

V

Priority Setting and Policy Making



13

Retirement Stress in Nigeria: A Psycho-political Analysis

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Introduction

Retirement means different things to different people. Typically and like most English words, the meaning it takes depends on the context in which it is used. The context in which retirement is described here concerns 'giving up a regular job or regular activity with consequent cessation of the enjoyment of fringe benefits or other benefits associated with it'. Retirement could also be viewed as being outside the workforce, receiving some income from a previous job and having time to do the things the individual desires. Technically, retirement can begin anytime an individual has amassed enough capital to provide a living without holding a job. Retirement is not necessarily a dichotomy: retired versus not retired. It is a process that begins when the individual realises that some day he or she will leave a job, and ends when the individual becomes so feeble and impoverished that they can no longer play the retirement role (Atchley 1976). This then indicates that retirement is a process through which the retirement role is approached, taken up, learned, mastered and relinquished. When retirement is viewed as a social role, it undergoes the following phases: pre-retirement phase, honeymoon phase, disenchantment phase, re-orientation phase, stability and termination phase. The pre-retirement phase is divided into the two phases of remote and near, with the remote phase beginning when the individual takes a job and finishing when the individual ends his career. The near phase begins when the individual becomes aware that he or she will take up the retirement role very soon, with the attitude towards retirement becoming negative, probably because the realities of retirement become clear. The honeymoon phase is rather a euphoric stage in which individuals wallow in their newly found freedom of time and space, with many trying their hand at things they never had time for before. After the honeymoon is over and life begins to slow down, some people experience a period of disenchantment.

This depends on a lot of factors: few alternatives, little money, poor health etc. The re-orientation phase is then necessary for those whose honeymoon either did not get off the ground or landed with a crash. Here, the retiree tends to explore new avenues for involvement and to develop more realistic views about alternatives. The stability phase ushers in a relatively well-developed set of criteria for making choices while in the termination phase, people tend to lose their retirement role through illness and disability, which sometimes accompany old age. At this point, the individual ceases to retire and becomes dependent.

Retirement, seen as one of the biggest changes in the life cycle, can be a stressful period; no matter how prepared you may think you are, as there can be something that has not been planned or foreseen to upset things. With increased rate of early retirement, the experience of retirement can be very difficult. It may be an opportunity for increased leisure time for those with adequate pensions, but for those retiring through ill health and with a low or no pension, retirement may bring despair and limited opportunities. Indeed, there is a sense in which psychology as a state of mind and political economy of care, as perceived and experienced by the retirees, underlie the whole process.

This paper intends to critically examine retirement stress from a multi-disciplinary perspective with the emphasis on the psychological and political contexts. It is clear today that no comprehensive study of social issues could be done without recourse to the interrelated factors causing or influencing events. In this case, the focus is in analysing the various dimensions of retirement stress in Nigeria as they relate to both the political and social dynamics.

However, this study is basically a review of the state of discourse of retirement stress and relevant literature in Nigeria. It does not lay claim to any systematic survey for information gathering. However, extensive person-to-person interviews and primary documents were used as reliable sources of first-hand information on the plight of retirees and the state of retirement policy in Nigeria.

For a better understanding of the discourse, the paper raises the following questions:

- a) To what extent can retirement stress be said to be a problem in Nigeria?
- b) What are the political structures for managing retirement in Nigeria?
- c) Is the financial architecture for managing pensions in Nigeria adequate?
- d) What are the possible psychological implications of unchecked retirement problems on the national psyche?

Theoretical Underpinnings

Two theories, which dominated social gerontology in the 1950s, were Disengagement and Activity theories. Both postulate not only behaviour changes with age and retirement but also imply how that behaviour would change (Powell 2001). Disengagement theory, associated with Cumming and Henry (1961),

proposed that a gradual withdrawal of older people from work roles and social relationships is both an inevitable and rational process. For this variant of functionalism, this process benefits society, since it means that the death of an individual member of society does not prevent the ongoing functioning of the social system. This theory argues that it was beneficial for both the retired individual and society that such disengagement takes place in order to minimise the social disruption caused by an ageing person's eventual death (Neurgarten 1998). A number of critiques exist: first, this theory condones indifference towards retirement, old age and social problems. Secondly, it represents a threat to the promotion of a positive and involved lifestyle for ageing persons across the lifespan (Powell 1999).

Activity theory, a counterpoint of Disengagement theory, claims a successful retirement can be achieved by maintaining roles and relationships. Any loss of roles, activities or relationships within old age, should be replaced by new roles and activities to ensure happiness, value consensus and well being. Thus, 'activity' was seen as an ethical and academic response to the disengagement thesis which recast retirement as joyous and mobile (Powell 2001). Nevertheless, Activity theory tends to neglect issues of power plays, inequality and conflict between age groups. An actual 'value consensus' may reflect the interests of powerful and dominant groups within the society who find it advantageous to have age-power relations organised in such a way (Phillipson 1998).

As an intellectual background against such functionalist theoretical dominance, the political economy of old age emerged from Marxist insights in analysing the capitalist complexity of modern society and how old age and retirement were socially constructed to foster the needs of the economy. The political economy approach desired to understand the character and significance of variations in the treatment of the aged and to relate these to polity, economy and society. For Ester (1979), political economy challenges the ideology of older people as belonging to a homogeneous group unaffected by the dominant structures in society. Political economy therefore focuses upon an analysis of the state in contemporary societal formations. Here, we can see how Marxism is interconnected to this theory. Ester (1979) also looks at how the state decides and dictates who is allocated resources and who is not. This impinges upon retirement and subsequent pension schemes. As Phillipson (1982) pointed out, the retirement experience is linked to the timing of the reduction of wages and enforced withdrawal from work, and has made many older people financially insecure. Hence the state could make and break the fortunes of its populace.

From this perspective, the nature of the Nigerian state as presently constituted, the state of its democracy, and the character of the political class, all serve as important constituents in examining social security and retirement. The suspicion is that the not too efficient Nigerian state characterised by official corruption and poverty has been instrumental in generating retirement stress for a significant percentage of its citizenry.

Retirement as Stressors

The question that most people often ask the newly retired person is: 'What do you do now?' I have watched most retirees literally torn between eagerness and reluctance to answer when asked this familiar question, probably followed by another: 'How do you pass your time?' Surprisingly, many fumble for an answer, with their thoughts turning from family responsibilities to pensions and concern about how to make ends meet. Faced with their problems, accentuated by a nagging wife or uncaring children, they are unlikely to seek comfort in retirement.

Stress is as much part of retirement as of any other period in life, however the impact of some sources of stress seems to intensify during retirement. Retirement, whether voluntary or involuntary, is a transition that requires tremendous adjustment. Most people take it for granted that they will retire someday, while some express dread of retirement. Attitudes towards retirement could be seen as a function of health, ageing, income, roles and expectations, relocation, changes in identity, and position held at retirement. Others could include educational background, versatility of the retiree, government's economic and political policies on retirement, gender, death of spouse, attitude to life, and emotional predisposition.

The concept, stress, was originally used in physics, primarily to describe tension or force placed on an object to bend or break it. When applied to the human condition, it was described as the non-specific response of body to demands placed on it (Selye 1956). Stress can also be understood as a life event that causes physical and psychological reactions in the individual. Today, the word stress is frequently used to describe the level of tension people feel because of the demands of their jobs, relationships and responsibilities in their personal lives (Seaward 1994). In eastern philosophy, stress is considered to be an absence of inner peace. In western culture, stress is viewed as a loss of control, while psychologically speaking it is described as a state of anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one's coping abilities. To the disbelief of some, not all stress is bad. In fact, there are many who believe that humans need some degree of stress to stay alert. When stress serves as a positive motivator, it is considered beneficial, but beyond this optimal point, stress does more harm than good. Notable side effects of stress include high blood pressure, heart attacks, irritable bowel movement, aches and pains, ulcer, dizziness, sleeping difficulty, poor vision, headache, tiredness and in the extreme, death. Psychological effects include depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, tiredness and misery, irritability, negative mood, restlessness and suspicion. Others could lead to reduction in coping capabilities, low self-esteem and self-image, absolutist and dichotomous thinking, fear, hopelessness and helplessness. Other negative impacts of stress could also present themselves in the form of family and marital difficulties, disruption in effective communication, interpersonal difficulties, child abuse, wife battering, political alienation, corruption and greed, etc.

The question that arises when these definitions and side effects are examined closely is: Is stress the event itself or must it be defined in terms of certain reactions to an event? It does seem that stress must be defined in terms of the individual's reaction to the event, which in this case is retirement. Thus, experiences of retirement could also aid in the disruption of the ego and a sense of self worth, when people who have been seeking you dwindle; subordinates, followers, admirers become conspicuous by their absence. It is difficult to accept the fact that you have to wait now instead of people waiting on you. (Dhar 2004). Dhar also reported the case of a retiree whose nagging wife was almost invariably found deriving some sort of vicarious pleasure, bordering on perversion, in shouting at and humiliating her husband, even in the public gaze. Following his retirement, the situation had gone from bad to worse, leaving him with a bout of self-doubt, and loss of confidence. He of course became worried and apprehensive of the uncertainties of the future and lost his sleep and his health. The big fear is usually, who will take care of him now? Will he be a burden to their children? Other difficulties could come in the form of a loss of control over key positions of responsibility with a resultant feeling of frustration and anxiety. A very serious problem is having too much time to spend. Suffice to note that a good number of retirees, immediately after retirement, usually wallow in their newfound freedom of time and space. Here, most try to do all the things they never had time for before. When the 'honeymoon' is over and life begins to slow down, most experience bouts of disenchantment and isolation. Disruption in the usual waking-up routine of the retiree is also a huge challenge, because when not adequately overcome, it could trigger boredom and isolation. Retirement can also trigger marital stress and adjustment in couples. Mein (1998) for example, in his study found that men felt adjusting to a new role and relationship with their wives was the most difficult and unexpected part of retirement. Although retirement might be a way to get rid of the stressors and strains of work, surprisingly, it seems that spending the golden years with a wife is not the recipe for joy either. In another report by Jungmeen et al. (1999), men sometimes complained that retirement tended to reduce their wives respect for them, especially when the wives were not retired. Jungmeen et al. in another study stated that men who retired while their wives were still working showed a higher level of marital stress and distrust. The happiest men were the ones who found another job and whose wives were not working, and they reported the highest morale and the lowest depression and suspiciousness.

This brings us to this important question, 'Why do people work?' Some work for the money and they are most likely to continue even when the income is no longer needed. Some for the social interaction it provides, while others work for the sense of accomplishment it gives. However, when work defines a person: what you are, what you do and where you work, the retiree is very likely to feel disenchanting and restless when this identity tied to his working life seems to have fallen apart.

Perhaps a peep into life events associated with old age could also explain some sources of retirement stress. Such old age events could come in the form of physiological (medical) complications like the loss of energy, vulnerability to diseases due to wear and tear of the body over the years, and the fact that most non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, high-blood pressure etc., manifest themselves at this critical period. Of course, none of these changes begins suddenly at old age; gradual decline in some kind of functioning starts earlier. However, it is during old age that these changes become more apparent. Also, along with the multiplicity of health problems of old age, physiological disturbances are usually chronic and are more difficult to detect. This is due to the fact that symptoms may not have the same characteristics as that of the same disease in a younger person.

Politically and economically, in other words, in terms of its political economy, retirement stress could be caused by inability of workers to obtain their gratuity on time and the hiccups experienced in the payment of pension benefits, as complained by many retirees from both public and private sectors of the economy. The experience is almost universal, the only exemption being perhaps the oil industry and some major organisations in the manufacturing sector. Other sources of stress include waiting endlessly for hours or days to be paid, while in some cases most go home dejected without receiving their pension, others end up carving an almost permanent niche at the payment centres. Also the erroneous assumption that the traditional, extended family, informal welfare institution is a substitute for a well-articulated social security for the aged and retired needs to be re-thought.

Prolonged stress is believed to weaken the immune system, leading to susceptibility to diseases. Inadequate social support and retirement policies could hasten the triggering of stress reactions in the elderly and retired, and invariably complicate most of their physiological changes. It is therefore obvious that the aged and retired would experience much more difficulty in coping with stress and diseases, coming from a more disadvantaged position.

Problems of Retirees in Nigeria

It suffices to note again that retirement in Nigeria is no longer a stage to which people look forward. Gone are the days when retirees, especially those from the public services were assured of regular pensions. Today, they live from hand to mouth and more especially, their days on earth appear numbered. Pension scheme meant to provide succour to retirees do not seem to be working, and retirees from the public sector know better the negative effect of labouring for the fatherland. From different sectors, they have gory tales to tell. A case in point is the tragic state of retirees of the Nigerian Railway Cooperation who were owed their pensions for twenty-four months (*The Guardian Nigeria*, 2004). Several of the military retirees were reported to have turned the streets of Abuja and Lagos into homes begging for survival following the failure of relevant authorities to pay their pensions. The worst scenario is that of the retired primary school teachers.

This class of pensioners according to reports have not been paid for decades and their case is worsened by the fact that they do not know which tier of government to turn to for their stipends. The literature is rife with the woes that retirees go through in Nigeria, both in the public and private sectors (*The Guardian* Nigeria, 2000, 2003, 2004). For most civil servants and top directors, retirement may mean relocating from government quarters to a private residence, which is usually made worse if the retiree is unable to afford an alternative residence or to access funds from financial institutions. Coupled with the poor financial status of the retiree and the fact that there is no organised package on health care, retirement is far from satisfying for many. Retirement is satisfying for most people if they have a decent income, enjoy good health and were not forced to retire (Foner and Schward 1981). Mein (1998) also observed that health and income were frequently mentioned as sources of stress and depression among retirees, especially among those from lower civil service grades, while Benjamin, Idler, Leventhal & Leventhal (2000) in another study assert that health and income put together lead to a more successful retirement. The following lamentation of Godson, a retired captain would probably speak the mind of millions of retirees:

Not many people know what retirees go through in this country. On a personal experience, I retired as a Captain due to ill health. For my poor condition, I had hoped to collect my benefit soonest so that I can give myself a good treatment. At the pension directorate in Lagos, I met a brick wall, no one was ready to assist. Besides being tossed about for days and weeks, my file was declared missing. I was told to start afresh.

In an attempt at interrogating the architecture for the management of retirement factors and pensions in Nigeria, perhaps another example could drive this point home more strongly:

‘50 Retired Teachers die while waiting for pension’:

They are honourable senior citizens, notwithstanding how badly emaciated some of them appeared, who had put in their entire productive years in the service of their fatherland. But what a price to pay, now at the twilight of their own lives, when they need all the help they can get, the country which they had served so conscientiously had turned its back on them. They are subjected to deprivation, hardship and death. The chairman of Retired Teachers’ Association for example, claimed that in the last 6 months, 50 of their members had died, due to inability to get their entitlement. He also reported that one of them, a treasurer of the association, died recently, because he could not get 50,000 Naira, needed for medical treatment whereas the government owed him over 150,000 Naira unpaid pension arrears. They therefore demanded, among other things, for upward review and prompt payment of their pension arrears and most importantly, for a welfare package like free medical care in government hospitals.

They also claimed that a governor in one of the Eastern states in Nigeria was unfair in a statement credited to him that ‘our children should take care of us’.

They went further to state that while it is the duty of their children to take care of them, the government should not claim ignorance of the fact that most of their children cannot find jobs and are still liabilities for parents (*The Guardian Nigeria*, 2004).

Many African governments, including Nigeria's, certainly find it convenient to assume that the extended family in Africa continues to adequately meet all the needs of its members even in retirement. This assumption may be convenient for government to make since it appears to provide a basis for a minimal role for the state in ensuring old age and retirement care. The extended family that is presumed to be taking adequate care of the elderly is not living up to its expectations. The contributory factors include: the serious problem of economic survival faced by the young, the presumed caregivers in the context of prolonged economic crisis and depression; the span and speed of social change associated mainly with urbanisation, industrialisation and exposure to foreign ideas, and the value crisis now prevalent in most African countries (Akeredolu-Ale 2001).

This then paints a clear picture of what retirees in most of the developing world go through every day due to inadequate or poorly managed retirement benefits and policies. When compared with their counterparts in the developed world, they are certainly having a rough deal. This is a bad signal for the retirees as well as millions of younger Nigerians who see in what is happening a frightening reflection of their own future.

Retirement Policy and Retirement Management

Until the mid 1980s, there were no widespread instances of retirement of old people from work in Nigeria; rather, they continued to work until they were compelled to leave due to ill health. However, it was during the Buhari regime of the mid 1980s that the retirement rule became very effective in the Nigerian public and private sectors. During this period, many workers who were above the official retirement age of sixty were compelled to retire and since then, retirement has become a planned phase and programmed aspect of employment in Nigeria. Today, the retirement age in Nigeria is sixty years or thirty-five years in service, while for university lecturers and judges it is sixty-five years and fifty-five to sixty years for the private sector. A person is qualified for a gratuity when he or she has put in five years of service while eligibility for a pension is ten years of service. The public sector, prior to the recent pension reform in 2004 in Nigeria, operated a non-contributory pension scheme, (pay-as-you-go scheme), while that of the private sector is contributory. Pension benefits in Nigeria are reviewed from time to time in order to meet with the social and economic changes in the country.

On the situation in the Africa region, the ILO assessed as 'weak' the coverage and effectiveness of existing social protection schemes relating to the contingencies of retirement, invalidity and death. It concluded that 'many African schemes have failed to provide effective social protection, even for the small minority of the population that they cover' (ILO 2000). North Africa has the oldest and most

comprehensive schemes, with pension schemes based on social insurance principles operating in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia since the 1950s. In Francophone sub-Saharan African countries, priority has been given to employment injury schemes while many of the countries have similar schemes with pension provisions based on social insurance principles which guarantee a defined benefit determined by reference to length of service and average earnings. In Anglophone Africa, the emphasis has been placed on employment injury schemes, while the development of social insurance schemes has been much slower than in Francophone countries. Pension schemes have been restricted in most cases to permanent public servants, though national provident funds have been provided in some cases to cover non-pensionable public servants and employees of big firms in the organised private sector (ILO 2000).

The fact that the Nigerian government is not living up to expectations as regards pension and retirement is very obvious. Nothing could be more horrifying for the retired than to be owed money when other sources of income are closed. Solanke (2004) observed that government has a problem of funds. They do not fund as and when due, and when it is time to pay, they find it difficult to pay. For some, very few parastatals are trying to put money aside for pensions, it is either the trustee who does not manage the funds properly or the funds are lost in the process of management, or worst still, such funds are stolen out-right. And when this happens, the pensioners are subjected to untold hardship. Solanke concluded that the major problem bedevilling pension funds in Nigeria is outright corruption. Other problems associated with government pensions include arbitrary and sporadic retirement and retrenchment of 'under-aged' officers, thus expanding the population of young pensioners, the over-centralization of pension administration, inefficient record keeping, and the lethargic attitude of government employees which causes delays in effecting payments. Most importantly, there is the dishonesty and the phenomenon of ghost pensioners. Pension problems in Nigeria are also bedevilled by the lack of seriousness in addressing the problem by successive governments, money trapped in distressed banks and bureaucratic bottlenecks experienced by pensioners in a bid to access their pension. *The Guardian*, Nigeria (2004) observed that the pension crisis arose largely because the public service ballooned without control, under the belief that government money was inexhaustible. The situation of unpaid and irregular pensions clearly encouraged indolence, corruption, divided loyalty and inefficiency in the system. Such irregularities and deformities also have a tendency to discourage originality, creative hard work and patriotism. All these necessitated the cry for pension reform in Nigeria.

In the past, Nigeria initiated reforms with the setting up of committees. First was the Ajibola-led committee in 2002 which was mandated to harmonise the public-private sectors' pensions, while the privatisation agency in the country also set up a steering committee on the pension reforms with certain objectives. There was also an insurance industry committee on pensions set up to provide technical advice to the government on pension reform. The other was the Fola Adeola-led

committee charged with the responsibility of pension reform in the country. The common denominator in all the committees' recommendations and resolutions was a call for reform based on the unanimous conclusion that the public sector, unfunded, pay-as-you-go defined benefit pension system has failed woefully. This led to President Obasanjo's call in his May Day speech for a contributory public sector pension scheme. The latest effort by the Federal government to address the issue is now generating a lot of controversy. The controversial pension reform bill sought to merge the separate private and public sector pension schemes into one, scrapping every other system in the country including the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), among other things. One criticism is that the bill will not solve the existing problem in the public sector, but will rather infect the private sector with the same virus that rendered the public sector scheme unmanageable. However, the report of the Senate ad-hoc committee, after several deliberations, suggested the separation of the public sector contributory pension scheme from the private sector. In addition, the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) was also retained despite the government's proposal that it should be scrapped. To ensure that operators and administrators do not abuse the scheme, the committee endorsed the idea of a regulatory body to be called the National Pension Commission (*The Guardian*, 16 February 2004).

The Pension Reform Bill was finally passed on the first of July 2004, two hundred and seventy-four days after it was sent to the National Assembly. President Obasanjo reiterated the fact that the bill was set to eliminate the embarrassing situation where workers give their best in productivity, and receive no pension. The Act, which harmonises public and private sector pensions, has the following as its highpoints:

- Any organisation that has more than five staff is duty bound to run a pension scheme;
- The Act preserves the existing private sector scheme, but lays down a framework within which they must operate to protect the welfare and rights of the beneficiaries;
- Although the bill repealed the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) Act, the committee, after considering stakeholders' views, came to the conclusion that the NSITF be retained as a platform for delivering social security services to Nigerians. This is in consonance with the ILO convention.
- That the concept of Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) and Pension Fund Custodian (PFC), as introduced by the bill, was found desirable since it contains the most refined techniques for effective checks and balances. The qualifications of custodians were modified to ensure that only the most credible finance institutions could provide the services;
- The Act makes it mandatory for pension fund administrators to open savings accounts for pension beneficiaries;

- Pension fund administrators may also invest in real estate to protect funds against inflation and other economic hazards;
- The Act provides opportunities for Nigerians covered to make additional contributions and receive additional benefits, and for those not covered to willingly join the scheme.

On the speculation of what will become of the viable contributory pension scheme on the ground, the Senate stated that government parastatals like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and the Bureau of Public enterprises (BPE), which had pension funds of one billion and above will be allowed to set up their own funds management system. Other government organisations with pension schemes not as successful as CBN, NNPC, and BPE, will not be allowed (*The Guardian*, 30 June 2004). Some amendments made by the Senate include: the adoption of the House of Representative version to replace section 9 (1) (a) (i) & (ii), which provided for a minimum of 7.5 percent employee contribution and 7.5 percent employer contributions. Another amendment was in section 4(2) where the withdrawal of a lump sum by the retirees was reduced from 50 percent to 25 percent.

With the signing of the Bill into law, the Pension Act of 1990 expired.

After the review of the nation's new pension law, the Nigerian Labour Union observed that the new Act excluded certain pensioners like the Nigerian Railway Cooperation, Primary Schools and the Military. An enraged labour leader, Adams Oshiomhole, remarked that there was nothing to celebrate about the Act, as far as those pensioners who die daily in the queues waiting to collect pensions are not provided for. He lamented the fact that it was in response to their plight that the pension reform came up, and pitifully, there was no mention of their plight. Labour also lamented that the new Act put the pensioners at a disadvantage and many of them at risk of losing their savings to failed fund administrators. It also queried the measures put in place to guarantee savings of the pensioners in case of default by the pension administrator (*The Guardian*, 16 July 2004).

Organised labour also disagreed with the provision regarding the contribution ratio between the employer and employee in both the private and public sectors, observing that the harmonised position of labour submitted to the National Assembly was for 12.5 percent contribution for the employer and 5.5 percent for the workers. Similarly, the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) also frowned at the contributory ratio of 1:1 saying that it negates the 3:1 internationally accepted norms of contributory pension schemes. (*The Guardian*, 3 February 2005). However, the Senate, in a bid to amend the new Pension Bill, is currently asking that government contribute an extra 2 percent of the monthly wage bill to its workers to the Redemption Fund. This is to ensure that the 'living standards of the employee are reasonably brought in conformity with that of their counterparts who occupy the same position in future and also

by harmonizing the earnings of a previously retired person to rank *pari-passu* with that of his counterparts who have just retired and is payable under the law' (*The Guardian*, 30 January 2005).

On the lingering issue of pension arrears, President Obasanjo noted that the issue will require the government to come up with viable strategy and policy that will assure those who are owed arrears of pension that they will be paid. He therefore apologised for the pain and deprivations caused because of irregular and unpaid payments.

Conclusion

In concluding this article, one thing is obvious – that we all must retire one day and that each of us will react differently to our retirement situation. Some will find it easy to accept, while others will find it really traumatic. Though our ability to choose a rosy retirement may be a mirage, it is still very important to plan for retirement to avoid the pain and depression that normally accompany unplanned retirement. In the face of rapidly disintegrating joint family structure and inefficient government policies, people walking into retirement are likely to turn greyer and lonelier by the day, the more so if they do not have financial security. Perhaps this paper may sound stern if it suggests that individuals should try to take personal responsibility for the retirement problem that afflicts them, and perceive pensions and gratuities as an additional resource. If the government is finding it difficult to pay the working employees, it is certain that they may find it almost impossible to make the case of the pensioners a priority, unless there is sincerity and empathy. Even the corporate giants may not be prepared to discuss the need of retired persons due to dwindling income and profit coupled with suffocating demands for higher pay as a result of crippling inflation. Of course, the plight of retired teachers, railway workers, military personnel and a host of other pathetic stories about pensioners should serve as red signals for the working class and a constant reminder that 'the only person who should be concerned about your retirement is you'.

On the new pension contribution scheme in Nigeria, I feel that there is a point to be made for the Nigerian Government to have a more human face by lightening the burden on the various institutions, both public and private, in terms of the percentage contribution to the scheme. The war against corruption by President Obasanjo's administration and the effort at sanitising the public service are a welcome development which hopefully will impact positively on the management of pensions, and hence the plight of retirees in Nigeria. Also for a happier retirement and old age status, government should think of providing free medical services for its retired citizens, as a thank you gift for serving the state diligently. This is also necessary because of the health complications of old age and thus, coming from a more disadvantaged position, retirees may experience more difficulty in coping with stress and disease.

On a lighter note, after retirement, since one is no more a slave to a fixed schedule, one can devote some time to introspection, to try and rediscover one's self and acquire new ideas or pursue unconventional hobbies and interests. Think of retirement as a new lifestyle not as the end of the road. Develop your sense of humour and laugh at difficult situations. Take your health as an item of the highest priority, take pride in who and what you are now, be enthusiastic about the present and optimistic about the future and take personal responsibility for your financial future. Since enthusiasm is caught and not taught, the secret of growing old gracefully is never to lose your enthusiasm in remaining active in life.

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