

# Addressing Rural Poverty in Nigeria: Exploring Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian Principle in Community Development

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## Abstract

Rural poverty remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, marked by inadequate access to basic amenities, and limited economic opportunities. This paper critically examined the application of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle, which emphasizes the greatest happiness for the greatest number, as a framework for addressing rural poverty. By aligning the theoretical underpinnings of utilitarianism with practical strategies for poverty alleviation, the study explored how community-based approaches enhance social welfare, equity, and sustainable development in rural areas. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from existing literature, case studies, the research identified key barriers to rural development, including artificial rural poverty, and governance challenges, while proposing utilitarian-driven interventions such as participatory governance. The paper argued that real utilitarian approach can foster inclusive policies and practices that prioritize collective well-being over individual. The paper in the main recommends strengthening of institutional frameworks to enhance accountability and transparency in rural and community development in Nigeria.

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## **Background to the Study**

Rural poverty in Nigeria remains a pressing issue, undermining efforts toward national development and social equity. With approximately 52% of Nigeria's population residing in rural areas, the disparities in access to basic amenities such as healthcare, education, and clean water are stark. Addressing this challenge requires innovative approaches that align ethical principles with practical solutions. This paper examines Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" as a guiding framework for formulating and implementing community development strategies. Notably, over 60 % of Nigeria's rural population lives below the poverty line, compared to 40 % in urban areas (World Bank, 2020); income inequality, stands at 0.48, indicating a significant wealth gap between the rich and the poor (World Bank, 2020; NBS, 2022); only 43.6% of households have access to improved sanitation facilities, and 30.5% have access to improved water sources (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Observably, despite numerous governmental and non-governmental interventions, the rural population continues to experience high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, and limited opportunities for sustainable development. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, ethical, and pragmatic approach that prioritizes the well-being of the majority while ensuring equitable resource distribution and access to opportunities. One potential framework for addressing rural poverty in Nigeria is Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle which emphasizes the maximization of happiness and well-being for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism, as a moral philosophy, advocates for policies and actions that generate the most overall benefit and minimize suffering. In the context of community development, Bentham's utilitarian approach provides a rational basis for designing and implementing interventions that prioritize the collective welfare of rural communities (Bentham, 1789).

By applying utilitarian principles to rural poverty alleviation, policymakers and development practitioners can focus on initiatives that deliver the highest social and economic returns. This involves strategic investment in critical sectors such as agriculture, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and empowerment programs, all aimed at enhancing the quality of life for rural dwellers. In addition, utilitarianism calls for evidence-based decision-making, cost-benefit analyses, and participatory approaches to ensure that development efforts are both effective and inclusive.

This exploration delves into how Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy can be leveraged to tackle rural poverty in Nigeria. It examines key areas such as:

- i. Understanding the dimensions of rural poverty – Analyzing the socio-economic challenges faced by rural communities in Nigeria, including lack of access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- ii. Utilitarianism as a guiding principle – Exploring how Bentham's ideas of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" can inform policy design and community development initiatives.
- iii. Strategic interventions – Highlighting practical measures that align with utilitarian values, such as community-based projects, infrastructure development, and inclusive economic policies.

- iv. Challenges and ethical considerations – Addressing potential criticisms of utilitarian approaches, including concerns about equity, minority rights, and sustainability (Bentham, 1789). Ultimately, adopting a utilitarian approach to rural poverty alleviation in Nigeria has the potential to create transformative change by ensuring that development efforts are guided by the overarching goal of maximizing societal welfare and fostering long-term community resilience.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Rural poverty remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, characterized by inadequate access to basic amenities such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Despite various government interventions and development programmes, poverty levels in rural areas continue to rise, exacerbating social inequalities and hindering national development. Many of these initiatives have failed due to issues such as poor policy implementation, corruption, and a lack of community participation. The utilitarian principle, as proposed by Jeremy Bentham, emphasizes the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Applying this ethical framework to community development efforts in Nigeria could offer a more people-centered approach, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and equitably to maximize overall well-being. However, there is a gap in understanding how utilitarianism can be practically integrated into rural development policies and programmes to address the complex socio-economic challenges faced by rural communities. This study seeks to explore the potential of Bentham's utilitarian principle as a guiding framework for rural development initiatives in Nigeria. It aims to examine whether the application of this principle can lead to more effective poverty alleviation strategies by prioritizing community needs and optimizing resource distribution for the collective good.

### **Objectives**

- i. To examine the concept of rural poverty in Nigeria: this is where the causes, consequences and current state of rural poverty are being analyzed
- ii. To explore Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle: here, tenets of utilitarianism and their applications are being discussed
- iii. To apply utilitarian principle to community development in rural Nigeria: this is where how the principle of maximizing overall happiness and well-being can be applied to community development initiatives in rural Nigeria

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Rural Poverty**

**Rural poverty** refers to the condition of poverty experienced by people living in rural areas, where access to resources, services, and economic opportunities is often limited. It is characterized by a lack of basic necessities such as adequate food, clean water, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Rural poverty tends to be more severe and persistent compared to urban poverty due to factors such as geographic isolation, low population density, and a heavy reliance on agriculture and natural resources.

### Key Indicators of Rural Poverty in Nigeria

- a. **Income Inequality:** As earlier averred, over 60% of rural households live below the poverty line.
- b. **Education Disparities:** Limited access to quality education perpetuates the cycle of poverty.
- c. **Healthcare Deficits:** High maternal and infant mortality rates highlight gaps in rural healthcare.
- d. **Infrastructure Challenges:** Poor road networks and inadequate electricity hinder economic activities.

### Root Causes

- i. **Governance Issues:** Weak institutional frameworks and corruption undermine development efforts. Notwithstanding current move by President Bola Tinubu in trying to revitalize local government councils via fiscal autonomy (Titus, 2016:36; Awofeso, 2000:191), rural poverty in Nigeria remains artificial. Example is electricity, the engine room of development of any country in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Where is sense in trying to draw power all the way from kanji dam in Niger State to supply electricity in Akwa Ibom State (741km) when solar power is possible – promoting vandalism, wastefulness endangering of lives and properties, etc. in the name of executive list? Similarly, the power stations in states (like that of Akwa Ibom State in Ikot Abasi) is not permitted to use its generated power in the State until it is transferred to the frequently collapsing national grid (12 reported incidents in 2024 alone) in the north, at Jebba, kainji, and Shiroro. Indeed, rural poverty in Nigeria is artificial, not natural or accidental.
- ii. **Economic Marginalization:** Rural economies are heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture with minimal value addition.
- iii. **Social Exclusion:** Women and other vulnerable groups face systemic barriers to participation in development. Incidentally, this exclusion and perceived victimization of women led to the 1929 women's riot killing many like my step-grandmother in Utu Ikot Imonte Village, Etim Ekpo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
- iv. **Infrastructure Deprivation:** Regrettably, most governments in developing countries devote more attention and resources on infrastructure in Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) at the expense of the Rural Areas (RAs) – perpetuating the colonial masters' mentality and legacy. To this end, the paper strongly advocates approach change from GRAs to RAs.

### Consequences of Rural Poverty

- i. Higher rates of malnutrition and poor health outcomes.
- ii. Migration to urban areas, leading to overcrowded cities.
- iii. Intergenerational poverty cycle with limited social mobility.
- iv. Low productivity and economic stagnation in rural communities.

### **Potential Solutions to Rural Poverty**

- a. Improved Infrastructure Development:** Better roads, electricity, and internet connectivity.
- b. Agricultural Innovation and Support:** i. Access to modern farming techniques and equipment, ii. Financial support and insurance schemes for farmers.
- c. Education and Skill Development:** i. Vocational training programs to diversify income sources, ii.
- d. Scholarships and incentives to encourage schooling.
- e. Access to Healthcare Services:** i. Mobile clinics and telemedicine solutions, ii.
- f. Government subsidies for essential medical services.
- g. Microfinance and Economic Inclusion:** i. Providing small loans and financial literacy programmes, ii.
- h. Encouraging local entrepreneurship and cooperatives.
- i. Efforts to reduce rural poverty require a holistic approach involving government policies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector involvement to create sustainable development opportunities.

Corruption must be sincerely fought to its barest minimum by an autocratic leader.

Nigerian government must stop borrowing to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor masses. The saying “he who goes borrowing goes sorrowing” is true to the poor masses in Nigeria, not the hegemonic corrupt politicians.

### **Utilitarianism**

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that evaluates actions based on their consequences, specifically in terms of maximizing overall happiness or well-being. It is a form of consequentialism, meaning that the morality of an action is determined by its outcomes rather than intrinsic qualities or intentions. Utilitarianism seeks to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Invariably, as much as government cannot satisfy the needs of all its citizens at the same time, it can the greatest number of them as in most developed countries of the world including Bentham's England where he first offered the principle in 1789.

Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism is grounded in the principle of maximizing collective happiness while minimizing suffering or unhappiness. In fact, there is no gain saying the fact that happy people make a happy nation while unhappy people make an unhappy country. Corroborating this fact in the holy book, the Bible, psalms 144:11-15 “deliver me from ... from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields” (NIV) ...that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people that is in such a case ... (KJV). Proverbs 17: 22 “a happy heart is good medicine and a cheerful mind works healing, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (Amp.Version). By the above biblical provisions, sons (youths) blossom and realize their dreams early in life as daughters (youths) follow suit being polished in character and learning in a food security or happiness-attained country after being delivered from

mischievous, deceitful political leaders. Also, the present Nigerian “streets” full of complaints as a result of economic doldrums biting villagers the most is diametrically the opposite of the positive bible pictures above.

**Key tenets of utilitarianism include inter-alia:** Equity, impartiality, inclusivity, availability, affordability and efficiency—aligned closely with the goals of sustainable development (Bentham, 1789: 12-13).

### **Strengths of Utilitarianism**

- a. **Practicality:** Provides a clear decision-making framework based on consequences.
- b. **Flexibility:** Can adapt to different situations by focusing on outcomes.
- c. **Impartiality:** Encourages fairness by considering everyone's happiness equally.
- d. **Focus on Human Welfare:** Prioritizes well-being and reducing suffering.

### **Criticism of Utilitarianism**

1. **Measurement Problem:** It's challenging to quantify happiness or compare different people's well-being. However, in response to this criticism, Udokang (2000:160) posited and averred “To him (Bentham) the test of institution's utility lies in how far it tends to promote 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as can be measured”. Similarly, Mbachu (1998:118-119) opined “Bentham is fully aware that personal happiness and the happiness of the greatest number are not always identical, and he sees two means by which the gulf between individual selfishness and communal good can be bridged. First, education ... Second, legislation”. Understandably, education here means that educated mind is an informed mind, and an informed mind in formed to perform transformation ally and vice versa. Legislation comes in to regulate and checkmate the inherent excesses of man.
2. **Justice and Rights:** Utilitarianism may justify harmful actions (e.g., sacrificing one for many) if they maximize overall happiness.
3. **Demandingness:** It requires people to always act in ways that maximize overall happiness, which can be burdensome.
4. **Predictability:** Consequences of actions are often uncertain, making it difficult to apply the theory reliably.

### **Rural Development**

**Rural development** refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas with limited access to resources and services compared to urban areas. It encompasses a broad range of initiatives aimed at enhancing infrastructure, social services, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability in rural communities. Still, in the context of rural development, this ethical framework provides a lens for evaluating policies and interventions based on their capacity to enhance the overall well-being of rural populations. In fact, the most reliable index for measuring development of any country is not the number of cars or availability of social amenities in the few urban centers but the degree of development in the rural areas. Ironically, most of the universities in Ghana (patronized by Nigerians) are in villages with constant electricity.

### **Key Aspects of rural Development**

- 1. Economic Development:** i. Promoting agriculture, small-scale industries, and rural entrepreneurship, ii. Providing access to credit and markets for rural producers iii. Encouraging sustainable practices to boost productivity.
- 2. Infrastructure Development:** i. Building roads, bridges, and transportation facilities ii. Expanding access to electricity and water supply, iii. Improving digital connectivity and communication networks.
- 3. Social Development:** i. Enhancing healthcare and education services ii. Providing skill development and training programmes, iii. Ensuring social inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups.
- 4. Environmental Sustainability:** i. promoting sustainable agricultural practices ii. Managing natural resources effectively, iii. Addressing climate change challenges and disaster resilience.
- 5. Governance and Policy:** i. Implementing government schemes and policies targeting rural uplift, ii. Strengthening local governance (e.g., Panchayati Raj system in India), iii. Encouraging community participation in development initiatives. Here, Indian villages are most preferred because of availability and affordability of social amenities and less taxes.

### **Importance of Rural Development**

- a. Reduces rural-urban migration by creating opportunities in rural areas.
- b. Enhances food security through better agricultural support.
- c. Improves living standards and reduces poverty.
- d. Strengthens national economic growth by leveraging rural potential.

Various governments, NGOs, and international organizations, such as the United Nations, focus on rural development through programmes and policies aimed at sustainable growth and self-sufficiency of rural populations towards the earlier averred 2030 SDGs. This global initiative is informed by the fact that the development of the 'backward' or 'undeveloped' arrears is desideratum as it would positively affect global economic survival (Eminue, 2009:556).

### **Community Development**

This is a process where individuals, groups, and organizations come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems within their community. It focuses on empowering people, improving social and economic conditions, and fostering sustainable growth through collaboration, participation, and capacity building.

### **Key Aspects of Community Development**

- 1. Participation:** Encouraging active involvement of community members in decision-making and development initiatives.
- 2. Empowerment:** Equipping individuals and groups with the skills, knowledge, and resources to create positive change.
- 3. Capacity Building:** Strengthening the abilities of people and organizations to

- address community challenges effectively.
4. **Sustainability:** Ensuring long-term improvements that benefit current and future generations.
  5. **Social Justice:** Promoting equality, inclusion, and addressing issues related to poverty, discrimination, and inequality.
  6. **Collaboration:** Engaging various stakeholders such as government, non-profits, businesses, and community members in a shared effort.

### **Examples of Community Development Activities**

- a. Establishing local businesses and cooperatives.
- b. Improving access to education and healthcare.
- c. Developing infrastructure, such as clean water and sanitation projects.
- d. Promoting cultural and social initiatives to strengthen community identity.
- e. Organizing skill development and employment programmes.

Overall, community development is about fostering self-reliance, enhancing quality of life, and creating stronger, more resilient communities.

### **Relevance of Utilitarianism to Community Development**

Utilitarianism emphasizes outcomes that benefit the majority, making it a pragmatic approach to addressing rural poverty. Community development initiatives that integrate this principle prioritize participatory decision-making, fair distribution of resources, and the empowerment of marginalized groups. Also, studies have shown that community-driven development programmes, which involve local communities in decision-making and implementation, can be effective in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods (World Bank, 2019).

### **Applying utilitarian principles to community development**

1. **Participatory Governance:** A utilitarian approach emphasizes the inclusion of community members in decision-making processes to ensure that interventions reflect their needs and priorities. Participatory governance fosters trust, accountability, and transparency, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Invariably, Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods, which involve local communities in the planning and implementation of development projects, have shown to increase community ownership and project sustainability (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2018).
2. **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Utilitarianism advocates for the fair distribution of resources to maximize collective well-being. Policies should prioritize investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure in underserved rural areas to bridge the development gap.
3. **Grassroots Empowerment:** Empowering rural communities to take ownership of development initiatives enhances their capacity to address local challenges. Skills training, microfinance programmes, and women's empowerment initiatives align with utilitarian goals by creating pathways for economic independence and improved quality of life.



### **The Role of Community Leaders in Community Development**

The role of community leaders in this noble advocacy cannot be overemphasized. Community leaders serve as middle men between the government or NGOs and the land or people in the area or community. These leaders make or mar developmental projects. For instance, the largesse flowing from the government to the communities could be appropriated by the leaders as their personal or political rewards. In fact, this is what happened in some of the villages in Akwa Ibom State in 2023 when government rice, beans etc. were shared in villages (Titus, 2025:36)

### **Sustainable Development**

**This** is a development approach that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It seeks to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being to ensure long-term prosperity for people and the planet.

Key principles of sustainable development

#### **1. Economic Sustainability:**

- i. Promoting economic growth without depleting natural resources
- ii. Encouraging responsible production and consumption patterns
- iii. Creating job opportunities and reducing inequalities.

#### **2. Environmental Sustainability:**

- i. Protecting ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources
- ii. Reducing pollution, carbon emissions, and waste
- iii. Promoting renewable energy and sustainable agriculture.

#### **3. Social Sustainability:**

- i. Ensuring equitable access to resources, education, and healthcare
- ii. Promoting human rights and social inclusion
- iii. Reducing poverty and gender inequality.

### **Utilitarianism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The UN has defined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some of the goals within this context include:

- a. No Poverty (Goal 1)
- b. Quality Education (Goal 4)
- c. Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6)
- d. Affordable and Clean Energy (Goal 7)
- e. Climate Action (Goal 13)
- f. Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12).

Examples of sustainable development practices are:

- a. Using renewable energy sources (solar, wind, hydro).
- b. Promoting eco-friendly products and recycling programs.

- c. Implementing green building designs.
- d. Encouraging public transport and sustainable urban planning.

Sustainable development aims to create a fair, prosperous, and environmentally sound future for everyone. Interestingly, poverty, the number one goal in this context needs to be pursued vigorously in the remaining five years or suffer another failure in developing countries like Nigeria. This “gate” position of poverty issue in the 2030 SDGs depicts its importance and relevance to all other goals towards their achievement or otherwise (Titus, 2016:108-111).

### Nigeria

Nigeria is a country in West Africa and situated between the Sahel to the North and Gulf of Guinea to the South in the Atlantic Ocean. It is the most populous and naturally endowed, yet poverty stricken in Africa.



**Figure 1:** Sub-administrative-units map of Nigeria showing its large size of 923,768km square, too big for a leader with African mentality to manage effectively.

### Theoretical Framework

This study explores the issue of rural poverty in Nigeria through the lens of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian Principle, which posits that actions should be guided by the principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." The theoretical foundation integrates classical utilitarianism with community development strategies to assess how policies and interventions can maximize social welfare and economic well-being in rural areas.

### Utilitarianism Theory

Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study.

Utilitarianism, a consequentialist ethical theory, argues that the morality of actions should be determined by their capacity to produce happiness or pleasure while minimizing pain. This principle is particularly relevant to rural poverty alleviation efforts, as it provides a normative basis for evaluating public policies, community interventions, and resource allocations that aim to enhance overall societal well-being. Invariably, utilitarianism could be applied to global issues like climate change, economic development, human rights and cultural renaissance. Same goes for technological advancement and socio-economic inequality. Accordingly, key tenets of utilitarianism that guide this framework include:

- a. **Hedonic Calculus:** This has to do with measurement of pleasure and pain to determine the most beneficial course of action.
- b. **Maximization of Utility:** It ensures that development efforts generate the greatest benefits for the largest segment of the rural population.
- c. **Impartiality:** Here, the theory addresses poverty in a way that benefits all members of the community equitably (Bentham,1789)

### **Community Development Theory**

Community development theory complements the utilitarian approach by emphasizing participatory, inclusive, and sustainable development practices. This theory focuses on empowering local communities through capacity building, resource mobilization, and participatory governance to achieve long-term poverty reduction. Important aspects include:

- a. **Participation:** Engaging community members in decision-making to ensure interventions align with their needs.
- b. **Sustainability:** Implementing development programs that are economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.
- c. **Empowerment:** Providing rural populations with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to drive their own development.

By integrating utilitarianism with community development provides a holistic perspective on addressing rural poverty in Nigeria while ensuring that interventions are both effective and ethical.

### **Pseudo Utilitarianism in Nigeria**

The Ministry of Happiness and Purpose Fulfillment was a controversial government initiative established in 2017 by the former governor of Imo State, Nigeria, Rochas Okorocha. The ministry was created with the aim of addressing issues related to citizens' welfare, emotional well-being, and purpose in life. According to Okorocha, the ministry was intended to help residents "discover their talents and skills" and live more fulfilling lives.

Keypoints about the ministry:

1. **Criticism and Public Backlash:** The establishment of the ministry was widely criticized and ridiculed, both locally and internationally. Many saw it as an unnecessary bureaucratic expansion in a state facing economic challenges and infrastructure deficits. Critics argued that the government should focus on tangible development issues such as healthcare, education, and job creation instead of "happiness."

2. **Leadership:** Governor Okorochoa appointed his sister, Ogechi Ololo, as the commissioner in charge of the ministry. This sparked allegations of nepotism and further controversy.
3. **Objectives (As Stated by the Government):**
  - i. To address issues related to unemployment and social welfare.
  - ii. To ensure that government policies positively impact people's emotional well-being.
  - iii. To promote purpose-driven living among citizens.
4. **Public Reaction:** The ministry became a subject of jokes and memes on social media. Many saw it as a misallocation of resources in a state with pressing development needs.
5. **Current Status:** The ministry was largely considered inactive after Okorochoa left office in 2019. The succeeding administration of Governor Hope Uzodinma did not continue with the initiative.

Similarly, Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State introduced the "Happy Hour" initiative, designating Fridays from 5 PM to 6 PM for bars to offer drinks at discounted prices. This policy aims to stimulate local businesses and provide residents with an opportunity to unwind. The initiative has been met with mixed reactions. Some residents appreciate the support for local businesses and the chance to relax, while others believe the government should prioritize more pressing issues like unemployment and education.

### **Case Studies: Utilitarianism in Action**

#### **1. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)**

The Nigerian government's CCT program provides financial assistance to low-income households, conditional upon children's school attendance and regular health check-ups. This aligns with utilitarian principles by directly addressing poverty while promoting long-term societal benefits.

#### **2. Community-Based Health Insurance Scheme**

In rural Nigeria, community-driven health insurance schemes have improved access to affordable healthcare, reducing mortality rates and enhancing overall well-being. These initiatives demonstrate the effectiveness of collective action in achieving utilitarian objectives.

#### **3. Agricultural Cooperatives**

Rural cooperatives have facilitated access to markets, credit, and technology for smallholder farmers, improving productivity and income levels. By prioritizing the collective good, these cooperatives exemplify the practical application of utilitarian principles (Titus, Asuquo and Etuk, 2024:43).

Worthy of note at this point is the fact that local governance in the 1970s was more proficient than the present local government area system in Nigeria. Then, Etim Ekpo was called "Touring Area" under Abak Division (today's local government area status). Despite the sub-sub status of the former, all the government ministries, agencies and parastatals in Abak were repleted in Etim Ekpo headquarters. Impacts of these offices robbed off on clans and villages developmentally. As a matter of fact, like other ministries resident in the area, ministry of

works provided pipe-borne water (in addition to the natural streams around) and road maintenance within and outside the council. Indeed, this was utilitarianism in action, not empty big nomenclature without substance to show.

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical studies on rural poverty in Nigeria have examined various socio-economic and policy-driven approaches aimed at improving the living conditions of rural dwellers. Utilizing Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle, which advocates for the greatest happiness for the greatest number, provides a theoretical lens to assess the effectiveness of community development initiatives. This review explores empirical evidence from various studies that analyze the impact of utilitarian-driven interventions on rural poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

### **Rural Poverty in Nigeria**

Several studies have documented the prevalence of poverty in rural Nigeria, identifying factors such as lack of access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. For instance, Omonona (2010) analyzed the determinants of rural poverty and found that low agricultural productivity and inadequate social amenities contribute significantly to poverty levels. Similarly, Aigbokhan (2008) highlighted the role of government policies in addressing poverty but noted a lack of sustainability in many interventions.

In a study conducted by Okojie (2013), the effectiveness of community-driven development (CDD) projects was evaluated. The findings revealed that participatory approaches that align with utilitarian principles, such as inclusive decision-making and resource allocation, resulted in improved rural livelihoods. However, the study also identified challenges such as corruption and mismanagement that hinder the full realization of community benefits.

### **Utilitarian Principle in community Development:**

Applying Bentham's utilitarian principle in community development implies that interventions should be designed to maximize the collective well-being of rural populations. Empirical evidence from Nigeria suggests that projects that prioritize community involvement and equitable resource distribution yield better outcomes. A study by Adebayo and Ajayi (2014) examined the impact of microfinance programs in rural communities through a utilitarian lens. The results indicated that access to microcredit significantly improved household income and welfare, aligning with the principle of maximizing happiness. However, the study also noted challenges such as high interest rates and lack of financial literacy, which limited the benefits.

### **Case Studies of Utilitarian-Driven Intervention:**

**The National Fadama Development Project:** Empirical findings by Nkonya et al. (2008) showed that the project, which focused on providing agricultural support to rural farmers, led to increased productivity and income levels. The project's participatory approach ensured that the needs of the majority were addressed, resonating with Bentham's utilitarian principle.

**Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes:** Studies such as that by Anyanwu (2019) demonstrated that cash transfers targeting vulnerable households resulted in improved access to education and healthcare, thereby enhancing overall community welfare. Despite the successes recorded in various community development initiatives, empirical studies reveal persistent challenges. Issues such as policy inconsistency, lack of community ownership, and poor monitoring frameworks have been identified (Obadeyi, 2020). These challenges often result in suboptimal outcomes that fail to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number.

**Examples of Countries with Significant Progress in Rural Development include:**

**China:** China's implemented policies have greatly reduced rural poverty by promoting agricultural development – resulting in significant reduction in poverty rates.

**India:** India, with its initiatives in improved rural infrastructure, training and support to rural farmers has promoted rural entrepreneurship.

**Brazil:** Brazil is known for supports to small-scale farmers, improved access to education and healthcare in rural areas. These countries demonstrate that with the right policies, implementation and investments, rural development can be a powerful tool for reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development goals (SDGs) globally.

**Challenges and Recommendations**

Challenges

- a. **Policy Implementation Gaps:** Weak enforcement mechanisms hinder the impact of well-intentioned programmes.
- b. **Corruption and Mismanagement:** Diverted resources undermine trust and efficacy. To this end, a thorough sanitization is urgently needed in Nigeria.

A typical example of sanitizing a polluted system was twice demonstrated by Jesus Christ himself as recorded in John 2:14-17 and Matthew 21:12-13 thus: And Jesus found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge ... he drove them out of the temple ... poured out the changer's money, and overthrew the tables ... my house shall be called house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

From the above scripture account, it could be deduced that Jesus' sanitization of the defiled/misused temple of God was thorough, uncompromising; he left no stone unturned. He actually stepped on toes, particularly those of the money-driven temple Levites. He called spade a spade and without mincing words by calling them thieves. Succinctly speaking, until Nigerian executives (being the heads at the federal and state levels) stop stealing public funds and show good examples to follow in that direction, Nigerian's change or whatever initiative, will never see the light of day; reason being that, the head controls and regulates all other part of the body – human or non-human alike. Invariably, other parts of the body are vulnerable to condition of the head. No part of the body can be cleaner or higher than the head.

This is to say that the same method of washing ourselves or one taking his or her bath from top down or from head down to the toes, the same method needs to be applied here, if the sanitizing in Nigeria's politics for sustainable development must be achieved and sustained (Titus, and Onwuhanze, 2023:164).

- c. **Cultural Barriers:** Resistance to change and entrenched power dynamics can impede progress (World Bank, 2021). Eg. Lack of education to the girl child

### **Recommendations**

1. Stakeholders to strengthen institutional frameworks to enhance accountability and transparency in governance.
2. Public-Private Partnerships should be promoted to leverage private sector expertise and resources for rural development.
3. Invest in Education and Advocacy should be prioritized to raise awareness about the benefits of participatory governance and inclusive policies.

### **Conclusion**

Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian principle offers a robust ethical framework for addressing rural poverty in Nigeria. In simple terms, the principle argues that actions are right if they promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Also, by prioritizing the collective happiness and well-being of rural populations, community development initiatives can achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes. This study underscores the importance of aligning philosophical principles with practical strategies, providing a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders committed to transforming Nigeria's rural communities.

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