households" (*ibid*, p.59). This study was undertaken between 1966-67. The other in 1970 covered some rural households in Kwara State. The third set of data collected in 1972, covered factory workers and informal sector operatives (employed and employers) in Kano. If there is going to be any bias, it will be in appreciated workers' income. The textile factories used in Kano were also the better paying ones. One must also take cognisance of the wage increases that followed the awards of the Adebo Commission in 1972.

After controlling forage, educational level, etc. the initial estimate was that the farmers earned between 9d. and 1s. per hour, the informal sector workers about 9d., the informal (small-scale) sector employer, about one shilling and half a penny. The factory workers had an average hourly pay of 1s. 6d., which might suggest a differential of between 50 per cent and 100 per cent. However, adjusting for a limited cost of living, i.e. rents, the disposable earning of the urban small scale sector worker fell to eight and half pence an hour - below the average income of the farmer. The factory worker's income dropped to 1s. 2d. an hour. The differential fell to between 9 per cent and 55 per cent (Hinchliffe, 1974). The differential, Hinchliffe suggested, is likely to be even lower: informal operatives were reluctant to declare their total income, while there was direct access to the factory workers' pay through their pay offices. There was also the problem of under-estimating the farmers' income (especially in kind) at the individual and household levels. The proportion of female members' contribution to the household income was higher in the rural area than in the urban.

One should also note that the two rural surveys, 1966-67 and 1970, showed a 67 per cent 'appreciation' in household income, and a 73 per cent in individual male income. This can be a reflection of geographical variation or real appreciation in income over a three year period. Chances are that the inter-sectoral differentials would have diminished further given the two year lag between the last rural survey and the urban survey. But we will still be conducting the discussion within the parameters set by the purveyors of the conventional wisdom, i.e. intra-dominated bloc differentials. Here it is important to highlight intra-urban as well as intra-rural inequalities. Considering that the proletarian-worker with whom we are concerned are predominantly urban-based, I will for the moment concentrate on intra-urban inequalities. This exposes the intense class basis of income and wealth as well as the heterogeneity of urban-resident, making absurd the very notion

of urban coalition of the sort suggested by the conventional wisdom¹⁰. The ILO study, conducted in the mid- to late-1970s, assessed income differentials and inequality in rural and urban areas of Nigeria.

The data collected from a variety of sources - including national accounts figures and survey - and assessed for reliability was disaggregated to take care of a number of factors. These include differences in the composition of household incomes in rural and urban areas and across sectors of the urban area; price differentials in urban and rural areas, etc. The first stage was to consider income differentials among the low-income groups.

Table 2: A Comparison of Incomes Among Low-Income Groups, 1978

Groups	Income (Naira p.a)		Percentage Earning Less Than		
	Average	Median	Average Agricultural Income	Average Informal Sector Income	Average Unskilled Wage
Agricultural	785	650	37%	40%	46%
Informal Sectors	740	350	75%	80%	85%
Street Sellers	350	260	90%	95%	100%
Tailors, etc.	1,000	700	50%	55%	70%
Unskilled Workers	810	710	21%	55%	35%

Source: Jamal/ILO/JASPA (1982, p.11, Table 5).

While the street seller in the informal sector, in 1978, was much worse off than other low-income groups, the average income among the other segments was much narrower. The average family income of the unskilled worker was estimated at around ₦2 per month higher than the peasant farmers. The average unskilled workers' family would however earn about ₦16 less than the informal sector tailor. The median peasant farmer did much better than the median informal sector family, and ₦5 a month worse off than the median urban based unskilled family. Income differentials within the informal sector yielded a Gini Coefficient of 0.35 (ILO, 1982, p.14), but the income inequality across the urban area (Lagos) was much

10 Most of these proclamations - as is the whole of neoclassical economics and weberian sociology - is rooted in the methodology of logical abstraction. Its selection of concepts, and the prioritization of variables and problematic are, almost as a rule, *arbitrary and irrational*. Logical abstraction does not lend itself to the rule of empirical validation either; as curious as that may be for an ostensibly scientific endeavour. Where the empirical and the categories of logical abstraction collide - as they often do - the former is privileged.

**Table 3 - A Consolidated Distribution of Income in Urban Nigeria
1973 - 1974**

Groups	Number (Thousands)	Aggregate (Million Naira)	Average Income (Naira p.a)	Percentage		Cumulative	
				Numbers	Income	Numbers	Income
Unskilled Workers	390	125	320	10.9	2.2	10.9	2.2
Informal Sector I (Street Vendors)	700	262	374	19.6	4.7	30.5	6.9
Informal Sector II (Tailors, Mechanics, Carpenters)	1,000	538	538	27.9	9.7	58.4	16.6
Semiskilled Workers	337	236	700	9.4	4.2	67.3	20.8
Skilled/Clerical Workers	470	705	1,500	13.1	12.7	80.9	33.5
Informal Sector III (Small Shopkeepers, Taxi owners)	300	654	2,181	8.4	11.8	89.3	45.1
Professional, Nigerians	55	248	4,500	1.5	4.5	90.8	49.8
Formal Sector Entrepreneurs	300	2,493	8,310	8.4	44.9	99.2	94.7
Non-Nigerian	27	297	11,000	0.8	5.3	100	100
All Groups	3,580	5,558	1,553	100.0	100.0		

Source: Jamal/ILO/JASPA (1982, p. 14, Table 7).

higher. The intra-urban income profile in a study conducted five years earlier yielded a Gini Coefficient of 0.6. As the report says this is in spite of the "minimalist assumptions" that went into the calculation.

Unskilled workers turn out to be the worse off segment of the urban population¹¹, and while the income differential between the 'skilled/clerical workers', (the subalterns, perhaps) is significant, the percentile distribution of income is even more so. 68 per cent of the urban population, including most of the workers, earned only 21 per cent of the urban income. 81 per cent of the population, including all wage earners, earned only 33.5 per cent of the urban income. By contrast, 55 per cent of all urban income went to the top 10 per cent. As was noted, rural/urban differentials exist, but intra-urban inequalities are even more profound (*ibid*). In 1973/74, average family income was estimated at ₦485, that of the urban family ₦1,672.7. But the average unskilled worker family earned only ₦320. By 1978/79, the average urban family income had risen to ₦2,448.3, while the incomes of the average rural, and unskilled worker families' had fallen to ₦460.9 and ₦304, respectively.

In spite of the 1975 wage increases to workers in the formal sector, in real terms, the average unskilled family's income fell by ₦16 from a year before the wage rise and three years after the award. Nominal minimum wage, in the formal sector, we should recollect, had also been increased from ₦64 to ₦72 per month in the intervening period.

Onimode (1988, p.115) estimated (from the Bank's figures) that the Gini Equalization Coefficient rose from 3.4 in 1969/70 to 5.0 in 1971/72. The increasing concentration of wealth thus indicated has become more profound since 1972. The estimation was also before the emergent indigenous bourgeoisie started its meteoric rise on the back of the State, and the petro-naira. Alkasum *et al* (1985, p.156) also show that between 1973 and 1982, 73 per cent of all reported income came from property and related sources, which confirms my estimate on wage component of disposable national income in elsewhere¹².

The ILO/JASPA study estimated that in 1978, there were 320,000 unskilled workers' households living below the poverty datum line (PDL); about 82 per cent of all unskilled worker households. Also, there were about a million informal sector workers/operative households below the PDL; about 45 per cent of all informal sector households (*ibid*, p.33, Table 13).

11 This was based on the pre-Udoji wage, which may explain why by 1978 the average unskilled worker did better than the street vendor and rural low income earner.

12 Cf. Adesina, Jimi O., 1990b, *Labour in Nigeria's Development Experience: beyond conventional wisdom*, Report prepared for the 1990 Rockefeller Reflections on Development Fellows' Conference, Bellagio Italy (August), Ch.3.

What is quite dramatic is the phenomenal rise in the number of unskilled worker households that sank below the PDL in the five years between 1973/74 and 1978: 140,000 households to be precise. (*ibid.*, p.35). The much vaunted Udoji pay award did not seem to make much difference! Surely, the category 'urban poor', cannot preclude these households, and if it does not, the rationale for the 'defence of the poor' that gesturally falls from the Bank's printed lips, and the demand for a "reform" of the minimum wage law would seem rather contradictory. These are the households which need the protection of a minimum guarantee of income, as limited as the law was. Yet the argument over a 'minimum wage' begs the question, since in order to reduce poverty the issue should be a 'living wage'.

The impact of structural adjustment has been to worsen the inequality. The crisis of labour market insecurity reached feverish proportion by 1986 with mass retrenchment of workers. While comparable quantitative picture has not emerged, we can note the UNDP 1990 Global Report, which confirms the massive pro-rich direction of government spending in recent years. Qualitative accounts of the impact of adjustment can be glimpsed from the printed media for instance, and two examples will suffice. Ken Obi, a typist told the magazine:

that he earns a "handsome salary" of ₦250 per month when compared to some of his colleagues who earn less than ₦180. He pays ₦60 for his one room apartment (and the landlord has [] indicated his intention to increase it [] to ₦75), spends ₦100 on food and another ₦50 or so on transportation. At the end of the day, after the sundry expenses, he has a deficit of between ₦70 and ₦100. If he needs medicine, he has to borrow. He has shut his ears to the pleas of his parents to send money for educating his younger brethren. Ken is sapped - but he is lucky, he still has a job which is a luxury these days (This Week, May 21, 1990, pp.14-15).

At the polar end is the case of what is referred to as the "money bags". The magazine's staff writers groaned that the pathetic thing,

is that money bags do not even need to invest in manufacturing or nay other job-generating business to make their millions. All they have been doing now, is to move money around the banks and sit at home to watch their money. For example, in some banks, a one million naira deposit in any of the high-yield investment schemes carries at least 25 per cent interest after 90 days which is a quarter of a million. Some banks have even gone ahead paying the interest up-front (that is, before the maturity date) and the depositor can again take the ₦250,000 to another bank as principal. At the end of the year, he would have more than doubled the original money while sitting pretty at home.... [T]hey can use the deposit certificate collected from their banks to transact

business with such certificates serving as guarantee (This Week, ibid, p.22)

The individuals and households, traditionally below the PDL, have not even been considered!

Workers, Identity and Social Consumption of Welfare

Existing studies of the Nigerian worker, as I earlier noted, do not suggest exclusive residential neighbourhood for the workers outside where the 'urban poor', informal sectorists live. Peace's (1979) study in Lagos, Lubeck's (1975, 1986) in Kano and mine in Warri (Adesina, 1988, 1989a) confirm the extent to which workers are bound up in the intricate network of obligations and mutual dependence within the urban poor neighbourhoods. Peace's study and mine show that while in educational terms, the factory worker - especially those with secondary education - may be better off than most co-residents, this is not easily transferrable to income. Yesufu (1962) reveals the extent to which workers depended on ethnic associations for financial aids in periods of economic crisis. In the early 1970s, Peace also noted workers' dependence on credit from petty traders, which is heightened during the periods of industrial action when wages may not be paid. Across the neighbourhoods in Warri, lower grade workers, in a 'high prestige' industry, are not just co-residents, but are locked into a sustained daily relationship with informal sector artisans, petty traders, and other segments of the 'urban poor'. The dependence on credit is also more permanent, especially among the unskilled workers.

The workers are not distinguishable from the other residents by the furnishing of their apartments, or the physical attributes of their children. Age, education, and relative income level within the factory is what define their aspiration. Relatively older workers hardly have new dreams, while the ones in their 30s with a small-size family will talk to you about abandoned dreams. The unmarried, younger ones in their early 20s, more likely than not, exude the optimism of youth; a world out there to be conquered, etc. And some do break out. For most, the older workers say, the optimism will wear out with time. Wait until they start having kids, and younger extended family dependants to take care of! (Adesina, 1989a). Most of the workers, in the Warri context are children of peasant parents or children of urban poor parents; petty traders, or working class parents. Their 'socialization' was in the context of urban or rural poor parents and neighbourhoods. Whatever disadvantages or social domination the workers experience, it is often within the context of the large composite subordinate social bloc.

Lubeck's study shows that wage earners, and factory workers more so, occupy a lower status position and, had a lower perception of their work vis-a-vis most other occupational groups in the Tudun Wada neighbourhoods of Kano (1975, 1986). As I noted elsewhere (Adesina 1989b, p.10) what

these studies suggest is that the workers identify downwards towards the other segments of the urban poor, rather than upwards. This self identity is what I called "the 'poor man' worker" (Adesina 1989c). Self definition as "poor man" underscores the extent to which the workers share the sets of opinion and disposition of a larger subordinate social bloc; and an 'earthy' suspicion of the 'big men' in society. This orientation, interestingly, is within the context of a vibrant articulation of the idea that 'poverty is a curse' (Adesina 1989c).

Perhaps because of their relatively higher educational status, one found that the workers articulate the grievances of the other factions of the dominated classes in more coherent ways than one finds at the street levels of the neighbourhoods, confirming Peace's similar findings in Agege in the early 1970s. What more - and contrary to the labour aristocracy the petty commodity producers defined the post-Adebo Commission workers' agitation as a vicarious vent to their collective (urban poor) demands! This has been articulated in all the general strikes since 1945 (Adesina, 1989a, 1990b). The Lagos wage earning class, Peace noted "is best seen as a political reference group for the urban masses in general" (1975, p.287). In any case "values and sentiments attached to the wide range of entrepreneurial activity promote unity, not division, between those inside and outside the industrial mode of production" (1975, p.289).

I have so far tried to establish that in terms of income distribution, urban poverty, residence and identity, workers are not politically and socially a distinct collective apart from and standing over the 'urban poor'. Even those who are educationally better off or can be defined as skilled workers, share these collective attributes. We can safely assume, therefore, that whatever problems exist for the 'poor people' in the urban areas, in terms of some social indicators of development, will apply to the workers - perhaps, with differing intensity. At the level of labour market experience, income inequality and poverty, a substantial segment of the working class has been passed by the massive increase in per capita national income of the 1960-80 period. This the workers share, with differing intensity, with the other segments of the urban and rural poor. It is, however to some specific indicators of social development that I now turn my attention. These social development indicators further allow us to better appreciate how social development has impacted on workers and other subordinate social groups in Nigeria. The absurdity of the claims in the conventional wisdom becomes all the more evident.

Education is one area in which there has been phenomenal growth in Nigeria. In 1962, primary school population was over 2.8 million (Awokoya, 1969); in 1978/79 it reached 13.3 million, and 16.7 million in 1984/85 (FOS (Federal Office of Statistics), 1986). There were, however, major regional differences in coverage of the relevant population age. In 1965, access to

primary education in the relevant age group in Lagos was 100 per cent, 73 per cent in the Western Region, 71 per cent in the Eastern Region, and 17 per cent in the Northern Region. Between 1978 and 1985, national primary school education enrollment rose from 74 per cent to 93 per cent in 1981/82, but fell to 88 per cent in 1984/85. Other sources suggest that against the SSA average of 69 per cent in 1982, primary school enrollment coverage in Nigeria was 98 per cent: 94 per cent for males, and 70 per cent among females (Onimode, 1988, p.218). Secondary education enrollment also increased from 233,910 in 1962, to over 3.4 million in 1983/84, while university enrollment rose from 426 in 1962 to 113,158 in 1983/84¹³. Funding for education also suggests significant increases. Capital expenditure (nominal) of the central government, rose from ₦3 million in 1970 to ₦631.1 million in 1975. The bulk of this capital layout was directed at the implementation of the universal primary education programme that came onstream in 1976. In the 1979-1983 period at least five state governments operated free education to the secondary level.

The FOS household survey of 1984/85¹⁴, however, revealed that national literacy level was around 40.8 per cent: 28.5 per cent in the rural areas and 53.1 per cent in the urban areas, with significant regional and gender variations. In the urban areas, 78.8 per cent of people classified as 'working' had only primary education or less, and only 21.2 per cent had secondary education or higher. The category 'working' is however, ambiguous. It may embrace informal and formal sector operatives, wage earners and entrepreneur. The educational requirement for employment, may lead one to assume that the distribution among wage/salary earners will be more favourable, which will be true. While nearly 94 per cent of 'own account workers' (euphemism for informal sector operatives) had no more than primary education, only 43.3 per cent of 'employees' were in this category. However, the category of 'employees' does not easily translate into educational attainment for the proletarian wage earners. 'Employee' covers anyone in wage employment, from informal sector labourer to the senior managers in the MNC sector. In any case the essence of the category "unskilled worker" is that the person has no more than primary education.

13 FOS, *Economic and Social Statistics Bulletin, 1986 edition* (n.d.). The Federal Ministry of Education figures put primary school enrollment in 1984/85 at 13.025 million (1983/84, 14.383 million; 1985/86, 12.914 million). Secondary school enrollment (Grammar & Commercial schools, only) was put at 3.059 million in 1983/84, 2.689 million in 1984/85, and 2.794 million in 1985/86. For the university enrollment figures, the National Universities Commission put the figures 'major disciplines' at 112,056 in 1983/84, 126,285 in 1984/85, and 135,670 in 1985/86 (FOS, *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1987 edition*, Lagos).

14 FOS, *National Integrated Survey of Household: General Household Survey April 1984 - March 1985*, Lagos, September, 1986.

At the least, therefore, the figure for the proletarian-wage earner is bound to be much higher.

Using educational attainment as a social development indicator, we see just how poorly the proletarian wage-earner in particular, and the country in general, has done when compared with other countries. Measured by population size, per capita GNP, there is little doubt that in this key area of social development - with significant implications for economic development - Nigeria has done far worse than any other country on the table. The high level of inequality within the country suggests that the burden of this poor performance falls on the poorer segments of society rather than the 'nation' as a whole.

The development since structural adjustment, with the accent on bringing the market into the classroom, has led to worsening of the educational crisis. Federal government spending on education, as a percentage of the GNP fell by nearly 63 per cent between 1972 and 1988. This is in spite of the massive rise in federal revenue over the same period, and the proliferation of federal funded secondary schools, polytechnic, universities and research institutes. Between 1972 and 1988, total federal revenue, as a percentage of the GNP was almost double, and non-tax revenue had gone up by nearly 500 per cent (World Bank, 1990, p.200)¹⁵. In 1985, adult literacy in Nigeria was 43 per cent, against 60 per cent in Kenya, 74 per cent in Zimbabwe, 95 per cent in South Korea, and 96 per cent in Cuba. Yet Nigeria's GNP was about 7.5 and 5.25 times bigger than Zimbabwe's and Kenya's, respectively (UNDP, 1990).

The 1983 figures reveal declining enrollment, not so much because there is a fall in relevant age population, but because of the increased monetization of access to education. In the face of increasing absolute poverty, the poor - by no means exclusive of the proletarian wage earners - are forced to withdraw their wards from school reflected in declining enrollment. The accent on reduction of public welfare spending with impact on education, already at a low level, involves a country mortgaging its future on the alter of market forces and current account balancing.

The Bank's own assessment suggests some connection between education and economic growth, whether weak or non-causal. 48 per cent of South Korea's labour force has completed secondary education or more. 13 per cent in Indonesia, and only 6 per cent in SSA (World Bank, 1987). South Korea, by contrast increased spending on education, as a proportion of its GNP, from 15.8 per cent in 1972 to 19 per cent in 1988. That the millions of naira spent on education, never quite translated into rapid

15 We should note, of course, that federal revenue had fallen sharply since 1981/82.

Table 4 - Comparison of Educational Dimension of Social Development

Country	Total Population (in Millions)		Per Capital GNP (US\$)		Number Enrolled in Secondary School as % of Age Group			Central Government Spending on Education (as % of GNP)	
	1981	1983	1981	1988	1965	1980	1987	1972	1988
Bangladesh	90.7	108.9	140	170	13	15	18	14.8	...
Brazil	120.5	144.4	2,220	2,120	16	32	39	20.7	15.6
China	991.3	1,088.4	300	330	24	34	43	...	...
India	690.2	815.6	260	340	27	28	39	2.3	2.9
Indonesia	149.5	174.8	530	430	12	28	46	7.4	10.0
Japan	117.6	122.6	10,080	21,020	82	91	96	...	...
Nigeria	87.6	110.1	870	290	5	16	...	4.5	2.8
Pakistan	84.5	106.3	350	350	12	15	19	1.2	2.6
USA	229.8	246.3	12,820	19,840	...	97	98	3.2	1.7

Sources: Alkasum *et al.*, (1985), World Development Reports, 1983 & 1990.

development in educational attainment, has been attributed by Alkasum *et al.*, to the class content of the implementation process itself. While the actual capital expenditure rose by 800 per cent between the 2nd and 3rd Plans, increase in enrollment and schools built was barely a hundred percent (1985, p.119). Recurrent expenditure (books, chalk, etc.) has become "a gold mine, a haven of exploitation and private accumulation" (*ibid.*). Alkasum *et al.*, also confirm the wider occurrence of exorbitant cost of capital projects in some States that provided free education to secondary school level between 1979 and 1983. Simply calling for the commercialization, or worst still privatization, of education will miss the origin of the problem. Furthermore, in a context of mass poverty and massive national (not private) wealth from oil, it seems reasonable to demand that the national wealth be spent in providing education for the nation's citizens.

A second dimension of the review of social development indicators concerns health-related human development profile. Table 5 allows us a glimpse of such a review, evidencing a similarly poor performance. Nigeria has the lowest life expectancy among the countries evaluated on the table; lower than Bangladesh with about 16 per cent of Nigeria's per capita GNP. Where the data is available, less Nigerians have access to (modern) health services than Bangladesh, Zimbabwe or Republic of Korea. Access to safe (portable) water is lower than in most other countries¹⁶. Most frightening, perhaps, is the proportion of Nigerian women who die in child birth, itself indicative of access to qualified medical services. Almost 24 times as many Nigerian women die in child birth as their Cuban sisters; higher than in Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, and nearly five times as in Kenya. The number of children who die at birth reflects a situation that is equally appalling.

The calorie in-take league also shows a similarly bleak social condition. While in most countries time and rise in national income translate into improved nutritional profile, in Nigeria the reverse has been the case. Cuba, again by contrast evidenced a 132 per cent increase in per capita calorie intake. Except in Kenya, calorie intake fell faster than in any other country examined in Table 5. In a list of ten countries randomly selected from the

16 The UNDP grossly overestimates even the proportion of Nigerians with access to safe water. The *Human Development Report* assumes that *all* urban residents have such access - a variant of the urban bias thesis, perhaps. But anyone with the minimal knowledge of urban life in Nigeria will confirm that having main water pipes running through your neighbourhood does not translate into water supply. And many of the urban poor settlements do not even have the pipes. The rich and the powerful are, however, retreating behind the walls of their houses, internally sourcing their own water (and electricity) supplies through boreholes and power generating sets!.

Table 5 - Human Development Profile: the health dimension

Country	Life Expectancy at birth (years) 1987	Population with access to health Services (%) 1987	Population with access to save water (%) 1985-87	Daily Calorie Supply as % of requirement 1964-66	1984-86	Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births) 1980-87	1988	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births) 1988	Central Government Spending on Health as % of GNP 1972 1988
Bangladesh	53	43	46	91	83	600	188	5.0	..
Brazil	65	..	78	100	111	120	85	15.1	16.7
Cuba	74	..	..	102	135	34	18	..	..
Japan	78	..	..	126	138	8	13	..	..
Kenya	59	..	30	98	92	170	113	..	..
Korea (Rep.)	70	93	77	96	122	26	33	..	..
Nigeria	51	40	46	95	90	800	104	3.6	0.8
U.S.A.	76	..	..	126	138	8	13	8.6	12.5
Zimbabwe	59	71	..	87	89	480	71	..	..

Sources: Human Development Report 1990, (UNDP) & World Development Report, 1990, (World Bank).

World Bank's own World Development Report, (1983), Nigeria only did better than Bangladesh and India with about 16 per cent and 30 per cent of Nigeria's per capita GNP, respectively. Worst still is the acceleration in the (nutritional) rate of decline. From 91 per cent in 1980 to 87 per cent in 1985 (UN, 1989, Table 13, p.19).

As 'per capita' measurements go, a great deal more is hidden than revealed. Given the level of inequality in the country, real consumption among the vulnerable groups (urban and rural) would in fact be much lower than these figures suggest. This translates into general level of malnutrition, that at the family level is easily measured by the proportion of children at risk. The FOS Health and Nutrition Status Survey¹⁷ of 1983/84, revealed that the national average of moderate-to-severely malnourished (MSM) urban children was 20.9 per cent. In the rural area, 19.7 per cent of the children were similarly malnourished¹⁸.

Between 1987 and 1988, a nutritional status assessment was jointly conducted by UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Health in some local government areas (LGAs) of Nigeria. One such LGA is Oyo (Urban). In the 1983/84 FOS survey, 5.5 per cent rate of MSM was registered. The local government, in the later survey, with similar indicator, revealed a 27 per cent MSM among boys under 60 month, and 18 per cent among the girls. One could assume that the 1983/84 score for the State was the aggregate mean of the many assessment points. Conversely, it could well be that in the context of various adjustment programmes, there has been an upward swing in the number of urban families and children at risk. We have no basis for contesting the first explanation in the absence of assess to FOS's original data. Similar upward swing in the other four local governments covered in the UNICEF/FMH survey, relative to their 1983/84 mean score in the five states makes the second explanation more plausible. This conclusion is also supported by, *al beit*, cursory observation. Against the background of the thousands of urban households living below PDL in the boom years of 1973-1978, there is little to suggest that absolute poverty has not increased sharply.

I will suggest that the 1980s have seen a qualitative shift in the nature of poverty in Nigeria, although further investigation is required. Whereas in the 1970s many urban households - unskilled worker families inclusive - has access to cheap electronic consumer items, this has become virtually impossible even for many lower middle-income families. The content of

17 FOS: *The Health of Nigerians, 1983/84; Health and Nutrition Status Survey (A module of the National Integrated Survey of Households (NISH) April, 1983 - March, 1984)*, Lagos, Sept, 1985.

18 These were based on the 'weight for height' indicator.

poverty is shifting increasingly to food poverty. Coping with fall in real income has increasingly involved reduction in consumption: food, clothing, and shelter. Reduced access to education - with the increasing monetization of that sector - alongside reduced consumption surely has implications not only for the present nature of poverty but its transmission across generations. At a national level, long-term crisis in human resource endowment is perhaps one of the implications; the nation as well as the household are caught in what promises to be a vicious cycle.

As evident in the discussion above under section 2, a substantial number of proletarian wage-earning households are caught, like the rest of the urban poor in this mire.

A number of national-specific surveys attempt to capture other dimensions of social indicators like Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant or Child Mortality Rate (IMR/CMR), earlier discussed. The result as evident in Table 5 does not suggest social development advances commensurate with the growth in national income. As late as 1988, nearly a fifth of children born in Nigeria did not survive the first 60 months of life (UNICEF 1989). While the survival rate was 1.4 per cent higher than in Bangladesh, it was considerably lower than in Burma, Bolivia, Uganda, and Pakistan. The fertility survey report of 1984 revealed only a 3.4 per cent annual rate of decline in IMR from 1965-69 to 1975-79. The UNICEF/FMH survey also revealed what would again amount to an upward swing. IMR for Oyo and Calabar LGAs - both urban areas - was 120/1000 and 113/1000 respectively. While these may be shots in the dark, the fact that the proletarian wage earners constitute a significant segment of the urban poor suggests that whatever is happening, in terms of the crisis of social development, will also impact on them, especially the unskilled workers' households.

Concluding Remarks

We can conclude this paper by referring to the Bank's statement on the conditions of social amenities, thus; "In Lagos, Nigeria, low-income families buy portable water from vendors at a price at least four times the marginal cost of piped water and must carry it long distances" (1988, p.145). Although this was mentioned in the context of the agonies of industrial capitalists who have to generate their own power and water supply, it is instructive that the low-income families are as likely to be of proletarian wage earners, as of the informal sector vendor. While the big capitalist firms can pass the cost to the consumers, the low-income wage-dependent families can only absorb it by giving up other needs of life: sinking deeper into poverty, essentially. As I suggested above, we may be witnessing a qualitative shift in the nature and content of poverty. The 1990 *Human Development Report* cited Nigeria as one of the countries of dismal failure

to translate massive increase in economic wealth to social wealth for the majority of the population, proletarian-worker families inclusive.

I started this paper, by focusing on more general social development indicators: employment, inequality and poverty. In conducting the discussion within the context of the old and new conventional wisdom, especially the LAT-variant, it was necessary to identify workers' direction of association; to examine the extent to which even more educated/better paid workers can be assumed to stand above and away from the other segments of the dominated social bloc. Having suggested that such a position, is at best, suspect, I proceeded to examine the more overt indicators of social development and how these have impacted on the subordinate social bloc, of which the proletarian wage earners belong. The record on social development, how much 'development' has benefitted the workers, come out to be, at worst, more circumscribed than is suggested in the Bank's wisdom, the labour aristocracy thesis or their variants.

It is necessary to readdress the issue of poverty considering its recent reemergence as a vogue phrase. After years of preaching 'trickle down' ideology as a corollary to its adjustment programmes, the World Bank is rediscovering poverty. Nothing however shows a willingness to admit that the programme it is forcing on many sub-saharan African countries has exacerbated poverty, nor an admission that central aspects of its (the Bank's) diagnosis of the African crisis are profoundly flawed. The latter I have tried to demonstrate above. It is not just that the notion of "adjustment with human face" is, as far as idiomatic expressions go, flawed. Strapping a human face a wild tiger does not reduce its ferocity, does it? It is also that the so-called social dimension of adjustment project fits the Bank's political agenda of 'softening resistance to adjustment' (Atta Mills, 1989), rather than a fundamental readdressing of Africa's development crisis and how adjustment programmes of the Bank/IMF is fundamentally damaging Africa's future. The rather testy response of the Bank (and the ADB) to the fundamental flaws in SDA programme, as pointed out by their own consultants, betrays these hidden agenda of the Bank, the IMF, and the financial institutions demanding their pounds of flesh (UNDP. 1990b, Vols I & II).

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