

# NON-STANDARD WORK IN THE NIGERIAN INFORMAL ECONOMY

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## **Abstract**

The susceptibility of the informal economy to non-standard work has become a cause for concern despite the significant contributions of the sector to employment generation and development in Nigeria. This paper focuses on the incidence of non-standard work in the Nigerian informal economy within the ambits of the Neo-Liberal Theory. Drawing on data from fifty in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion and relevant secondary data the paper examines non-standard work among informal workers in Lagos State, Nigeria. It was observed that majority of the informal workers work under very harsh conditions; some had to grapple with unsettling feelings daily due to anticipation of evacuation from place of trade by Government Agencies. This may be responsible for some of the ailments that require management through medication and scheduled Doctor's visits. However, majority have no health plan which suggests that a culture of constant work without consideration for the health implications is not only prevalent problems caused by adverse circumstances remain unaddressed. It is proposed that the drive to harness opportunities presented by the informal economy be balanced with policies appropriate to the needs of the sector.

**Key Words:** Employment generation, unemployment, conditions of work, informal economy, non-standard work, poverty.

## 1.1 Introduction

The world of work has thrown up some challenges, including new forms of work arrangements, thereby promoting the incidence of non-standard work in the society. The pervading informality of work arrangements gave rise to the concept of informal economy and this includes employment in the informal sector; employment in informal enterprises and informal employment carried out in formal organisations (Simons and Lake, 2006). The informal economy is that sector of the economy characterized by the activities of the working poor. The majority of the people in developing economies are often engaged in the informal economy to minimise the effects of unemployment and poverty (Akinwale, 2012).

In accordance with the above, Fashoyin (2010) observed that employment is shrinking in the formal economy. Silverman (1992) contended that the inflexibility of the formal economy is the reason why it cannot contribute equitably to economic survival. This makes the growth and expansion of the informal economy inevitable. Studies have shown that attention on employment in the developing world would remain inadequate without consideration for the thriving informal economy (Heintz and Valodia, 2008; Tanzi, 1999). The rate of employment generation in the Nigerian informal economy is estimated at between 45% and 60% of the urban labour force with an urban population growth rate of about 5.5% per annum (Nwaka, 2005; as cited in Farinmade and Anyankora, 2012 and Adejumo and Azuh, 2013).

However, informality is prone to inadequacies in employment standards, employment creation, social security and social dialogue. In the light of the above, the present article deals with the incidence of non-standard work in the Nigerian informal economy. The informal economy in Nigeria is currently understudied and requires serious attention owing to its critical role in national development (Ajakaiye and Akerele, 1996 and Oduh et al, 2008). Besides, as pointed out by ILO (2001), decent work needs are greatest in the informal economy and among the poor. Agomo (2011) asserts that laws and measures designed to protect all categories of workers end up being for few workers engaged in public service or organized private sector. ILO (2004, p.10) reports that “... many men and women live in a state of oblivion in the informal economy without formal rights and in a swathe of poor countries that subsist precariously on the margins of the global economy.”

Fashoyin (2010, p.123) pointed out that *the outstanding characteristic of the informal economy, with regards to employment relations is that its operators have no access to the institutions and processes of the labour market*. A close observation of the situation of informal workers show that labour laws either do not apply to them, or where they can be, such laws are not enforceable. In response to this situation and to protect the interest of informal workers, an organisation called *Federation of Informal Workers' Organisations of Nigeria (FIWON)* was formed in June 2010. Its membership spreads across different sectors of the economy with presence in about 17 states of the federation and membership of about 40 million self-employed Nigerians.

These categories of workers constitute a significant part of the labour force in Nigeria but they face several constraints as a result of lack of adequate protection from the adverse consequences of non-standard work, including long working hours, low pay,

occupational hazards, and lack of standard measures for occupational health and safety.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework: Neo-Liberal Theory**

This study is grounded in Neo-Liberal Theory. The term 'neo-liberalism' which originated from Germany in the period between the two World Wars (Hartwich, 2009) is synonymous with economic liberalism (Rasak, 2011). Alexander Rüstow is credited with the coinage of the term at a conference in Paris in August 1938. The central idea is for the state to refrain from getting involved in economic processes to avoid crisis that was prevalent at the time. He prescribed that in this regard, the role of the state should be the setting of standards for economic behaviour and enforcement of compliance to these standards. According to Rüstow, when there is a free economy, the state is strong. Consequently, countries of the world that adopt this posture limit or remove government subsidies, reform tax laws to expand tax base, support deregulation, eliminate fixed exchange rates and privatize institutions run by government in line with international economic institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The results of these include inequality and elimination of much needed social programs for the citizenry which would account for the non-standard nature of work in the Nigerian informal economy as most of the activities in the sector do not comply with standards set by the Nigerian State, neither is the machinery for enforcing compliance making visible impact on the sector.

## **1.3 Employment and Non-Standard Work in the Nigerian Informal Economy**

An important use of the term 'informal economy' was in an ILO study of 1972 about Employment, incomes and equality as a way to increase productive employment in Kenya (Daza, 2005; Beneria and Floro, 2005). The introduction of the word has been attributed to a study of urban Ghana by Hart (1973) who found that most of the individuals tagged as unemployed were engaged in informal activities and are self-employed. Chen, Vanek and Heintz (2006) noted that the informal economy today includes informal employment within and outside of formal organisations covering informal self-employment and informal wage employment. Many reasons have been adduced for the rapid growth of the informal economy. Some authors believe that it is a result of economic downturn (Nwaka, 2005; Shah, 2009; Finnegan and Singh, 2004).

Others reason that it is a direct consequence of poverty (Ogbuabor and Malaolu, 2013; Becker, 2004; Rinehart, 2004). Fields (1990) claim that the growth is a result of contemporary times and that people volunteer to work in the informal economy. Besides, Akinwale (2012, p.325) maintains that the informal economy is "... *driven by traditional values such as culture of hard work, cooperation, integrity, commitment and dignity.*" For instance, in the African tradition, families tend to have vocations peculiar to them such as hunting and farming, the operation of which is largely informal. Therefore, involvement in the sector is largely dictated by family affiliation. This implies that the growth of different professions in the sector is predicated on the size of the family. Yet, Sundquist (2008) attribute the growth of the informal economy to massive rural-urban migration very common in developing countries.

Non-standard work is any employment that is not continuous and full-time; without contract specifying duration of employment; without standard hours of work and

associated benefits besides pay (Okafor, 2012; Simons and Lake, 2005). Many have labelled non-standard work as all forms atypical and flexible employment (Satō, 2001; Roper et al, 2010; Ebisui, 2012). A number of scholarly works have been carried out in Nigeria on non-standard work in its various forms covering different geographical locations and sectors (Oil and Gas – Okafor, 2007; Power – Aduba, 2012; Banking – Idowu, 2010; Lagos Island – Farinmade and Anyankora, 2012; Gender element in non-standard work – Fapohunda, 2012) of the Nigerian economy but scarce on its occurrence in the informal economy.

Informalization of employment has been directly linked to concerns over violation of human rights, further reduction in poverty-level wages and attrition of working conditions (Heintz and Pollin, 2003). These undesirable circumstances are fuelled by high rate of unemployment, widespread poverty manifesting in hunger, lack of water and adequate sanitation. In the light of these, current statistics point to widespread poverty and deprivation. Nigeria with GDP of \$262.6 billion in 2012 and a population of 168.8 million in the same year has about 67% of the population living below the poverty line of \$1.25/day (World Bank, Nigerianpoliticsonline). Over 111 million Nigerians do not have access to adequate sanitation; 63.2 million do not have access to safe water with over 97,000 children dying every year from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation (Water Aid Nigeria).

However, there has been tireless effort particularly by the trade unions to reverse this trend. Odu (2011:18) cited in Okafor (2012, p.97) highlights the provisions of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NECA) agreement of May 2 2000 thus: *that employers who currently engage casual workers regularize their appointment; and that their pay as well as all other rights be in accordance with current industry rate as stipulated in the procedural and substantive collective agreements*. Besides, articles 22 and 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Plain Language Version) point to basic rights to social security. Article 22 provides for the right to basic needs which includes shelter, security for all categories of children, health care and unemployment benefits. Article 25 states that societies in which people live should constitute an enabling environment for its citizens.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

This is a qualitative study conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria covering six major local government areas. The focus was categories of work in the informal economy readily available particularly for the majority of rural-urban migrants for which Lagos is a major hub. These included: farmers, fishermen, electricians, traders, plumbers, carpenters, domestic workers, commercial drivers, welders, barbers, tailors, waste pickers, hairdressers, shoe repairers, vulcanizers, auto mechanics/electricians, computer operators etc.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of fifty participants for the study. The selection was based on accessibility and form of employment. The author and six research assistants visited Alimosho, Oshodi/Isolo, Ikeja, Surulere, Yaba and Eti-Osa being six major local government areas in Lagos State. The purpose of which was to conduct in-depth interviews to elicit responses that will show the frequency and manner in which non-standard work exists in the Nigerian informal economy.

The study utilized primary and secondary data. Primary data was derived from fifty in-depth interviews involving workers from various trades in the informal economy. While secondary data was from books and relevant scholarly articles from journals. The field work for gathering primary data for the study was preceded by preparatory meetings of the research team to discuss roles, responsibilities, and expectations which would aid the establishment of clear norms. There was also a pilot test to assess the suitability of the interview instrument for the research and it was found to be appropriate.

This study duly adhered strictly to ethics principles relating to qualitative research. Oral informed consent of all research participants was obtained through clear statement of research purpose and particulars of researcher including institutional affiliation; expected action from research participants was expressed and confidentiality was promised to the research participants. The study carried out between October and November 2013 involved one principal researcher and six research assistants, all of the department of Industrial Relations and personnel management, university of Lagos. Data gathering, collation and analysis were carried out over a period of four weeks. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes based on 15 questions covering personal information, conditions of engagement, mode of entry/engagement and frequency specific jobs in the area. The interest this study generated among informal workers led to the conduct of one group discussion in Ikeja local government area. Due to the level of education of the respondents, the language of communication was mostly local to facilitate understanding. All responses were transcribed in English. However, all researchers applied the same principles in the translation, presentation and analysis of data.

### **1.5 Discussion of Findings**

This section is a presentation of data based on fifty in-depth interviews across six Local Government Areas of Lagos state.

**Table 1 - Personal Information**

No	Variables		Number of Respondents
1.			
2.	Sex	Male	29
		Female	21
3.	Age	18 – 25	20
		26 – 35	17
		36 – 45	10
		46 and Above	3
4.	Nationality/ State of Origin	Igbo	13
		Yoruba	27
		Hausa	2
		Others (Middle Belt, South-South, etc.)	8
5.	Number of Children	0 - 2	34
		3 – 4	12
		5 and Above	4
6.	Educational Qualification	Illiterate	1
		Primary 6/Junior Secondary School	9
		Secondary School	28
		Post-Secondary	12

**Source: Field Work, 2013**

Table 1 shows that 58 percent of the respondents were male. This means that more than half of those engaged in the informal economy are understood to be bread winners of their families in line with usual role assignment in the society. Age 18 to 25 being the age range of those who would normally be in tertiary institutions were engaged in the informal economy and constituted the majority with 40 percent. Yorubas dominated the informal economy in Lagos State. Majority constituting 68 percent had no children, had 1 child or had 2 children. A negligible 2 percent had no education at all while majority with 56 percent had secondary education.

**Table 2 – Frequency of Occupation**

S/N	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Trading	9	18
2.	Newspaper vending	3	6
3.	Food Vending/Canteen operation/catering	6	12
4.	Barbing	3	6
5.	Vulcanizing	2	4
6.	Fashion designing/tailoring	6	12
7.	Bus/tricycle/motor bike Commercial driving	6	12
8.	Farming	2	4
9.	Welding	2	4
10.	Shoe repairing	4	8
11.	Auto engineering/electrical	4	8
12.	Hair dressing	2	4
13.	Computer operation	1	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2013**

Table 2 shows jobs that were readily available and the rate of availability. The most common job was trading and the least common was computer operation being 2 percent of the respondents. Food vending, canteen operation, catering; fashion designing, tailoring; bus and tricycle commercial driving; jointly constituted about 36 percent of the total number of respondents. Newspaper vending and barbing were common to the same degree; 16 percent of the respondents were into shoe repairs, auto engineering and electrical. Welding, vulcanizing, farming, and hair dressing were not as common in relation to the other jobs sampled with a total of 16 percent between them. Most of the respondents had multiple skills and were willing to engage in any venture that would fetch money except stealing. Some respondents who were engaged in trading would choose to trade in some other goods if they were able to access more capital. Some of the respondents were in their current trade due to loss of sight and other challenges due to aging.

**Table 3 – Mode of Operation/Engagement/Entry**

S/N	Occupation	Mode of Operation/Engagement/Entry
1.	Trading	a. Source goods from wholesale markets and manufacturers; b. Often engaged in trading as a result of family tradition;
2.	Commercial Driving	Access tools (buses, motorcycles, tricycles etc.) through: a. hire purchase; b. employment
3.	Tailoring	a. Work from home;
4.	Hairdressing	b. Work in a rented facility;
5.	Welding	c. Work in client's homes ('home service')
6.	Barbing	a. Apprenticeship b. employment
7.	Vulcanizing	
8.	Shoe repair	

**Source: Field Work, 2013**

From table 3, all the occupations exhibited similarities in terms of flexibility and uncertainty. The element of flexibility in mode of operation, uncertainty in employment which characterizes non-standard work was apparent. Hired commercial drivers experienced non-specific/uncertainty in income as this was determined by the amount of money made after remitting a specific amount to the bus/motorcycle or tricycle owner. However, majority of the respondents relied on the patronage of passers-by and customers through referrals by families and friends. Some of the respondents were engaged in business through serving of apprenticeship, others gained entry through self-investment to feed and fulfil personal dream and passion while yet others get funding for the business from siblings, parents and spouses.

**Table 4 – Conditions of Engagement**

S/N	Conditions of Engagement	
1.	Average number of days worked per week	6 days
2.	Average number of hours worked per day	12 hours
3.	Average income per day	₦1,050 (\$6)
4.	Average Savings per week	₦3,300 (\$20)
5.	Terms of engagement	Full-time and part-time
6.	Volume of work	a. customer satisfaction; b. perception of opportunity; c. Pressure for extra income.
7.	Duties and responsibilities	a. Self b. Trainer
8.	Occupational hazards	Highly prone

**Source: Field Work 2013**

Table 4 shows that on the average, a worker worked about 72 hours in a week. Earned ₦6,300 per week on the average and saved ₦13,200 per month. Thus, the average hourly wage in the informal economy was ₦87.50 and in contrast to the hourly wage of ₦112.20 in the Nigerian formal sector, the former was lower by ₦24.70. Majority of the respondents worked on a full time basis, however, there were others who held primary jobs in the formal economy but for want of extra income also participated in the informal economy. The volume of work was dictated by customer satisfaction, perception of opportunity for and pressure to make extra income. Most of the respondents were self-employed and so assigned duties and responsibilities to themselves. However, apprentices had their duties assigned by their trainers. Informal workers were highly disposed to occupational hazards.

The study also shows that the proportion of the lowest income to the highest was 2 percent, pointing to a wide income gap between earnings within the informal economy. In relation to the current national minimum wage of ₦18,000, a worker in the Nigerian informal economy made at least 100 percent over the minimum wage per month. However, the proportion of savings to income was between 11.1 percent and 13 percent but about 50 percent claimed they were unable to save because they did not make enough to cater to their basic needs. Although most of the respondents could determine number of hours worked, they deem it necessary to work long hours to earn as much as possible or meet deadlines. Therefore, hours worked was unregulated particularly for the self-employed. These conditions of work suggest non-standard work arrangement in the sector.

**1.5.1 Health Plan**

Despite huge investments in General and Teaching Hospitals across Nigeria, majority of the workers in the informal economy engaged in self-medication. Many were reluctant to visit these hospitals as they claimed they would have to spend long hours before being attended to by a doctor. This may not be unconnected with certain conditions suggested by Obansa and Orimisan (2013) and in Iyun (1988) cited in Abdulraheem et al (2012) such as the decline in quality of amenities; inadequate remuneration; inadequate diagnostic laboratories; poor working conditions together with understaffing of these hospitals. Nigerian informal workers were wary of the time taken to receive treatment; besides, they do not earn an income for the hours

spent away from their workplace. This may also account for others who had no specific health plan. For instance, one respondent noted as follows:

*“... I am specially made, I don't feel sick ...”*  
(IDI, Female, Yaba LGA, October 2013).

This suggests that a culture of constant work without consideration for the health implications was prevalent. Moreover, a negligible number, mostly those with diseases that required management such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis etc. had scheduled Doctor's visits, another respondent noted:

*“... I go for check-up in a general hospital at least twice in a month ...”* (IDI, Male, Alimosho LGA, October 2013).

Whereas, others such as computer operators believed that they did not face any work related health hazard. Yet some others relied on traditional medicine, pharmacies and matrons when they were ill. There appears to be no deliberate provision made for maintenance of a healthy plan among informal workers.

### **1.5.2 Challenges of Informal Workers**

The challenges facing workers in the Nigerian informal economy included imposition of burdensome government levies in form of tickets; absence of leisure due to long working hours and the resultant stress; unsettling feelings due to anticipation of evacuation from place of trade by Government Agencies such as Kick Against Indiscipline Brigade (KAI), Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) and the Nigerian Police Force; lack of constant electricity supply; shortage of capital; low patronage and friction with customers (customer management). Newspaper vendors in particular faced the challenge of passers-by crowding around the stands to read headlines, some even read through right there on the streets without payment. Some respondents whose jobs required electricity were unable to deliver to customers as at when due leading to abandonment of such products with them.

### **1.6 Summary**

The world of work has thrown up some challenges, including new forms of work arrangements, thereby promoting the incidence of non-standard work in the society. In particular, the susceptibility of the informal economy to non-standard work has become a cause for concern despite the significant contributions of the sector to employment generation and development in Nigeria. Informalization of employment raises concerns for violation of human rights, further reduction in poverty-level wages and attrition of working conditions. The informal economy includes employment in the informal sector; informal enterprises and informal employment carried out in formal organisations. The growth and expansion of the informal economy has become inevitable as a result of inflexibility and inability of the formal economy to contribute equitably to economic survival.

This study is grounded in Neo-Liberal Theory with the central idea being that the role of the state should be the setting of standards for economic behaviour and enforcement of compliance to these standards. The adoption of this stance has

resulted in inequality and elimination of much needed social programs for the citizenry which would account for the non-standard nature of work in the Nigerian informal economy. Activities in the sector do not comply with standards set by the Nigerian State, neither is the machinery for enforcing compliance making visible impact on the sector. This study was conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria covering six major Local Government Areas. Purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of fifty participants for the study. The selection was based on accessibility and form of employment. One principal researcher and six research assistants, all of the department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, University of Lagos visited Alimosho, Oshodi/Isolo, Ikeja, Surulere, Yaba and Eti-Osa being six major local government areas in Lagos State.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This study examined the incidence of non-standard work in the Nigerian informal economy and found that a large number of those engaged in the informal economy were men who are assigned the usual role of bread winners for their families in the society. Most of the respondents had multiple skills and were willing to engage in any venture that could fetch money except stealing. A worker in the Nigerian informal economy made at least 100 percent over the minimum wage of ₦18,000 per month. It was observed that a wide gap exist between the highest and lowest income in the informal economy with the lowest income per day being about \$1.85 which is just under the moderate poverty line of \$2 per day. However, the proportion of savings to income was about 12.05 percent but about 50 percent claim they are unable to save because they can hardly cater to their basic needs.

The challenges facing most informal workers lied in the imposition of burdensome government levies in form of tickets; absence of leisure due to long working hours and the resultant stress; unsettling feelings due to anticipation of evacuation from place of trade government agencies; lack of constant electricity supply; shortage of capital; low patronage and friction with customers (customer management). The findings show that non-standard work manifesting in hazardous working conditions, long irregular hours and flexibility is prevalent in Nigeria. It is proposed that the drive to harness opportunities presented by the informal economy be balanced with policies appropriate to the needs of the sector.

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