

## Poverty Eradication and its Effects in Africa: Nigeria in Perspective

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### Abstract

The biggest issues of poverty in Africa particularly in Nigeria have attracted a lot of debates among scholars and organizations in the world. It is the recognition of these situations successive governments in Africa have committed themselves to promoting poverty alleviation. But is sad to say; these efforts have not been able to eradicate poverty in many African countries. For the purpose of this present discourse, we hope, however to take on Nigeria because whatever is true of Nigeria is also true in most other African countries. However, we shall be referring to some African countries as we proceed in this paper. The aim of this paper is to examine the concepts of poverty, explain the causes with reference to some African countries, and also to examine poverty eradication programmes put in place by successive governments in Nigeria and why some of them only recorded little success. Finally bring to focus the effects of poverty in the country and some African countries. Then draw a conclusion. The methodology employed in this paper is qualitative materials obtained from secondary sources of data collected and was historically analyzed. Following this development, theory of imperialism was used as our theoretical analysis.

Keywords:

Poverty Eradication  
African Countries  
Programmes

### Background to the Study

Poverty is a global phenomenon, which affects continents, nations and people differently. It afflicts people at various depths and levels, at different times and phases of existence. There is no nation that is absolutely free from poverty. The main differences are the intensity and prevalence of this malaise. Nations in sub-Saharan African, South Asia and Latin America are currently with the lowest level of socio-economic development. They also have the highest level of social insecurity, violence, unrest and generally unacceptable standard of living (Onah, 2006).

The Central Bank of Nigeria (1999:1) views poverty as “a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, potable water, and sanitation; and consequently, has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities”.

The World Bank (2000:1) utilized inductive approach to uncover various dimensions of poverty such as well-being, psychological, basic infrastructure, illness and assets. One of such definitions is “the lack of what is necessary for material well-being-especially food, housing, land, and other assets. In other words, poverty is the lack of multiple resources that lead to hunger and physical deprivation.” In the same vein, the World Bank (2001:3) views poverty as “lack of voice, power, and independence that subjects them to exploitation. Poverty leaves them vulnerable to rudeness, humiliation, and inhuman treatment by both private and public agents of the State from whom they seek help”.

Nigeria ranked among the 25 poorest countries of the world which started its independent nationhood with poverty level of barely 15% of its population in 1960. And today, is struggling to bring it down from about 70% of its current teeming population of about 160 million. Of course, the number of the poverty stricken people, about 73% are concentrated in the rural areas where illiteracy prevalence is high, potable water and health facilities are rarely available, road and electricity infrastructures are either unavailable or ill-managed (Human Development Index, 2001).

African nations of which Nigeria is one of one are typically poor and fall towards the bottom of any list measuring small size economic activity, such as income per capita or GDP per capita, despite a wealth of natural resources. Land degradation, a consequence of extensive agriculture, deforestation and overgrazing, has reached alarming levels and further threatens livelihoods. The poorest people lives in isolated zones deprive of the social safety nets and poverty reduction programmes available in semi-urban areas e.g West Africa and East Africa (UNICEF, 5:6). The poor are those deprived, unable to lack resources to acquire basic needs of life. They are structurally place to be dependence. Poverty denies its victims the basic needs for human survival and they are unable to meet their social, economic and political obligation in the society.

The World Bank Report (1996) shows that the sub-Sahara African including Nigeria are among the world poorest class of people in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and access to social and political life. Social statistics shows that Nigeria is the worst in terms of poverty in sub-Sahara Africa despite the abundance of natural resources. Adding that greater percentage of Nigerians are living below the universal poverty line of US\$1 per day. The situation of poverty in Africa emanates from the structural imbalance of the economy, inappropriate development agents and debt burden imposed by dependency and the global process of exploitation of the international capitalist system and its special imperialist agents, both domestic and alien (Offiong, 1980:14-15). The alarming rate of environmental degradation and its effects on employment and food production is also traceable to these imperialist agents; particularly the domestic bourgeoisie whose interests are programmes launched in Nigeria. Furthermore, high unemployment rate, unaffordable basic education, inequality, insecurity, deprivation of fundamental human rights, freedom, liberation and basic needs for human survival and crisis for constant agitation for the resource control in the case of Niger Delta are evidence of poverty in the land.

However, as a means to eradicate poverty in Nigeria, Nigerian government had at different times established different poverty alleviation programmes which include: National Acceleration Food Programme in 1972, Operation Feed the Nation in 1976, National Directorate of Employment in 1986, National Poverty Eradication Programme in 2000, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies initiated by Obasanjo in his assumption of the office in May 1999 and his second term policy in 2003 as well as Sure-P Programme by Goodluck Jonathan in 2012.

#### Literature Review

Poverty is multidimensional and all encompassing. It includes inadequacy, insufficiency or lack of certain aspects of human life. There are different forms of poverty such as financial and material poverty, moral and physical poverty as well as social and mental poverty (Hodges, 2001:6). From the above view, one can deduce that poverty level in Nigeria is increasing materially. Almost 70% of Nigerians are materially insufficient in terms of basic need of life, shelter, clothes and food. While financially, the question to ask here is that, how many Nigerian earn \$1 dollar per a day? And morally, the level of poverty in Nigeria has affected our moral behaviour which has resulted to crime and criminality in our societies. In fact, poverty level keeps on increasing in Nigeria almost every year.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report (1998:14), poverty is not only a term that is commonly used by the generality of the people, but also one that has no specialized content as a concept. The report states further that poverty is a multi-dimensional socio-economic and cultural situation that transcends economic and cultural description and analysis. Poverty is both concrete and relative. The report further clarifies that for any particular society, poverty and the poor are very concrete phenomena and can be easily identified.

From this perspective, Narayan and Petesh (2002:10) posit that, “poverty also may look quite different, seen through the eyes of a poor man or woman”, Naraya et al, (2003:30) captured the definition from the countries in the following perspectives, “poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept nudeness, insults and indifference when we seek help”. In the same vein such a view of the poor was also expressed by a poor man in Kenya in 1997 as reported by Narayan et al (2003:50) thus: “Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house”, look at everything and write what you see is poverty.

The above reflects just description of the various perceptions of poverty at least from the poor. Poverty could denote a state of deprivation as was captured by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (1992:3) as “not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and lack of active participation in the decision making process”. It could also denote “absence of life or lack of command over basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter” glaring defect in the economy, etc, as stated by Aluko (1998:10). The attempts made could be referred to as mere outline of the future or characteristics of poverty. In buttressing the difficulties encountered in arriving at a common and generally accepted definition of poverty, Ade (1997:4) posits that there seems to be a general agreement that poverty is a difficult concept to handle and that it is more easily recognized than defined.

Palmer et al (2008), acknowledges the lack of consensus on how poverty should be measured, stating that, the most common measures are of the numbers or percentages of people living on less than US\$1 or US\$2 per day. In the same vein, Geodhart et al (1977:5) argues that poverty must be seen in terms of low income or consumption, the lack of basic physical necessities of life, the lack of assets and other location or objective handicaps. Socially, it manifest in terms of social inferiority, low status, lack of dignity or self esteem, insecurity, vulnerability and marginalization. In political terms, it has to do with powerlessness, exclusion from the decision – making process, dehumanization and denial of basic natural and political rights. From the scholarly deductions above, poverty could be the manifestation of:

- i. Material deprivation ... which manifests in lack of access to the basic necessities of life like food, shelter, climatically appropriate clothing or having wealth which falls below standards accepted by a community.
- ii. Capability deprivation as manifested in the form of impairment to education, loan faculties, agricultural inputs and land among others.
- iii. Marginalization, powerlessness and exclusion from the decision making rungs of society. In other words, it refers to inability to actively participate in deciding on wealth generation, distribution and utilization as well as decision on who governs in society among other issues.

The World Development Report 2000/2001 summarizes the various dimensions of poverty as lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment and lack of security. The window of opportunity remains closed to the poor masses, and this makes them practically inactive in the society. Similarly, a United Nations statement says:

*Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean – water or sanitation UN Report on MDGs (2006).*

#### Causes of Poverty in Africa

Some of the causes of poverty in Africa are as follows:

i. Colonialism: In most African countries, the years of colonialism brought some set back to them. The colonial masters for instance, build and structured African economy to facilitate the expropriation of their resources for British economic growth and development. In the process African countries were penetrated, dominated, raped, exploited, distorted and disarticulated thereby leaving them with poverty and dependency (Claude, 1989).

ii. Corruption: According to Lipset and Lenz, (2000:112), corruption is “effort to secure wealth and power through illegal means. In Africa, corruption has contributed immensely to poverty and misery of a large segment of the population, exemplified on Nigerians horrifying faces of despair and deprivation. Many native groups in Africa believe family relationships are more important than national identity and people in authority often used nepotism and bribery for the benefit of their extended family group at the expense of their nations. Corruption is a major problem in the region; Ethiopia is one of the good case studies under Haile Selassie, where corruption was rife and poverty rampant.

iii. Poor Leadership and Misused of funds: The issue of poor leadership is not limited to the military, but also to their civilian counterparts alike. Most African countries after borrowing substantial sums of money from International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Parish Club e.t.c invest it on weapons which do not alleviate poverty or directly misappropriated for their personal use and also develop mega-project when the need is for smaller scale projects. For example Ghana spent a huge amount of her foreign reserve on the construction of silo for cocoa storage which was never used till tomorrow, (Wikipedia, 2008).

iv. Flood, War and Natural Disasters: In Africa the destruction caused by war and natural disasters such as drought and food often have devastating effect on the communities. In many parts of Africa, the production of food depends upon the intense manual labour of each family. In the Northern part of Nigeria, farmers suffer draught from time while their counterparts in the Southern experience flooding and erosion. These problems lead to massive death, loss of crops and animals, property etc.

Diseases: The greatest mortality in Africa arises from preventable water-borne diseases. Malaria, tuberculosis, tapeworm and dysentery often claim lives. Report shows that HIV/AIDS contribute to the worsening poverty situation at household level in many Africa countries. For instance, between 12 and 14 million African adults have died of HIV/AIDS. (World Bank/UNICEF) cited in UNICEF, Ibid) culture values: this also help to explain the intractability of the problems of poverty and injustice in parts of the third world (Harrison, 2000; Etounga-Manguelle) cited by (Victor Dike, 2005:5) for instance the culture of polygamy in Africa is one of the cause of poverty.

Table 1: Assessment of some Previous and Present Poverty Alleviations Programmes in Nigeria

S/N	Year Launch	Names of Programmes Project or Institutions	Nature of activity
1	1975	Agriculture Development Project (ADPs)	Provision of decentralized opportunities and resources in agriculture to small holder farmers.
2	1975	Universal Primary Education.	To provide free primary education.
3	1976	River Basic Development Authority.	To undertake comprehensive development of both surface and underground water resource for various purpose (e.g provision of irrigation, infrastructure, and control of floods, soil erosion, and watershed management).
4	1976	Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	To provide sufficient food for all Nigerians. To facilitate agricultural credit from commercial banks to farmers.
5	1979	Green Revolution	To provide sufficient food for all Nigerians.
6	1986	Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure.	To coordinate and streamline all rural development activities in the country and to accelerate the pace of integrated rural development.

7	1986	National Directorate of Employment.	To provide skill development to secondary skill development to secondary school leavers and graduates from tertiary institutions.
8	1987	Nigerian Agriculture Insurance Cooperation.	Provision of insurance cover for business engaged in agricultural production.
9	1987	Better Life for Rural Women.	Improvement of living conditions of rural women.
10	1988	Strategic Grains Reserve (SGR)	To mop up excess grains production and make such available locally in time of scarcity.
11	1988	Guinea worm Eradication Programme.	To eradicate guinea worm infections.
12	1989	National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE)	To provide basic education for nomadic herdsmen and fishermen.
13	1989	Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN).	To provide credit at low interest to encourage micro enterprises.
14	1990	National Primary Health Care Agency (NPHCA).	To provide health delivery at the local level.
15	1991	National Board for Community Bank (NACB)	To promote concessional micro credit.
16	1992	Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	Provision of access to credit for micro entrepreneurs at the grassroots levels; encouragement of job creation, local raw materials utilization, and development of indigenous technology.
17	1994	Family Support Programme.	To promote the welfare of women and children.
18	1997	National Commission for Mass Literacy.	To promote adult literacy.
19	2000	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	To coordinate implementation of all FGN Poverty eradication programmes.
20	2000	Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank.	Provision of credit for the production, processing and marketing of agricultural products.
21	2000	Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme.	Essential to provide compulsory basic education for all up to the level of junior secondary school year 3 (JSS 3).

22	2000	Forestry Development Programme.	Provision of tree seedlings and other forestry development facilities to local community participants in the countries five ecological zones.
23	2001	Roll Back Malaria	Eradicate harmful effects of malaria parasites.
24	2001	National Action Committee on HIV/AIDS (NACA).	Advisory programme to phase out the spread of HIV/AIDS.
25	2012	Sure-P	Empowering Youth in diverse Skills Acquisition

Source: National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

Why some of the Programmes did not achieve much success

The launching of poverty alleviation programme by different governments are indications that poverty have not reduced. For example, the human basic needs are still not affordable. Eradication and health are still not within the reach of the poor. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was faulty in its policy objectives due to its narrow focus on poverty. It viewed Nigerian poverty from Agricultural sector only and neglected other sectors such as Technological, National Security, Economic, etc. Green Revolution Programme (GRP) could not succeed. This led to food importation more than ever before. The local farmers were discouraged and food insecurity was on the increased. Peoples Banks of Nigeria (PBN) failed because the management of ht bank was more of politicians than professional bank staff. Loans were given out without collateral. For Community Bank (CB) although it has not totally alleviated poverty in Nigeria, but stand the wide chance of improving the life of the poor.

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) has been making tremendous impact in job creation although, faced with poor implementation strategies, poor revenue allocation, corruption, political influence e.t.c. Better Life for Rural Women (BLP) made tremendous impact on the life of Nigerian women and recorded remarkable success in poverty reduction. However, it also faced problems of inadequate finance, lack of full awareness among the women on the need to participate, poor implementation at the grass root level etc. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NEPEP) the programmes has good intension, but the focus is doubtful because of poor implementation strategies. It should be noted that Nigeria has always adopted unhealthy strategies using the programmes to patronize their political associates, friends and relatives. For instance the loan facilities never got to the target population rather to the relations of the ruling class who siphoned it to their personal consumption. Again there is absence of full participation of members of the communities in the development process. Until leaders have the political will to better the lots of the poor, the poor will remain poorer.



### Effects of Poverty in Africa

The effects of poverty in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Africa's economic malaise is self-perpetrating, as it endangers more of the diseases, warfare, misgovernment, and corruption. The most direct consequence of GDP is Africa's low standard of living and quality of life. Efforts to eradicate poverty are frequently set back by conflict and natural disaster. Angola for instance, reaps large sums annually from its diamond mines, but after years of civil war, conditions there remain poor. African nations dominate the lowest reaches of the UN Human Development Index. Infant mortality is high, while life expectancy, literacy, and education are all low. As for inflation Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo both saw triple-digit inflation through the period. There are incomplete numbers of unemployment in most African nations. Major cities like Lagos and Kinshasa have long slums of unemployed and underemployed (Wikipedia op.cit 8).

In Nigeria political effect is glaring. Because the majority is poor, the rich take advantage to indulge in electoral fraud. According to Egbe (2000:499), election is the period the electorate sees as opportunity to make money for survival. He added, electoral officers are also bribed to alter election results. Political instability and national insecurity are other negative effects of poverty. Poverty as a state of deprivation makes the deprived to be vulnerable and violent in nature. Eguavoen (2003:223) is of the opinion that the major cause of the Urhobo-Itsekiri crises and in some other Niger-Delta communities are poverty, as the poor are always agitating for better standard of living to alleviate their condition. Addition to the political effect is increase illiteracy and poor performance of political leaders. Also, illiteracy equally deprived the electorate the opportunity to participate effectively in democratic activities. Moreover, poverty induces social vices. The unemployed always indulges in criminal activities sometimes to enable them meet their basic needs. Many young girls are into prostitution as a result of poverty. Finally, before the advent of oil, agriculture was the major source of employment for about 80% of Nigerians. The dependence on the oil sector brought decline in the agricultural sector. The decline resulted in food insecurity, unemployment, etc.

### Conclusion

From more indications, more than 70% of the populations exist below the poverty line. The various programmes as we have seen above initiated towards poverty alleviation have invariably spread poverty. In otherwise, the more these programmes were been initiated the more poverty spreads. The situation is more painful considering the fact that Nigeria has lots of resources including oil which she exports on a daily basis. Again these programmes ordinarily meant to alleviate poverty are now like Frankenstein monster that was made to serve the people but the people are in turn serving the monster. What this means, is that this programmes that were made to alleviate poverty ended up torturing the less privileged people with more poverty. This is because the programmes are being highjack by the politicians and bureaucrats to perpetuate poverty with reckless abandon, resulting in alleviating their own poverty and increase their security. The reality is that Nigerian's effort towards sustainable development would be a dream if Government does not create a forum of projects-recipients reconciliation to ascertain the level to which these programmes have actually better their lots, just as a customer and the

bank reconcile their accounts for both to know their financial statement. By so doing the people will be able to gather and testify the level of their involvement, their benefits and their next expectations. The idea of creating more and more institutions to be managed by the same people, to further their interests is an ill conceived idea of putting a new wine in an old wine skin. Rather there should be continuity of programmes and periodic changes of the personnel in order to enhance efficient programmes delivery. 'Abujanization' of programmes without decentralization to reach or get to the grassroots is an aberration.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made:

1. The local people should be asked to identify their needs for implementation. Those charged with the responsibility of distributing programmes funds should be honest with utmost good faith to ensure the success of programmes and their implementation.
2. Agriculture should be encouraged at the rural level. Because vast numbers of people are rural dwellers that can productively make use of agricultural loan facility etc to improve their living conditions.

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