

Enhancing the Role of Youths in Poverty Alleviation and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper analyzed the poverty situation in Nigeria and the role youths can play in alleviating it. Poverty is a condition characterized by chronic deprivation of resources necessary for adequate living. Nigeria is a rich nation with very strong economy but majority of the citizenry are living in poverty. Statistics show that the rate of poverty has been on the increase since 1960 even as the population is increasing. About 71 percent of Nigerians live on less than one US dollar a day and 92 percent on less than two dollars a day. Corruption, unemployment and unequal distribution of the nations resources are key factors to the issue of poverty in Nigeria. If the youths become part of policy making and implementation in addition to giving them adequate education and entrepreneurial studies, they will be empowered to help fight poverty which has become chronic in the nation. As future leaders their potentials have to be maximized to contribute both to individual and national development.

Keywords: Enhancing, Youth, Poverty alleviation, National development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Authors have defined poverty in several ways depending on the context of the situation and their views. Poverty is generally seen as a condition of having little or no money or means of support. It is characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs like food, potable water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.

Poverty as it is used in this paper is a situation where one does not have the necessities or basic needs of life. The poor lacks the means of proper living in other words, there is scarcity of certain amount of material possession or money. Poverty is closely linked to inequality. One common characteristic of the poor is that they do not have enough money to feed. World bank (2001) observed that out of 6 billion people in the

world about 2.8 billion live on less than \$2 a day each while 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 a day each and majority of this poor are in sub-Saharan Africa.

II. TYPES OF POVERTY

Poverty is grouped into two namely: Absolute and Relative poverty.

A. Absolute Poverty

This is extreme type of poverty involving lack of basic things like food, clean water, housing, etc. It is a state of destitution where basic human needs are lacking. People in this state suffer and even die from preventable diseases like malaria and cholera.

B. Relative Poverty

This is defined in relation to other people in a particular area. For example one is considered poor when people around the person enjoy better living conditions and have better facilities. Some other writers tried to include other types of poverty like situational /transitory poverty and generational or chronic poverty.

Situational/Transitory poverty they say is as a result of events like flood and illness while generational or chronic poverty is the type handed over to someone from generations to generations.

III. CAUSES OF POVERTY

There are many causes of poverty. Some of which are:

- Illiteracy: This is one major cause of poverty. When someone is not educated, the person lacks information needed to improve his or her life. Illiteracy is equally a hindrance that prevents people from solving basic problems.
- Inequality in income distribution is another serious cause of poverty in Nigeria. It makes

the poor poorer as the rich gets the lion share of available resources.

- Wars and unrest have become common in our present society. They result in loss of lives and property. In this situation, hunger is common and diseases rampant. Under this condition wealth can not be created because of chaos. People are displaced from their homes and there is increase in the number of poor people in such areas. The case of North East Nigeria is a typical example where thousand of people have been killed and many have become destitutes as a result of terrorism.
- Adverse geographic location is another important factor. People that live in hash environment like hilly, swampy and deserts especially in developing nations live under very serious hardship. Majority engage in primary economic activities like farming, lumbering and gathering. These people depend on the natural environment for their means of livelihood. The situation here is complicated because of lack of technology to transform such an environment into a viable one. Some areas are inaccessible because of their remote location. People living in such areas are far away from social and economic amenities like markets, hospitals, schools, roads, etc. This further makes their life miserable and the people poorer.
- Natural disasters: Natural disasters such as floods draught, hurricane leads to destruction of lives and property. They disrupt and destroy peoples means of livelihood thereby making them poorer.
- Gender discrimination is strong in most African countries. There is gender discrimination in favour of the male folk. Men are given priority over women. Some parents send their boys to school and the girls stay at home to do house chores. These girls are equally given out in marriage early in life to any suitor of the parent's choice. In some places women are not allowed to engage in very viable economic activities. This impacts negatively on the wellbeing of the women and consequently on the welfare of the family. The women end up doing menial jobs which does not earn them enough money to take care of themselves.

- Illness or disability of a family member: This drains the family finances and makes such families poor.
- Some families inherit poverty from parents and grandparents who were very poor. Such parents did not send their children to school. This group cannot provide basic things for their families.
- Fraud and Corruption contribute to poverty. A situation where the nation's wealth is in the hand of very few who are in power, inequality exists and poverty abounds. The corrupt leaders loot government money while the masses live in penury.

IV. POVERTY SITUATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is a very rich country endowed with abundant natural and human resources. Nigeria vision 2010 report of UNDP stated clearly that poverty in Nigeria contradicts the country's immense wealth and resources. The economy of Nigeria is one that is getting stronger due to proceeds from sale of crude oil. With all the revenue accruing to Nigeria from crude oil, the government has not been able to meet the basic needs of the people. There is a serious dichotomy between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. Income is not evenly distributed www.unicef.org/nigeria/1971. UNICEF also noted that majority of Nigerians are poor with 71 percent living on less than one dollar a day. This implies that millions of Nigerians lack food, clothing and the basic things of life.

In 2007, United Nations Human Development index ranked Nigeria 158 out of 187 countries and 152 out of 187 on the scale of (HD) index for 2013. This shows that the human development is very low in Nigeria www.poverties.org/poverty. A study by UNICEF noted that 64% of households in Nigeria see themselves as getting poorer. Despite the fact that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the 6th most populated in the world, the population is still growing at an alarming rate. This is the trend in most developing countries. In fact according to Joel Cohen (a professor of population at Rockefeller University of New York, the pace of population growth in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) is unlike anything else even in history and has become a critical problem

www.nytimes.com/2012. The implication is that as the population is increasing the number of poor people is also increasing. Thus increase in poverty consequently means decrease in life expectancy which has decreased from 47 years in 1990 to 44 in 2005. This is unfortunately the lowest in West Africa according to the Nigerian center for disease control. Life expectancy in Nigeria is 15 years below that of India and Bangladesh according to United Nations and World Health Organization.

The poor do not have enough money to feed themselves. The Nigeria vision 2010 report of UNDP (1997) also revealed that 80% of Nigerians consume less than 1/3 of the required minimum of proteins and vitamins they need. This is because in 2004 about 54.7% of Nigerians were living in extreme poverty. This figure has risen to 60% in 2010 according to The National Bureau of Statistics.

Table1 shows increase in the rate of poverty in Nigeria in selected years while the nation's economy is getting stronger ironically.

Table 1: Nigeria's Population In Poverty

Year	Population in Millions
1980	17.1
1985	34.7m
1992	39.2m
1996	67.1m
2004	68.7m
2010	112.47m

Source: Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics 2012.

The above table portrays a steady growth in the number of poor people as the years increase. The National Bureau of Statistics observed that relative poverty is worst in Northern Nigeria with North West Nigeria recording 77.7%, North East 76.3% while South West has about 59.1%. This could be the reason youths who are hungry and idle have made themselves available to be used for terror attacks and other vices obtainable in that part of the nation. In 2004, 75.5% of the respondents interviewed by NBS saw themselves as poor while in 2010 the number has risen to 93.9% (NBS 2004, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa). A study considering Nigeria's income per capita shows that nothing has changed since 1970 in as much as the country has become richer and the economy stronger from oil revenue.

Poverty in Nigeria is generally seen as a rural issue because majority of this rural population are poor. A good number of them are migrating to the urban areas in search of better means of livelihood. Many youths are leaving school and cannot find jobs. According to UN world youth report, 724m young people live on less than USD 2 a day. Unemployment in Nigeria has become a social threat to socio-economic peace and stability of the nation. It is one major cause of poverty in Nigeria. Unemployment was about 23.9 percent in 2011 and youths make up over 50% of the total number of the unemployed.

V. CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

Poverty results in so many things ranging from hunger, malnutrition, stealing and even death. Poverty exposes people to unwholesome behaviour like prostitution, robbery, etc. In Nigeria and other developing countries, poverty is a major factor in crime rate. A hungry person can take part in a crime for a very low amount of money just to meet his/her pressing need. Some end up as commercial sex workers especially women. According to UN and WHO over 70% of the world poor are women. In the process of selling sex to survive many are infected with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV AIDS.

Poverty is a major cause of rural-urban migration in a nation. Nwajiuba (2012) noted that the main reason for rural emigration in Nigeria is economic. He equally observed that poverty, unemployment and misallocation of petroleum export earning against agricultural sector is the main cause of local and international migration. Poverty forces people to move to areas they think is viable especially the cities. As people move from rural areas to the cities the rural areas are deprived of the active labor force. This makes the source area (rural area) poorer.

- Poverty gives rise to increase in illiteracy: A poor parent cannot pay the children's school fees. To feed the family is a big problem and school fees are additional burden to them. Children from such poor families are usually sent out as house helps to richer families or as servants to business men/traders.

- Poor people have low self esteem: They feel inadequate because they lack self worth.
- Poverty gives rise to increase in the number of homeless people. Many live in uncompleted buildings or buildings still under construction. This makes them vulnerable to all forms of attack.
- Poverty gives rise to high infant mortality rate and increase in annual death rate. According to World Health Organization, hunger and malnutrition are the single gravest threats to public health and malnutrition is the biggest contribution to child mortality. Nigeria is one of the developing countries where child mortality is high as a result of poverty.
- Inaccessibility to social amenities: The poor have problems accessing social amenities. They can hardly afford hospital bills, potable water, school fees and other facilities that make life more meaningful.

VI. POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Poverty alleviation is any process of reducing poverty or making it less intense i.e. to ease the severity or pain of poverty on people. This is very necessary especially if it can not be totally eradicated giving the prevailing circumstances. The aim of poverty alleviation is to promote economic growth that will permanently lift as many people as possible over poverty line which is one major target of Millennium Development Goals(MDG1).
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/poverty-reduction.

Ihebereme (2008) opined that poverty alleviation is a systematic means aimed at reducing the state of being poor among our citizenry to the barest minimum. She decried the measures taken by Nigerian government to alleviate poverty as mostly superficial attack on the symptoms leaving the real cause unscratched.

How to Improve the Role of Youths in Poverty Alleviation And National Development

By definition, a youth is any person between 15 to 24 years. According to the African youth charter, a youth is a person between 15 and 35 years. The youths are the very active of the population. To achieve the MDGI which is eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, youths

must be recognized as a resource for change in society. They should not be sidelined.

-Youths must be considered very vital part of the population. They must be part of policy and decision making especially when it concerns them. They can effectively communicate and convince their fellow youths. They should take part in executing policies that will improve their wellbeing and the nation as a whole.

-Youths must be given good education: Education develops human personality Ihebereme (2008). It is of great importance towards poverty alleviation. Alfa and Adeniyi (2003) observed that education helps reduce poverty while sustainable national development will emerge due to improved quality of personal lives and of social relationships. Ihebereme noted that the type of education which will address the issue of poverty among Nigerians must effectively equip people to address those areas that perpetuate poverty and not just for a white collar job. The youths must be equipped with desired skills and technical-know-how for production and creativity. Our abundant human resource must be trained and harnessed economically to attain the goal for which the nation exist.

-Entrepreneurial studies must be given due attention it requires in our schools. Anup (2005) noted that entrepreneurial studies helps youths translate their technical knowledge and attributes which they have into sustainable money making scheme .When the youths are engaged gainfully, they make money for themselves and not be disposed to crime and other vices.

-Improving the quality of lives of people should be government's priority. Government should provide basic necessities of life like potable water, regular electricity, housing, etc. for the citizenry especially in the rural areas where majority of the poor live. This is because provision of infrastructural/social amenities are more in the urban areas as against the rural areas where there is limited access to these facilities. This will also reduce the rate of rural urban migration to the barest minimum. With the provision of electricity, roads, markets, potable water, businesses will begin to thrive in the rural areas; people can begin

to create wealth on their own. When this begins to happen poverty will be reduced and youths will no longer be drawn to the cities.

-Credit delivery system should be a priority to help upcoming business to start and be sustained.

-Improving healthcare and general living conditions of the people. If this done, people will be healthy, happy and productive. Consequently their lives will be improved and poverty reduced.

-Corruption is a big problem that has eaten deep into the very heart of the nation. Corruption in Nigeria should be fought seriously and the money being looted be used to create jobs and empower the millions of youths who are roaming the streets looking for work to do. Some engage in all kinds of dubious lifestyle because they are not gainfully employed. Government should convert the huge human resource of this nation into an asset that will contribute immensely to national development. Government should have the political will to fight corruption and put an end to it. This is because it is responsible for uneven distribution in income which has put a big gulf between the rich and the poor in the nation. The money being carted away should be used to provide basic amenities that will better the lives of the citizenry.

-The youths of Nigeria should be given adequate attention. If the aforementioned are carefully looked into and taken care of as a matter of urgency, poverty in Nigeria will be radically reduced and the burden taken off the people.

VII.CONCLUSION

Poverty is a serious problem facing Nigeria. It is as a result of unequal income distribution, unemployment, corruption and a host of other factors. The consequences of poverty cannot be over emphasized. People die of hunger and malnutrition; there is increase in rural-urban migration in search of better living condition etc. When the expectation of having greener pasture is not met at the destination area, it leads to all kinds of vices including robbery, prostitution, kidnapping, etc.

Government at all levels should pursue with aggression youth empowerment programs. When youths are empowered, It will improve their living standard and as a result poverty will reduce.

The youths are vibrant, gullible and very active. They have potentials which should be maximized. Youths should be carefully nurtured. empowered and integrated into policy and decision making in the country. If this is done, they will make positive contributions to the country's leadership. They will equally create wealth which will make life comfortable for themselves and other people. In this case Nigeria will no longer be a rich country with poor citizens rather it will be a rich country with well developed highly skilled and productive citizenry and poverty will be reduced to a near zero level in the country

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