

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

BY

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Poverty alleviation is today a principal yardstick for measuring sustainable development. The soundness of economic policy and quality of a countries institution ultimately can be seened by the extent to which they contribute to the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development. The impact of poverty on sustainable development in Nigeria is devastating. The inability of the poor people to harness the resources that will improve their living conditions has helped to dismantled their hopes of life. The unsustainable use of natural resources inevitably cause poverty. To solve the problem, policy must be focused on environmental policies and not poverty alleviation policies. In addition, environmental degradation can be caused by poverty. Hence, to resolve the problem, the first objective is to identify if it is indigenous poverty, then policies must be focused on environmental policies. On the other hand, if it is exogenous poverty, then poverty alleviation policies need to be formulated and implemented. Furthermore, for poverty to be reduced to a bare minimum the economy must be diversified to remove the overdependence on oil revenue. The greater Nigerian population practice agriculture, which in spite of its neglect, feeds the nation and contributes significantly to the nations GDP. Therefore, the necessary condition for the upliftment of the living standard of the masses of Nigerians is improvement in agricultural production.

Keywords: *Poverty alleviation, sustainable development, environmental degradation, unsustainable use of natural resources, environmental policies*

Introduction

Poverty has been widely acknowledged as a major global development challenge as evidenced by the influential Brundtland commission in a sentence that captures widely held belief (Brundtland, 1987). Poverty alleviation is

today a principal yardstick for measuring sustainable development. They soundness of economic policy and quality of a country's institutions ultimately can be seen by the extent to which they contribute to the alleviation of poverty and sustainable development (Eboh, 1999).

Poor people are often seen as compelled to exploit their surrounding for short term survival and are assumed to be the ones most exposed to natural resources degradation. In Nigeria, we are suffering from acute rural-urban economic disparity along with substantial poverty, inequality, deprivation, illiteracy, lack of proper health and sanitation facilities.

Mankind has failed to give poverty the attention it deserves. That is why a problem from time, immemorial is plaguing the world today. Many have seen it as a problem of the third world. Little or no findings have been made about the origin of poverty though Encyclopedia Encarta says that the reasons of poverty are not clear. Yet there are attempts to eradicate it today (Tazoachal, 2001). Therefore, in a society plagued by poverty, little can be said about sustainable development if the problem of poverty cannot be addressed.

The terms poverty and sustainable development are not new in our daily parlance but when seen from the practical point of view, they call for the attention of man.

The study is organized into five sections. Section one deals with the introduction. Section two presents the conceptual framework. Section three explores the related literature review. Section four examines the causes of poverty and the impact of poverty on sustainable development in Nigeria. The final, section five deals with the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Conceptual Framework

The Meaning of Poverty

For proper understanding of the issue of the study, it is necessary that concept of poverty be explained. According to the United Nations Human Development Report (1998), poverty is defined as a complex phenomenon that generally refers to inadequacy of resources and deprivation of choices that would enable people to enjoy decent living conditions.

Moreover, the World Development Report 2000/2001, sees poverty to connote lack of a range of material needs of life as food, shelter, water, clothing and non-material needs as security, employment and literacy (Ayoola,

2000). While Tazoacha (2001) defines poverty as the absence of peace in an individual. This could be as a result of hunger, lack of medical care, marginalization, denial of human rights relating to the fulfillment of basic human needs, and freedom.

It is also defined as pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions as low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity, low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's like (World Bank 1999). United Nation Development Project, (1999) defines poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity, which implies lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society, not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not attaining literacy of good health, not having security of food or a job to earn one's living. Poverty is a world-wide phenomenon, but its incidence is more severely felt in the developing countries than in the developed ones. Thus, poverty can be classified into relative and absolute poverty. Absolute poverty is a state of destitution, is the lack of basic human needs, such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing, and shelter. The World Bank defines relative poverty as living on less than US \$1.25 (PP) per day, and moderate or relative poverty as less than \$2 a day (World Bank, 2007), and it accounts for about 1.7 billion people in the world (Krugman and Robin, 2009). In Nigeria, available evidence tend to suggest that more than 40% of the Nigerian population live in extreme poverty, spending less than N320 per capita per month (Ognifiditimi, 1996). At the individual level, poverty could be seen as the determinant of income whose absence or inadequacy incapacitates him/her from acquiring the necessities for good living (Ahokegh, 2010).

The Meaning of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development could be seen as development that can stand the test of time. Consequently, Tazoacha (2001) defines sustainable development as development that could be regarded as a long lasting quantitative and qualitative expansion of all aspects in a society. Be it social, cultural, economic, political, scientific or technological.

A widely accepted definition of sustainable development is the one put forward by the World Commission on Environment and Development. It defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It has become common to isolate four factors that determine sustainable

development. They are: natural capital, physical or produced capital, human capital and more recently, social capital sustainability, or the capability of future generations to meet their needs, is ensured when the total stock of these assets remains constant or is increased in the production process.

The Linkage between Poverty and Sustainable Development

The assumption of relationship between poverty and sustainable development in developing countries has long prevailed in the debate on poverty and sustainable development linkages (Lele, 1991). The assumption were first launched in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in Brudtland report and have later been echoed by a wide range of organizations (Durning, 1989). Due to lack of resources and their struggle just to ensure day to day survival, poor farmers are believed to offset concerns with the long-term sustainability of their resource management and to degrade already fragile resources, such as steeply sloping, erosion prone hillsides. This resource degradation, in turn, aggravates their poverty even more. Thus, poor people are seen both as victims and agents of unsustainable development.

The linkages between poverty and sustainable development issues are artifacted by how poverty is defined, by the type of environmental problem in question and by which groups among the poor are affected. Research and policy has tended to focus on the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation in terms of pointing out that the poor are both victims and agents of environmental degradation. Victims in that they are more likely to live in ecologically vulnerable areas, agents in that they may have no option but deplete environmental resources thus contributing to environmental degradation and hence unsustainable development (Leach and Mearns, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Poverty, as a social phenomenon has attracted the interest of researchers and its reduction programmes are designed in response to theories that justify such interventions. The paradigm of poverty has a direct bearing on the alleviation measures adopted (Bradshaw, 2005). Poverty reduction strategies require an effective assessment and a clear understanding of how key factors affect the welfare status of households, along with other co-varieties (Anyanwu, 2014). Thus, poverty theories are divergent and resulting in different intervention strategies. Thus research work analyses poverty in Nigeria through the lenses of the culture of poverty, individual deficiency theory, progressive social theory and geographical disparities theory.

The Culture of Poverty

This concept was developed by Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist as a result of his studies of the urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico. It constitutes a pattern of life, which people adopt as a community, and is passed from one generation to the next. People adopt a fatalistic attitude that leaves them feeling marginalized, helpless and inferior. Family life is characterized by high divorce rates, with mother, children often abandoned. Individuals do not participate in community life by engaging in voluntary associations, self-help initiatives and politics (Bradshaw, 2005). They make little use of banks, hospitals and other facilities to enhance their welfare and well-being. Perceptions may be influenced by religious or cultural beliefs such that people are not psychologically geared towards taking advantage of changing conditions or available opportunities (Ryan 1976).

The culture of poverty is prevalent in developing countries and societies in the early stages of industrialization as well as among the lower class in advanced capitalist societies. It is a reaction to low income and lack of opportunities such that people live for the present and believe in luck rather than effort to achieve success. The culture can be eroded if the causes are removed. In Nigeria, weak governance, impunity, systemic failures, illiteracy, income inequality, unemployment and corruption have entrenched this culture manifesting in poor orientation, low standard of living, and high rate of social ills, political unrest and abuse of religion. Politicians and government officials tend to be selfish, greedy and corrupt, enriching themselves by looting from the common wealth of the country. Based on this theory, poverty can be overcome if deliberate and genuine reorientation is imbibed or commonly adopted, otherwise, this culture will continue in a vicious cycle and be passed on from one generation to the next inflicting poverty on the population.

Individual Deficiency Theory

This theory attributes poverty to individual deficiencies. The poor are assumed to be responsible for creating their problems through lack of hard work and bad choices. Other variations to this theory ascribe poverty to lack of certain genetic attributes, intelligence and even punishment from God for sins committed. Neo-classical economists reinforce individualistic sources of poverty with the assumption that individuals are responsible for their choices in maximizing their wellbeing through wise investment.

The theory cast the poor as a moral hazard with claims that poverty persist because the poor are not doing enough or are engaged in activities which are

counterproductive (Gwartney & McCaleb, 1985). Poverty reduction is achievable through skills acquisition, hard work, motivation and resilience. This can be applicable in the context of poverty analysis in Nigeria. Poverty has been aggravated by failure of individuals to take responsibility for their destinies in order to have a brighter future. Failure of individuals to acquire adequate skills and training could lead to loss of career opportunities and result in poverty.

In analyzing how individuals make wrong choice which inflict poverty, Dike (2009, p.130) explains that the wrong attitude and mentality towards technical and vocational subjects by youths in Nigeria makes them “lack the skills and knowledge to compete effectively I the rather tight labour market and thus loiter around in the villages and cities from dawn to dusk looking for jobs that are not available:. Non-enrolment in schools, laziness, indiscipline and engagement in crime and other social ills are personal choices that could result in poverty for individuals.

Poverty induced by individual deficiencies can be alleviated if all stakeholders including government and policy makers provide the needed support; opportunities and incentives that help people make right choices to evade poverty.

Progressive Social Theory

Proponents of this theory do not view individuals as the source of poverty but economic, political and social distortions as well as discrimination, which limit opportunities and resources to create wealth and overcome poverty. The 19th century social theorists waged a full attack on the individual theory of poverty by exploring how social and economic systems overrode and created individual poverty situations. They analyse how the economic system of capitalism created a reserve army of the unemployed as a deliberate strategy to keep wages low (Bradshaw, 2005). They argue that people may work hard and have acceptable attitudes but still be in the poverty trap because of dysfunctional social and economic systems.

The theory ascribes poverty to economic, social and political structures that make the poor fall behind regardless of how committed they may be. Another category of system flaws associated with poverty relates to groups of people being discriminated against based on personal attributes such as race, gender, disability and religion, which limit their opportunities in spite of their personal capabilities. In Nigeria, government policies and actions exacerbate poverty.

These may be adopted in pursuit of good intentions, but poor implementation could impoverish the citizens. The SAP and its various fallouts in the form of massive devaluation of the Naira, high inflation, factory closures, privatization, commercialization, appropriate pricing of petroleum products and unlimited free market contributed to the poverty situation.

The structure of Nigeria's economy has also worsened the poverty situation. Its productive base is narrow and undiversified with the economy largely dependent on oil revenue while other critical sectors are neglected. This situation has hampered economic growth and capacity utilization leading to macroeconomic instability and poverty. Misplacement of priorities by governments at all levels manifesting in wasteful expenditure rather than investment in critical sectors that have direct bearing on the standard of living, has aggravated poverty in Nigeria.

Bias, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion, and non-adherence to principles of true federalism and federal character in appointments and projects distribution have led to many ethno-religious conflicts and social unrests in Nigeria resulting in wanton destruction of lives and property thereby worsening the poverty situation of the country.

Geographical Disparities Theory

This theory focuses on poverty in geographical perspective e.g rural poverty, ghetto poverty, third world poverty etc. It calls attention to the fact that people, institutions and cultures in certain areas lack access to opportunities for wealth creation. This theory is applicable in the Nigerian context where poverty is prevalent in some geographical locations: rural areas, slums and areas prone to natural disasters such as floods, draught and desert encroachment. The level of economic activities is low leading to high rates of unemployment and other manifestations of poverty.

The gross neglect of rural areas in the provision of social amenities and empowerment opportunities by successive governments have led to an imbalance and a wide divide between rural and urban dwellers resulting in challenges of rural-urban drift. Poverty is high because governments and communities have not tapped the resources and opportunities in the disadvantaged areas to improve the wellbeing of the populations. Populations in disadvantaged areas live in sub-human conditions and are afflicted with poverty and absence of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria and the way forward.

Literature Review

This section reviews the related literature for the study. A major work was undertaken to study the relationship among population, poverty and environmental unsustainability in China in 1997 (Rozelle, 1997). The author examined the impact that each had on the Chinas land, water, forest and pasture resources. They found that government policy is ineffective in controlling rural resource unsustainability primarily because of its limited resource and poorly trained personnel.

Dasgupta (1994) found a positive relationship between rural poverty, fertility and environmental resource base degradation and concludes his study by stating that it was not only poverty but also institutional failures that were the root causes of environmental unsustainability Jeganathan (1989) and Jodha (1998) both disagree with Dasguptas conclusion and assert that the poor do not: (a) have the resources to degrade the environment and (b) have the short time preference which propels them to destroy a resource which they regard as safety buffers during time of destruction. However, they agree with Dasgupta on the role institutional and market failure plays in providing incentives to: (a) the poor to have short time preferences and (b) the rich to exploit the resource base at unsustainable rates.

But the result of Ransburg (2003) does not support the hypothesis that poverty is a major cause of environmental unsustainability. He believed that due to the limited access of poor farmers to productive resources such as land, forest and forest resources, agrochemicals and irrigation, the environmental impact of their resource management is limited in comparison with that of the non poor. He mentioned that the environmental degradation taking place is more compellingly explained by the social and political relations that shape access to natural resources and the norms for their management.

The above discussion on the various studies conducted reveal that there is a two way linkage between poverty and environmental unsustainability. Degradation of environment caused either by the poor or the rich has both direct and indirect impacts not only on the cost of production but also on the productivity of crops and thus on the income of the people. Poor get more affected than the rich and become poorer due to environmental degradation manifested through destruction of forest for fuel wood, degradation of land, water through the use of chemical fertilizer, pesticide, etc in modern farming and pollution of air due to consumption of biomass fuel. Thus a vicious link is

established between poverty and environmental degradation. Each becomes the cause and effect of the other (Nayak, 2004).

Causes of Poverty

Lack of sustainable development in Nigeria is always attributed to poverty. Although majority of researchers are of the view that poverty is caused by illiteracy, but there is more to it than this (Tazoacha, 2001, Aboucheldid and Nasser, 2001, Garr and Maclachlan, 1998, Duraiappah, 1996, Lele, 1991). They maintained that illiteracy is the impediments that have not pushed the society forward to achieve sustainable development. It is the forces turning the wheel of sustainable development in many economics anti-clockwise. On the other hand, other researchers opine that the causes of poverty are multidimensional and encompass areas like economics, demography, health, social and geographic factors (Umo 2012, African Development Bank 2010, Sharma 2012, Abu 2000, Ayoola 2000, Oguntiditimi 1996). The main causes they highlighted include the low per capita income, low investment rates and tenuous financial intermediation, poor infrastructures, low human capital growth and its utilization, limited diversification of the economy, exposure to development shocks and use of flawed development concepts and strategies, adverse consequences of high population growth corruption good governance deficits and ineffective leadership.

However there is a preponderance of studies addressing the issue of poverty in Nigeria. For instance, Olowa (2012) highlights the causes of poverty in Nigeria to include: low or negative economic growth, inappropriate macroeconomic policies, deficiencies in the labour market resulting in limited job growth, low productivity and low wages in the informal sector and a lag in human resource development. Other factors are; increase in crime and violence environmental degradation and retrenchment of workers. Ucha (2010) identifies unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of the economy, income inequality, laziness and poor education system as some of the key factors contributing to poverty in Nigeria. On the contrary, Aluko (2003) highlighted the main causes of poverty in Nigeria to include:

- 1) Inadequate access to employment opportunities for the poor;
- 2) Lack or inadequate access to assets such as land and capital by the poor. This is often attributed to the absence of land reform and minimal opportunities for small-scale credit;
- 3) Inadequate access to the means of fostering rural development in poor regions, the preference for high potential areas and the strong urban bias

in the design of development programmes is often assumed to be its primary cause;

- 4) Inadequate access to market for the goods and services that the poor can sell. This is caused by their remote geographic location;
- (5) Inadequate access to education, health, sanitation and water services. This emanates from inequitable social service delivery which consequently results in the inability of the poor to live a healthy and active life and take full advantages of employment opportunities;
- 6) The destruction of the natural resource endowments, which has led to, reduced productivity of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This often resulted from the desperate survival strategies of the poor as well as inadequate and ineffective public policy on natural resource management.
- 7) The inadequate access to assistance by those who are the victims of transitory poverty such as draught, floods, pests and war. This is brought about by lack of well conceived strategies and resources; and
- 8) Inadequate involvement of the poor in the design of development programmes. This is often exacerbated by the non-involvement of the representatives of the communities or beneficiaries in the discussion, preparation, design and implementation of programmes that will affect them.

Poverty Profile in Nigeria

Poverty profile in Nigeria has been seen to affect more people in the rural areas than the urban ones. For example, in 1992, rural poverty increases from 46% to 71.7% in 1996 (Anyanwu, 2006) and correspondingly, urban poverty increase from 37.5% (Ogunmike, 1996).

Worst still, about 78% of the population lived below poverty line in rural areas and 34% in urban areas (Kelvin et al, 1995). According to the report of the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2004), poverty rate in Nigeria stood at 40.6% in the same year and ranked 76th position among the 102 developing countries calculated and 20th position among the poorest countries of the world. Furthermore, in 2010, it was estimated that about 92% of the Nigerian population survive on less than \$2 daily, while about 71% survive on less than \$1 daily in the same year (Lawal, 2010). This is a major embarrassment for the

supposed ‘Giant of Africa’. Incidentally, the report came against the backdrop of fear earlier expressed by many Nigerians and organizations including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that unless urgent steps are taken by Nigeria, the 2015 target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) objectives that are essentially meant to achieve the UN declaration for the reduction of poverty, especially in the developing nations by at least 50% by the 2015 would not be attained (Lawal, 2010).

Of the Nigerian population that lives in extreme poverty, it is posited that women outweigh men and their experience of poverty is quite different as a result of the expectation about their gender role. The estimated variance in the distribution of the incidence of poverty by sex shows that women constitute 70% of the world 1.2 billion poor people (Modupe, 2003). In 2016 during the first recession in 25 years, the economy contracted by 1.6% (World Bank, 2019). Nationally 43% of Nigerians (89 million people) live below the poverty line, while another 25% (53 million) were vulnerable. For a country with massive wealth and a huge population to support commerce, a well developed economy, and plenty of natural resources such as oil, the level of poverty remains unacceptable.

Furthermore, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), in a report about poverty and inequality from September, 2018 to October, 2019, said 40% of people in the continent’s most population country lived below its poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) per year. It said that represents 82.9 million people in Nigeria 40.1 percent of total population were classified as poor, in other worlds, on average 4 out of 10 individuals in Nigeria has real per capita expenditures below 137,430 Naira per year.

The Impact of Poverty on Sustainable Development

The impact of poverty on sustainable development in Nigeria is devastating. Due to the inability of the poor people to harness the resources that will improve their living conditions, it has helped to dismantle their hopes of life. Therefore, the economic activities of these people continuously face diminishing returns (Tazoacha, 2004).

The impact is seriously felt in the agricultural sector as well as other sectors of the economy. Since, farmers lack the appropriate technology, updated skills, modern technology, capacity building, innovative techniques, tools, lack capital to invest in this sector in order to improve the soils and in turn multiply

the yields, hence, as a result of this poor state, the sector has seriously been artified.

Moreover, the consequence of population explosion and inadequate food production has resulted in food insecurity. The policies to guarantee food security and eliminate hunger have remained theories with no solution in sight. Except these theories are transformed into concrete action and realities, the problem of food insecurity and hunger will continue to remain a delima.

Moreover, poverty related problems like malnutrition, diseases, HIV/AIDS, juvenile delinquency, disillusionment, unemployment, social insecurity, fraud, acute corruption, embezzlement, trauma have been the order of the day. Acute poverty in Nigeria has resulted in high rate of illiteracy. This is because there is inadequate educational facilities, few and inexperienced personnel. This has affected mostly the elementary and post secondary levels.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The paper sees poverty as a condition of absence or of denial of the basic necessities of life such as safe food, fresh water, housing, clothing, basic health care, education, employment and participation in political decision making. Among the poor households, 70% of them are involved in the agricultural sector. This confirms a strong linkage between agricultural sector and poverty in the rural areas. In general, poverty has the most direct effect on the environment via cropping where poverty influences the households technology and investment path in intensification of cropping, where there is a land constraint (pressure from population). A high rate of population growth and population density in poor areas can exacerbate the poverty problem (Bardhanm and Udry, 1999).

The concept of sustainable development suggests a potentially positive relationship between socio-economic development and environmental sustainability. Indeed, the discourse of the 1980s and 1990s has been about how development and environment can be reconciled and how sustainable development can be achieved (Lele, 1991).

However, unsustainable use of natural resources inevitably causes poverty. To solve the problem, policy must be focused on environmental policies and not poverty alleviation policies. In addition, environmental degradation can be caused by poverty. Hence, to resolve the problem, the first objective is to identify if it is indigenous poverty, then policies must be focused on

environmental policies. On the other hand, if it is exogenous poverty, then poverty alleviation policies need to be formulated and implemented.

Furthermore, for poverty to be reduced to a bare minimum the economy must be diversified to remove the overdependence on oil revenue. The oil natural resources are found in the delta area that holds a population of less than one third of the total population of Nigeria (Ahokegh, 2010). The greater Nigerian population practice agriculture, which in spite of its neglect feeds the nation and contributes significantly to the nation's GDP.

Therefore, the necessary condition for the upliftment of the living standard of the masses of Nigerians is improvement in agricultural production. This can be achieved through the supply of inputs such as improved seeds, machinery, fertilizer, storage facility and price stabilization.

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