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**THE POLITICS OF CHANGE, PRECARIATISED YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND  
LABOUR MARKET POLICIES IN NIGERIA**

**ABSTRACT**

The insecurities suffered by the youth precariat class in Nigeria derive from labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity and representation insecurity, all of which point to largely steep economic, social and political insecurities. This labyrinth of insecurities, particularly as it manifests in bulging youth unemployment, further marginalises this class, and exacerbates its precarity. Since members of this class respond in the most vicious way by pulling at the fabric of social cohesion and peace or in the least by running a criminal economy aimed at achieving economic assuagement, serious commitment must be made by the political and economic managers of the state to address youth unemployment crisis in Nigeria. Particularly, a lot is expected from President Muhammadu Buhari whose anti-corruption and people-oriented policy disposition is expected to sire a democratic regime that will address the contradictions in the body polity and economy, paving way for greater youth employment in the country. This study adopts the Political Economy paradigm for its analysis and a qualitative approach in its collection of data to investigate how President Muhammadu Buhari's Politics of Change can be combined with relevant labour market programmes in giving hope and a sense of belonging to the precariatized youth class in Nigeria. These disenchanted and precarious young Nigerians must be provided with decent livelihoods that can wean them off their resort to criminality and antisocial behaviours which some have adopted as survivalist measures to escape the hard social and economic realities in the country.

Keywords: Politics, Politics of Change, Precariatized Youth Unemployment, Labour Market Policies, Nigeria

## **INTRODUCTION**

The political landscape in Nigeria was agog with a lot of excitement, enthusiasm and hope especially as the Change mantra which served both as a sloganeering tool and a distillate of the manifesto of the All Progressives Congress (APC) before the 2015 General Elections rent the air on campaign fields and dominated the political consciousness of Nigerians and the electorate. The Politics of Change was masterfully introduced by the then opposition party into the body polity and political system and became an opiate, which the people already hungry for change and a transformative one at that, were fed on, and rabidly supported and pursued until the former President Goodluck Jonathan and his party lost at the presidential polls of that year. It was victory for democracy, victory for the All Progressives Congress, and a lucid testament to the indefatigability of their Presidential candidate (Muhammadu Buhari) whose goodwill and personality brand as a no-nonsense leader, particularly one with a zero tolerance for corruption, stood as an epaulet on his personality brand and further worked magic for the party and the candidate in that election.

Nigerians were literally ecstatic over this victory and the pall of catastrophism which blanketed the nation's atmospherics seemed to be rolled away. The government came into power seeking to address a trilogy which it considered very important to the survival of Nigeria and to the improvement of the quality of life of Nigerians. These were corruption, insecurity and unemployment (Oketola & Falodi, 2015). Determined to break with the Achilles heels that dogged the previous government and those before it, President Buhari's personal guarantees and body language to fight the horrific corruption, pulverise the Boko Haram army of terrorists and tame the general insecurity in the country, and to attack unemployment were all that Nigerians needed to welcome and embrace the new dawn that was breaking over the entire nation.

While a post-mortem of the Buhari's democratic government is not the intention of this study, neither is it apropos to begin to assess an incumbency that is barely more than 13 months old, what this study hankers after is how the politics of change of the present government, whose anti-corruption and people-oriented policy disposition is expected to sire a truly pro-poor, pro-people and an equitable democratic regime, will explore and exploit labour market policies apposite for achieving greater youth employment in the country.

Already, the country is heaving under the onerous toll of a dangerous but growing criminal economy, Boko Haram-styled terrorism, and ethnic revolutions led by Biafra irredentists and Niger Delta militants, uprisings which are a signature proof of a roily, embittered and alienated youth precariat class in the country. This class has been seen to be dangerous, is standing on the fringes of society and sanity, and is raging to abolish the conditions of insecurity and inequality that characterise its modus vivendi (Imhonopi & Urim, 2015a, 2016b; Standing, 2014b).

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the purports of President Muhammadu Buhari's Politics of Change, and labour policies that can potentiate the labour market in the country, enabling it to generate more employment opportunities for members of the youth precariat class so they can access decent livelihoods that can wean them off their resort to criminality and antisocial behaviours which some have adopted as survivalist measures to escape the hard social and economic existence in the country.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine President Buhari's Politics of Change as the administration intends to sire a pro-poor, pro-people and equitable democratic regime;
2. Scrutinise the insecurities underlining the youth precariat class, making it a dangerous class in Nigeria;
3. Investigate how the Politics of Change can explore and exploit appropriate labour market policies to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology adopted in this study is the qualitative approach with data collected from secondary sources namely, books, academic journals, newspaper and technical reports and online resources.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Politics and President Buhari's Politics of Change**

Politics has been narrowly construed as the activity of government or the governing process (Waylen et al., 2013) or widely as the study of power, and sometimes by extension the study of the powerful (Urim, Imhonopi & Ahmadu, 2014) as a reference to the postulation by Dahl (1984, 9–10) that politics comprises not only a study of power and political systems but also is “any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority.” David Easton leads the school of thought that connects politics with resources and their allocation. He considers politics as a process that depicts “who gets what, where, when and how” or the authoritative allocation of value (Easton 1953, p. 50). Thus, politics deals with an understanding of government as a group of people who manage the levers of political power for the benefits of some interests in the state which could be themselves or the people or some others. It also describes the nature of a governance process, pictures the use of power and the powerful and their influence on the political, social and economic trajectories of a state party, and examines how the political process or lever or institutions such as the state are used in allocating resources to individuals and groups within the state, while considering the legality or illegality of the process. This is why some political systems are portrayed as being democratic, pseudo-democratic, dictatorial, liberal, totalitarian, closed or open in nature.

In the modern world, politics has assumed a process far from monarchism or totalitarianism because it now provides a platform where power and legitimacy of a government are given by the people and are not derived from some absolute ruler or minority in the state. Additionally, politics is ideally an instrument for social transformation and not a platform for elite domination of the social, political and economic planes. Chronically, however, the latter seems to have much vraisemblance in most societies including Nigeria as politicians or political merchants or those Standing (2012, para. 12) indicts as professional politicians “whose goal is to be elected as a means of launching a money-making career” have led to a commodification of politics which has resulted in the growth of inequality which now shapes most brands of politics.

This state of inequality where the destinies of a majority are almost at the behest of a minority has midwived a monstrosity that now plagues almost all societies, the birth of the precariat class. This class now rants and raves to reverse its precarious conditions.

President Muhammadu Buhari coasted to power with a Change mantra that caught on with most political constituencies in the country who were yearning for the reinstallation of sanity and morality in a political system that had become irrepressibly and waywardly corrupt, elitist and kleptomaniac. The system had thrown up a political aristocracy whose leadership was weak or showed astigmatism to most wrongs going on in government quarters. Anyone in doubt about the putrefying kleptocracy that the immediate defunct government of President Goodluck Jonathan had morphed into would have a change of heart when revelations began to touch down arising from the arrest of many of the officers that served in that government by the Buhari government and anti-corruption agencies for diverting, siphoning, misappropriating or stealing outright the monies committed into their hands for legitimate projects in the country.

Relying on a government interim report on financial and asset recoveries from May 29, 2015 to May 25, 2016, the News Agency of Nigeria (2016) published the following as the recovered loot from unnamed public officers in that government:

1. 182 completed buildings;
2. An uncompleted building
3. Five maritime vessels;
4. Twenty-five vehicles
5. Twenty-two farmlands;
6. Four plots of lands;
7. N39.2 billion;
8. \$128.5 million dollars (USD)
9. 2,355 British Pounds
10. 11,250 Euros
11. Monies recovered from the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) were as follows: N5.7 billion and eight million dollars while Value Added Tax (VAT) recovered from companies by ONSA was N529.6 million;

12. N19.3 billion and 435,253 dollars were said to be with the EFCC recovered fund account with the CBN, while N5.5 billion and 5.5 million dollars respectively were said to be with the Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation.
13. The ICPC revenue collection recovery in CBN was totaled at N869.9 million while its cash asset recovery was put at N2.6 billion.
14. The Department of State Security (DSS) recovered assets were summed up as N47.7 million, 1.9 million dollars and 3.5 million British pounds.
15. Monies stashed away in foreign accounts and awaiting repatriation were as follows: Switzerland (321 million dollars), UK (6.9 million pounds), the United Arab Emirate (310.5 million dollars and 11.826 million Euros), and the United States (6.2 million dollars).

The report also gave a breakdown of recoveries under interim forfeiture in cash and assets which amounted to over N126.6 billion, 9.09 billion dollars, 2.5 million British pounds and 303,399.17 Euros (News Agency of Nigeria, 2016).

If these statistics are not scary enough, the Federal Government under President Buhari came out with another revelation that 55 Nigerians had stolen about 1.34 trillion in about 8 years, between 2006 and 2013, an amount that would have financed significant developmental projects across the country (Daniel & Elebeke, 2016). The report also went ahead to reveal the categories, numbers and amounts stolen by perpetrators of this heinous crime as follows:

1. Fifteen former governors stole N146.84 billion
2. Four former Ministers pilfered N7 billion
3. Twelve former public servants both at federal and state levels pocketed over N14 billion
4. Eight other Nigerians in the banking sector made away with N524 billion
5. Eleven businessmen stole N653 billion.

According to the Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, using World Bank rates and costs, monies stolen could have provided 635.18 kilometres of roads, 36 ultra-modern hospitals per state, 183 schools, educated 3,974 children from primary to tertiary level at 25.24 million per child and built 20,062 units of 2-bedroom houses (Daniel & Elebeke, 2016). Matter-of-factly, these monies may only represent crumbs stolen within the period which shows that Nigerian leadership within the period had condoned, fanned the embers of and promoted corruption through state apparatuses and institutions, and transmogrified a minority into

arrivistes who later with their massive ill-gotten wealth could become economic colossuses astride the political and economic spheres.

Such was the profligacy and impunity in government that, as aptly captured by Imhonopi and Urim (2015a), the Nigerian democratic system became a new minting causeway producing nouveaux riches, political jobbers and a tiny political aristocracy who controlled the vast resources and opportunities in the state in the midst of excruciatingly harrowing poverty, deprivation and marginalisation that the populace were subjected to, while ensuring that the judiciary and anti-corruption institutions were weakened and compromised.

This situation caused the nation to begin to go adrift and concerned citizens felt there was need for a change in the political leadership. Thus, when the All Progressives Congress came up with their Politics of Change, the people were enthusiastic about it and welcomed it wholeheartedly.

The Politics of Change initialised by the Buhari administration focuses on three cardinal areas, namely, internal security, corruption and unemployment. About 13 months into his first term, the government has successfully brought the Boko Haram sect to its knees, and decimated most of the fighters and weapons of the Islamic group. Although new insecurity conundrums have emerged in the form of Fulani herdsmen attacks all over Nigeria, the Biafran agitators and the new Niger Delta militant groups that have mushroomed all over the South-South region, the government has improved the confidence of the citizens and the international community that it could tackle the Boko Haram scourge and even end it as it promised in its election campaigns.

Secondly, the government has shown the greatest resolve to fight corruption since the advent of the Fourth Republic. This is why as soon as the government was inaugurated, it went after the looters of the national treasury and many began to retribute what they had stolen from the national till. Therefore, the Politics of Change as canvassed by President Muhammadu Buhari has also delivered on this count as his resolute anti-corruption drive has begun to yield massive benefits and has put the thieving elite on alert that business would not be done anymore as usual.

Thirdly, as part of his mandate to reduce unemployment in Nigeria, the government of President Muhammadu Buhari has also begun to examine ways to generate employment

through the agricultural sector, solid minerals and through labour-intensive projects scattered all around the federation. Most importantly, his government has just opened employment windows for the engagement of 10,000 young Nigerians into the Nigerian Police Force and 500,000 into federal government jobs as teachers, agriculture extension advisers, healthcare assistants and civic and adult education instructors in communities across Nigeria all in a bid to tackle the youth unemployment crisis in the country.

While these may be part of the achievements of the Buhari-led democratic government, there are still vast areas that the Politics of Change will have to focus its attention on. These include addressing the rising Fulani Herdsmen menace targeting mostly farmers and Nigerians of Southern and Christian origins, the Biafra agitators, the Niger Delta militant groups, internal insecurity, growing mass poverty, spotty power supply which has gone from bad to worse, increasing pump prices of premium motor spirit (or petrol), automotive gas oil (or diesel), dual-purpose kerosene (kerosene) and liquefied petroleum gas (natural cooking gas), slow infrastructural development strides, among a list of others.

In this study, authors also are interested in how Buhari's Politics of Change could be used to explore and exploit pragmatic labour policies in order to generate more employment opportunities for the growing youth precariat class in Nigeria.

## **Understanding the Conditions of Precariatism, Its Crystallisation as a Class and Its Etiologies in Nigeria**

### **The Precariat Class**

The precariat class has emerged in Nigeria just as elsewhere in other parts of the world as that social group consisting of people whose lives are difficult because they have little or no job security and few employment rights (Standing, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). While it is a class-in-the-making (Standing, 2014a, 2014b), it is the first class that has been losing its rights as citizens of modern states, thereby earning the title of “denizens” instead of citizens (Standing, 2012). The precariat class has limited social, cultural, political and economic rights and exist on the fringes of society. Their employment or income status in society is tenuous at best or precarious at worst while they enjoy little or no privileges like the elite or ruling class. They are a composite of people with professional, income and age differences as they include the disabled, homeless, migrants, ethnic minorities, women in oppressive labour, impoverished



youths and frustrated educated youths with no jobs or underemployed, seniors, and others (Imhonopi & Urim, 2015b).

The precariat has become a class somewhat because members share the same pains, regrets, disappointments and rage with and within a system that legislates wealth for the minority while keeping the majority on its knees through a combination of an economic system that favours the interests, needs and desires of the elite while keeping out the precariat from enjoying the benefits that the politico-economic system has. However, authors are more concerned about the crystallisation of a group within this class, i.e. the youth precariat class. This class is made up of youths who mostly are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (Population Reference Bureau, 2013). This youth precariat class is growing and becoming a dangerous class because of its precarious conditions which have been neglected by government and the ruling elite for a long time.

Several conditions in Nigeria have led to the emergence of the youth precariat class. Some of them have been identified by Imhonopi and Urim (2015b) as follows:

First is the problem of misgovernance. Nigeria has suffered misrule for many years in the hands of its elected or selected leaders who have turned the state into their personal estate. Thus, from the era of military rule to the democratic era, the political space had been peopled with characters who perpetrated all forms of kleptocracy and self-styled perpetuation of the interests of the ruling class in the country. This system of governance has alienated Nigerian youths, pushing many of them further into the precariat trap.

Second, Nigeria is a victim of poor leadership marred by convoluted systemic corruption which has blighted national development (Imhonopi & Urim, 2012, 2013) as well as opened up wealth channels to a minority without recourse to the needs of the masses. This has been one of the triggers for the emergence of the youth precariat class in Nigeria.

Third, lack of the political will to develop a fair, transparent and accountable political and economic leadership has increased secrecy in governance and hidden several abuses perpetrated by those in charge of the commonwealth. Monies that should be spent on developmental projects or youth empowerment programmes are diverted into private purses.

Four, absence of infrastructure has also affected Nigerian youths and increased their social and economic vulnerability. Epileptic power supply, inclement business environment, and other factors have all forged to become disincentives to youth development and empowerment in the country.

Fifth, the educational curricula of most institutions in Nigeria are outmoded and inadequate to cater to the educational needs of Nigerian youths. This factor has also not been favourable to many youths who want to enter the labour market as they lack the skills required by employees. Many therefore do not find respectable jobs after school and this has resulted in some youths entering the criminal economy to make a living for themselves and their families.

Lastly, youths in Nigeria have come face to face with a system that rewards avarice, thieving political rogues, contract inflators and people of dishonest characters. This moral problem pushes them to the fringes where they aspire either to become like these system-minted billionaire nouveau riches or despise the narrow path of hard work and labour. This may explain the reason many Nigerian youths have chosen to become kidnapping czars, human trafficking masterminds, hired political assassins, drug pushers, violent street gangsters, cultists, armed robbers, cybercriminal overlords, oil bunkerers, among other nefarious roles (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013a; Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013b; Imhonopi & Urim, 2015b).

These factors have been carefully considered as some of the reasons that have swelled the youth precariat class in Nigeria.

### **Precariatized Youth Unemployment in Nigeria**

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has soared in recent years following the brigandage and irresponsible leadership that Nigeria has suffered from its ruling class. Unemployment of the active youthful population in Nigeria is no doubt a social problem plaguing the country's psyche. Although government at its various levels has continued to tinker with programmes, initiatives and projects aimed at arresting this trend, these efforts seem to be skin-deep as unemployment figures have continued to soar. Even the government recognises the high unemployment rate among its youth population. In 2008, the federal government acknowledged that about 80 percent of Nigerian youth were unemployed and 10 percent underemployed (Daily Trust, 2008). In 2011, the Minister of Youth Development, Bolaji Abdullahi reported that 42.2 per cent of Nigeria's youth population were out of job. That same year, a non-governmental organisation devoted to youth causes claimed that while the national

unemployment rate was about 23.9%, youth unemployment rate was over 50% (Rise Network, 2013). Depo Oyedokun, the Chair of the House Committee on Youth and Social Development also revealed that of the over 40 million unemployed youths in the country, 23 million were unemployable and therefore susceptible to crime, hence the need to articulate what could be done to salvage the situation. The pace is increasing because most graduates lack relevant market-ready or industry-relevant skills. This situation seems to have worsened as the aborted Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) job test held in the first quarter of 2014 revealed that over 125,000 job applicants, mostly young Nigerians, showed up in Abuja and Lagos for the advertised 4,000 positions in the NIS. On Saturday, April 9, 2016, the Nigerian Navy Recruitment initially scheduled to hold nationwide on that day was postponed in order for the Nigerian Navy to figure out how it would guarantee a well-planned and hitch-free recruitment exercise. This was because 300,000 young Nigerians had applied for 3,000 naval jobs (Omonobi, 2016). In the same 2016, the police recruitment exercise which was designed to absorb 10,000 qualified Nigerian youths into its workforce attracted about 796,152 applications before the end of the deadline for applications (Premium Times, 2016). This implies that roughly 80 Nigerian youths were jostling for a job opening.

As this was not enough, on June 14, 2016, a report had it that within 36 hours after the launch of the Federal Government Job portal calling for applications from qualified Nigerian youth graduates for employment opportunities consisting of 500,000 openings, about 403,528 persons successfully applied for the advertised federal government jobs (Adetayo, 2016). These job openings were for those interested in becoming teachers, agriculture extension advisers, healthcare assistants and civic and adult education instructors in communities across Nigeria. Also, the same recruitment exercise targeted a pool of 100,000 software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans and others. The implication of the report is that over 11,000 applications were being sent in every hour by unemployed Nigerian youths. It is even expected that by the end of the recruitment exercise, millions of applications from unemployed Nigerian youth and graduates would have come in.

Thus, the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training in Nigeria is ballooning with dangerous portents as this class of Nigerians are forced onto the fringes of society without any form of social or economic safety net to cushion their precarity.

## **Insecurities Faced by the Precariat Class**

There are insecurities faced by the precariat class that increase their vulnerability and their angst at the establishment. A few of these have been considered below:

**Labour Market Insecurity:** There is a flexible labour market in place globally as more workers are forced to make do with temporary jobs including casual employment. This is a way for employers to survive the harsh business operating climate. However, because of flexible labour markets, the precariat cannot draw on a social memory, and cannot pin down any permanent employment that can guarantee them some security. This precarious grip on employment forces them to consider other options including joining the criminal economy or revolutionary forces in the society.

### **Identity Insecurity**

Having been denied of their rights within the society, members of the precariat class lose their identities and see themselves as outsiders of mainstream society. They do not have occupational identity, they feel their political rights to vote in their candidates will not be honoured due to manipulation of election result and their economic identity is also damaged as they see themselves as marginalised members of society. If this situation is not reversed, they could pull at the beams supporting or sustaining the society.

### **Employment Insecurity**

Employment insecurity largely characterises the lifestyle of the precariat class as many do not have the knowledge, skills and abilities to get a job and to keep it. When they do, the system is skewed against them as employment is for scions and wards of the elite who are allowed unbridled access to strategic positions in the state. This further marginalises members of the precariat class and increases their employment insecurity.

### **Skill Reproduction Insecurity**

The youth precariat class especially have fewer opportunities for developing market-ready and industry-relevant skills needed for employment. Whatever skills they have immediately become outmoded due to changing management systems, processes, and technological inputs at work. Therefore, as they acquire a new skill and delay a bit in the labour market, the skill becomes obsolescent, thereby requiring that they develop more skills and this cycle continues, locking them down in the precarity trap.

### **Income Insecurity**

Because of the foregoing reasons, members of the precariat class do not know where their next income would come from. This increases their vulnerability, and insecurity and forces some of them to embrace anarchic forces.

### **Representation Insecurity**

In Nigeria, the precariat class are those that Standing (2014) described as not engaging in politics because of the thinning of democracy which reflects in the “drastic falls in membership of political parties, declining turnouts at elections and the low percentage of young people bothering to vote, thereby shifting the median voter to the elderly, which induces politicians to favour them” (Standing, 2012, para. 17-18). Thus, the lack of confidence the youth precariat class have in the political system makes them to reduce their political engagement, and further distances them from the ruling class and the political machinery of the state.

These insecurities have conflated to increase the vulnerability of the precariat class and its youth segment and further made Nigeria a risk society open to the vengeance and anger of its youth precariat class.

### **Theoretical Matrix**

This study has adopted the Political Economy theory to further its analysis of the subjects of the youth precariat class vis-à-vis the ruling class and the instrument of politics of change which could make all the difference if the Buhari democratic administration continues to show commitment.

There are three generations in the development of the theory of political economy. According to Hudson and Letfwich (2014), these include the first generation, in the 1990s which focused on issues of governance, especially the absence of good governance; the second generation which emphasised historical, structural, institutional and political elements as shapers of the context within which actors worked; and the third generation, which combines elements from the previous two generations. Hudson and Leftwich (2014) contend that political economy has largely become the economy of politics, and less about political analysis.

While authors share the reductionism posed by Hudson and Leftwich with regard to political economy becoming more as the economy of politics, they do so bearing in mind that politics and political actors control much of what happens in the economy through their policy formulations, policy actions, pieces of legislation passed to favour their fronts, friends and lackeys in the economy and the fact that members of the political class in most cases are also members of the economic class.

The Political Economy theory cannot be fully understood and appreciated until the works of Karl Marx are examined. This is because his treatments of dialectical and historical materialism identified the bicameral context that most societies are largely divided into. The society features the capitalist or the owners of capital in competition for the protection and promotion of their interests as against a proletarian class that only has its labour power and also seeks to protect and enhance returns on this advantage. This constantly brings these two classes into a conflict where each group seeks to dominate the other, with the capitalist having the upper hand. According to Marx, the economy or the substructure is what defines the superstructure, that is, politics, law, education, religion and entertainment, among others, which all reflect the ideologies and ideals of those that control the economy. In other words, the political sphere for instance bears the semblance of the interests of the economic class. Thus, for Marx, the important basis for workers to capture is the economic base and from there they control the entire society. However, political economy not only points to the power of the economic class, it also analyses or identifies the hegemony of those who control the political sphere. In other words, the political economy theory canvasses that:

1. There are mutual interests, needs and desires that the political class and economic class have. These interests and needs are complementary and are aimed to perpetuate their hegemony ad infinitum.

2. Economic actors are friends of the political actors because they fund their campaigns, and programmes, and support certain projects that enhance the political capital of the actors in the political sphere. On the other hand, political actors make policies, pass pieces of legislation, introduce programmes and create a favourable institutional environment to support their economic allies.
3. While politicians make political choices, the entrepreneurial or economic class makes economic choices, and each seeks how choices made can continue to protect and promote its interests within the state.
4. While the hegemon of the economic base influence the political sphere, those who control the political reins of power could also influence to a large degree the outcomes within the economic base.
5. Additionally, those who control the political reins have their eyes on obtaining a share of the economic pie for themselves as is seen in Nigeria where former leaders have businesses or massive shares in many choice sectors of the economy. In fragile states, particularly, political actors seek to extend their hegemony to the economic sphere.

Thus, a relationship exists between power wielders and economic wielders. Economic wielders are interested in who controls the state apparatuses so their economic interests can be protected and sometimes descend into the political arena with their wealth to take over or take up the political reins.

The Buhari-fashioned Politics of Change can have positive effect on the reduction of youth unemployment in Nigeria and in the improvement of the quality of life of Nigerian youths if his government continues to show sustained commitment, and also unveils its pro-poor and pro-people policies and programmes to benefit the generality of citizens. Particularly, with regard to the generation of employment opportunities for the Nigerian youth bulge, the administration can consider a wide range of labour market policies to increase its employment window for the absorption of many members of the youth precariat class in the country.

## **LABOUR MARKET POLICIES TO TACKLE RISING PRECARIATISED YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA**

There are numerous labour market policies that the Buhari government can explore to regenerate the labour market in Nigeria, making it nimble to absorb more unemployed youths

in the country. These labour market policies were developed by Standing (2008) in conjunction with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Some of these policies may not be new in Nigeria but with greater commitment and ingenuity, the Buhari government can harvest more results from the implementation of the programmes.

First, Child labour policy could be explored. Nigeria is a signatory to all the key international conventions concerning child labour, and child rights are enshrined in two pieces of legislation in the country, the 2003 Child's Right Act (CRA) and the Labour Act (United States Department of Labor, 2016). The CRA has codified the rights of children in Nigeria and has been ratified by 23 states and the Federal Capital Territory, with 12 of the remaining 13 states located in northern Nigeria (United States Department of Labor, 2016). The Labour Act on the other hand forbids youth employment under the age of 18 in work that is dangerous to their health, safety, or morals, but allows children to participate in certain types of work that may be dangerous by setting different age limits for various activities (USDL, 2016). However, child labour remains a major challenge in Nigeria in spite of existing legislative measures. According to the International Labour Organisation, the number of working children under the age of 14 in Nigeria is estimated at 15 million (UNICEF, 2016). These jobs include children as street vendors, beggars, car washers or watchers, shoe shiners, apprentice mechanics, hairdressers, bus conductors, domestic servants and farm hands. To prevent young members of the precariat from engaging in child labour, the Buhari-led government should exert his influence to consider paying Nigerian mothers a monthly basic income (MBI) on condition that their children would enrol in school and attend for most of the time, in order to deplete the huge NEET population in the country, and mainstream many members of the youth precariat.

Second, promotion of Anti-Discrimination Measures. Buhari-chiselled Politics of Change must discourage all forms of discrimination against certain members of the society, namely women, youths and other members of the Nigerian society either based on their religion, or ethnicity. No ceiling must be erected over any Nigerian because of factors such as gender, religion, ethnicity, political party affiliation or other subjective factors.

Third, strengthening of the minimum wage policy to reflect market or economic realities should be pursued by the Buhari-led administration. Although this policy has been critiqued not to be effective in labour markets characterised by general informality and flexible relations. However, in a communitarian society like Nigeria where a worker has many dependants, an



increase in wages means more money to these dependants, thus reducing the precarity of vulnerable members.

Fourth, Unemployment insurance benefits, a re-employment project (based on re-employment centres, where masses of retrenched workers could be reached and re-engaged) and a basic living allowance could be looked at to stimulate more employment in Nigeria.

Fifth, Labour market training could help to renew the skills, competences and knowledge of unemployed youths in Nigeria, helping them to match their skills with industry needs and requirements. However, the training should be provided to the most disadvantaged and poor groups, subsidy should only be provided to firms that would have done the training successfully while firms should not be allowed to substitute workers receiving the training subsidy for workers or trainees who are not doing so.

Sixth, Food-for-work schemes such as distribution of food parcels in return for labour on some infrastructural project can be a way of engaging and rewarding the poorest and most disadvantaged in the society. In Ethiopia, for instance, Government devoted, at some point, 80% of its food assistance to food-for-work projects. Such schemes have been recommended as a response to the drastic increase in food prices as it was done in Bangladesh. Some have argued that such workfare initiatives should target women and the very poor.

Seventh, the use of Public works in both development policy and as an anti-unemployment strategy can help to engage many idle youths who desperately need a job to meet their basic needs. Such projects which may last for months or a few years could help to sustain many of these youths, help them raise income that could be invested in a business and even help them plan their route out of extreme poverty by saving a large chunk of earnings which could be committed to education, training or some skill acquisition.

Eighth, part of the arguments in favour of Employment subsidies is that in addition to boosting more demand for labour, they help the low paid obtain jobs. It is supposed that these workers do not obtain jobs without subsidies because their potential productivity is below the market wage. Employment subsidies could be helpful in certain sectors such as export industries or sectors threatened by imports. However, employment subsidies typically favour less skilled,

lower-paid labour and therefore are used to catalyse labour-intensive production that engage more low-skilled workers.

Ninth, government should explore and create more windows to channel Micro-credit and micro-finance schemes to reach vulnerable members and members of the youth precariat class. Provision of small loans to the poor and vulnerable, as start-up capital for small business activity could help to support these individuals, provide them an income and could help them grow their micro businesses into SME enterprises when these monies are bundled with relevant enterprise training to beneficiaries.

Lastly, Cash transfers or grants can become another way the Politics of Change can resonate among the youth precariat class in Nigeria. Rather than reject the campaign idea of payment of N5,000 cash transfer to the vulnerable in Nigeria, who are credible members of the precariat class, the Buhari-led government should consider going ahead with the implementation of the policy in order to reach out to the marginalised, vulnerable and fringe members of society who in the absence of such a policy could become cannon fodder for anti-establishment and anarchical forces in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has attempted a connexion between the politics of change and labour market policies that the Buhari-led administration could consider in order to address the interests, needs and desires of the youth precariat class in Nigeria. These class suffers from a latticework of insecurities, namely, labour market insecurity, employment insecurity, skill reproduction insecurity, income insecurity and representation insecurity, all of which combine to deepen their social, identity, political and economic insecurities in the country. If not stemmed, these insecurities have continued to isolate this class, making members soft targets of criminal overlords, terror merchants, militant warlords, cybercriminal czars and armed robbery chieftains. These insecurities will also continue to drive the youth precariat class towards the fringes of sanity and exacerbate their odium and feelings of vengeance at a society members of this class consider insentient to their plight.

Therefore, it is with open arms that Nigerians, including members of this class, welcomed Buhari's Politics of Change with the hope that it would make a clean break with the politics of "elitocracy" pursued by the previous government and the ones before it. Its pro-poor and pro-people policies must receive concrete support from his government, be adequately funded and be creatively implemented to attack the root causes of poverty and deprivation which keep the youth precariat class on its knees.

Any attempt to dismiss members of the youth precariat class as denizens not fitting to be assisted and supported will drive them towards centrifugal forces or anarchists whose ideology of bloodletting and waste could consume what remains of Nigeria's peace, progress and unity.

The politics of change advocated by President Buhari will be more successful if his government shows greater political will towards his fight against corruption, infrastructural development is enhanced, government business is reformed such that the public service becomes an institution for the people and not for some select few, and government revenue is judiciously used for national development purposes. Moreover, the government must continue to show leadership by example while hard work and commitment to national development goals should become ideals that typify his government and that are projected to the people in order to reform the ethical consciousness of Nigerians and especially that of the precariat class whose members are already lured by the avarice and ostentation displayed by the corrupt elite.

The government of Buhari has a date with history and what it does with his well-chiselled Politics of Change will either stand him in the pantheon of African political leaders with sterling qualities that changed their societies positively for good or push his memories into the dark alleys where African leaders who failed their societies and generations are kept only to be remembered for negative commentaries or narratives.

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