THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN ZIMBABWE

by

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Abstract

Zimbabwe currently faces a severe problem of unemployment. The challenges are being experienced in all parts of the country and in all sectors of the economy from primary right to the quaternary sector. Added to this is the problem of regional inequalities in the levels of unemployment. The paper examines spatial patterns of unemployment in Zimbabwe. Data on the levels of unemployment was collected from Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZIMSTAT) (2014) published reports of the 2012 population census. Using quartiles, the country was demarcated into four regions of unemployment zones based on the rate of unemployment in the administrative districts. It emerged from the research that overall, the level of unemployment in Zimbabwe is very high and in addition, there is severe inequality in the levels of unemployment across the administrative districts in the country.

Key Words: Spatial dimension, Unemployment and Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Developing countries generally have high unemployment rate and experience high inflation because of the low investment levels (Mazango, 2013). Zimbabwe like other developing countries is not spared from such a situation. Unemployment is a situation where the supply of labour exceeds demand. In the current study, the unemployed were those who had done no work and were looking for work and were available for work. The reference

period used to determine current unemployment rate is usually one week. Information on the employment situation was obtained using a time reference period of twelve months. Persons who stated paid employee, employer and own account worker as their main activity during the reference period were regarded as employed and the collected data thus provides a general picture of employment for the 12 months. The total number of persons aged 15 years and above was 7 661 295 and of this number, 5 120 540 were economically active (ZIMSTAT, 2014). Apart from the high level of unemployment in Zimbabwe another predominant feature of the unemployment situation in the country is that the spatial pattern is not even. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the spatial pattern of unemployment rate in Zimbabwe and suggest possible explanation for such a distribution.

Study Area

Zimbabwe is a low income country in Southern Africa. The country lies between latitudes 15° and 23°S and longitudes 25° and 33°E. A large part of the country is elevated in the central watershed (Highveld) which stretches from the southwest to the northeast at altitudes between 1,200 and 1,600 m. The country has a subtropical climate. The capital city of the country is Harare. There are 61
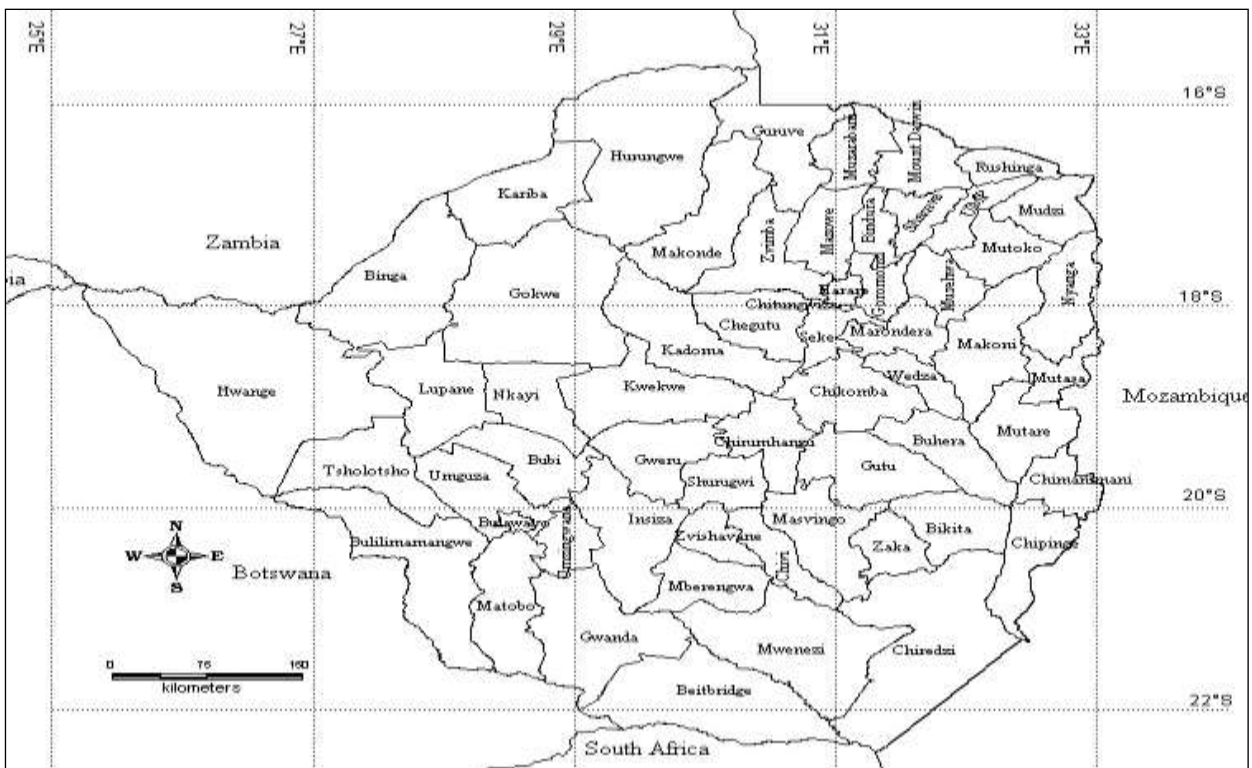

Figure 1: Administrative Districts of Zimbabwe (Source: Adapted from ZIMSTAT,2014)

administrative districts in Zimbabwe. The demarcation of districts used by ZIMSTAT (2014) is also used as spatial units of analyses for the examination of the spatial pattern of unemployment rate in the country (Fig. 1). This is because data used in this study where obtained from ZIMSTAT (2014) published census reports. There are spatial inequalities in social, political and economic conditions and this has impacted on the spatial distributions of unemployment in the country

Methodology

Data were obtained from Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2014) published reports of the 2012 population census. It is acknowledged that it could have been better if more recent data were used to unveil the unemployment situation in Zimbabwe. The challenge is however that, data on unemployment rate for the whole country is normally gathered during a national census. The latest census in Zimbabwe was conducted in 2012 published in 2014. The next census shall be conducted in 2022. This means that the latest available data that can used to examine the spatial pattern of unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is the 2012 census reports.

The data on unemployment rate in Zimbabwe as it was in 2014 was arranged from low to high values and class intervals were created on the basis of quartile values. Quartiles divided the data into four equal parts. The formulae $1(n+1)/4$ for the lower quartile or first boundary, $2(n+1)/4$ for the semi quartile or second boundary and $3(n+1)/4$ for the upper quartile or third boundary, were used to calculate the quartiles. Data were, therefore, grouped into four classes. Classes were created on the basis of the calculated quartiles. The classes created were used to generate the map, Fig. 2 that shows the spatial variation of unemployment rate in Zimbabwe. To explain the results of the analysis, the researcher makes reference to conditions in the socioeconomic and the influence of urban centres in Zimbabwe. The main urban centres of Zimbabwe are included in Fig. 2 because of their effect on the spatial distribution of unemployment rate in the country. The symbols representing the urban areas are presented as polygons on the location of the urban centre in Zimbabwe. The maps were generated in Arcview, Geographical Information System (GIS) software.
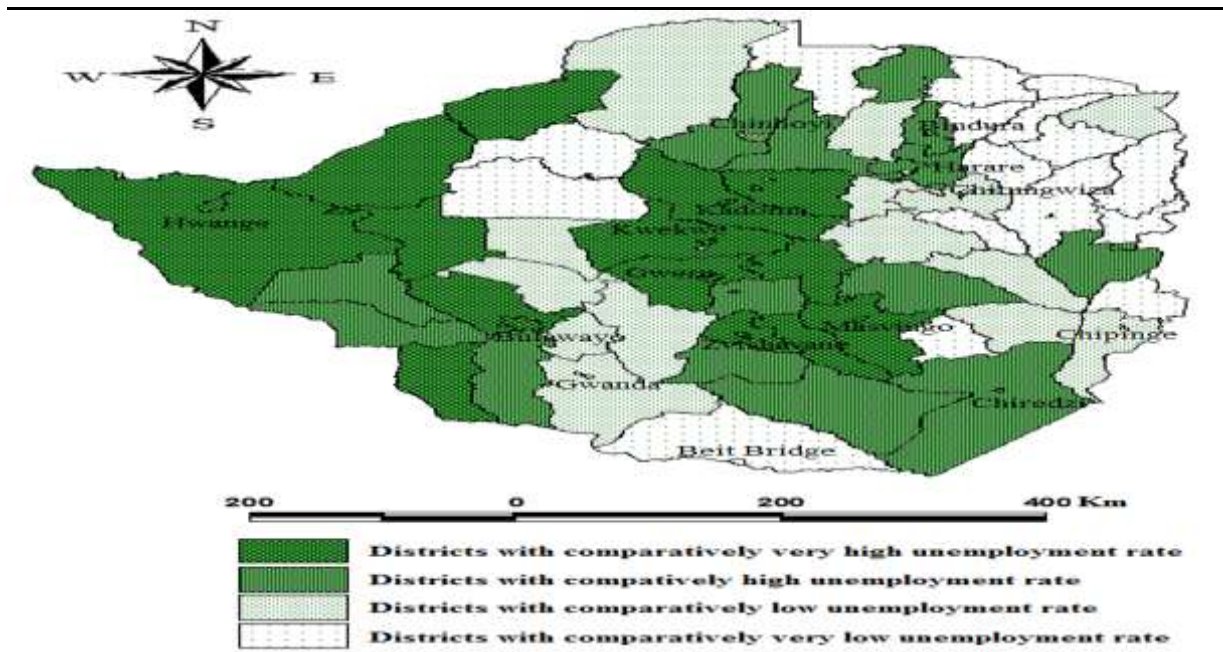
Spatial patterns of unemployment

As reflected in Fig. 2, there is a very close association between location of urban centres in Zimbabwe and comparatively high rate of unemployment. Administrative districts which are wholly urban or with urban centres in them or are located near the urban areas generally have high levels of unemployment. On the

other hand, administrative districts which are primarily rural in nature such as Bikita, Zaka, Gokwe South, Gokwe North and those in the north-eastern part of the country generally experience comparatively the lowest level of unemployment rate in the country.

The spatial pattern of unemployment rate in Zimbabwe reflected in Fig. 2 can largely be explained in terms of economic influences. Social, physical and political factors seem to have very limited influence. Administrative districts (basically rural districts) concentrating on primary economic activities such as agriculture show low levels of unemployment in the country. On the other hand, administrative districts (urban oriented districts) concentrating of secondary and tertiary economic activities show high levels of unemployment rate. The secondary economic activities include processing and manufacturing industries while tertiary economic activities include transport and trade (on a large scale). In other words, Zimbabwe as a developing country is typically characterized by an urban industrialized sector experiencing higher unemployment rate and a rural agricultural sector experiencing lower rate of unemployment. This scenario is highly ironic. In absolute terms, urban areas generally have greater supply of employment opportunities. It is therefore expected that administrative districts which are wholly urban or which are located in close proximity with urban areas should have comparatively low levels of unemployment.

Figure 2: Spatial pattern of unemployment in Zimbabwe

It can however, be argued that the high levels of unemployment in administrative districts with urban orientation is due to the fact that people generally perceive such regions as regions that can supply them with jobs as well as high wages and therefore job seekers become extremely too many in such regions. Rural to urban migration tends to exacerbate the high levels of unemployment rate in the urban and urban oriented districts of the country. This argument is supported by what is referred to as the Todaro paradox. Todaro (1976) maintains that creating urban jobs is an insufficient solution to the urban unemployment problem because of the induced negative effect on rural migration, which may outweigh the positive effect of creating jobs. Several other scholars (Cornwell and Inder, 2004; Gimba *et al.,* 2012 and Ango *et al*., 2014 also support the view that in general, there is greater urban than rural unemployment. In fact, Zenou (2011) argues that in the city, unemployment prevails because of too high (efficiency) wages, while, in the rural area, workers are paid at their marginal productivity.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. Vocational training centres: Vocational training centres should be established in the rural areas for training of the people in the economically productive age group. The training should be oriented towards self-employment. The trained people should be provided with micro loans to start up some projects. As they do the projects frequent monitoring and guidance should be provided by people who are knowledgeable and experienced about projects.

2. Rural development and employment creation: To a large extent, the urban unemployment lies in lack of rural development. The government must strive to provide jobs for the citizens in the rural areas by way of stimulating agriculture and other rural based economic activities in order to reduce rural to urban migration. Moreover, the creation of attractive economic opportunities in rural areas would redirect job seekers toward rural areas and reduce urban unemployment. The government and other development oriented stakeholders should also provide social facilities and amenities (in the area of health, education, water supply and transport) in the rural areas to make them attractive living environments.

3. Expansion of labour-intensive industries: Industries that require more labour per unit of output create more jobs than capital intensive ones. Expansion of such labour intensive-industries should be established in both urban and rural areas but more preferably in the districts that experience comparatively high rates of unemployment. Establishment of such industries can be achieved in two ways: directly, through government incentives and investment and indirectly, through income redistribution to the poor.

4. Balancing education and employment: The emergence of the phenomenon of the unemployed educated people is calling into question the relevance of the massive quantitative expansion of the Zimbabwean educational systems, especially at tertiary levels. Jobs are multiplying at a slower pace than the numbers of persons leaving the education system. Resources need to be allocated efficiently. There is need to ensure that enough resources are channelled towards industrial expansion rather than overexpansion of the education system. Another related challenge is that, many African educational systems (Zimbabwe included) are transplants of colonial systems which are oriented toward preparing students to function as

employees. Many of the potential skills (in the students) for advancement thus remain largely neglected. There is need to reorient the education system toward generation of people who can be employers or at least survive through self-employment.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwe unemployment situation has two characteristic features. First, the country has extremely high level of unemployment. Secondly, there is spatial variation in unemployment rates across the administrative districts of the country. Generally rural administrative districts have low unemployment rates although the districts also have some variation among them. Administrative districts which are urban in nature or have urban centres in them generally have high unemployment rates. Such districts however, also have some variations among them.

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