POVERTY IN NIGERIA: A BANE TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Upon the attainment of political independence, the expectation by Nigerians albeit Africans in general was that all the sufferings under colonialism will be a thing of the past. Given the fact that Nigeria's economic and natural resources were siphoned by foreigners. Though with internal collaborators. This has an adverse effect on the population of Nigeria leading to poverty and malnutrition. Despite attempts undertaken by various governments to curtail poverty and hunger in Nigeria, people still suffer. Even in the 21st century, this phenomenon continued at an alarming rate. Even though most African countries including Nigeria acquire the basic technical know-how to meet their counterpart in Asia and South America. Unfortunately, corruption and financial mismanagement becomes the order of the day. Thus, the paper examines the causes, effects and solutions of poverty in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty, Bane, Socio-Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

Africa has remained the world's poorest of the various regions, despite the enormous natural resources of the region, a virile population and the various reform efforts within the past decades by countries in the region to break the circle of poverty. In Nigeria, the story is more pathetic given the fact that some countries have regarded her as the "Giant of Africa", the most populous country and abundant

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natural resources. Yet Nigeria is engulfed in a development crisis. It is faced with the stark reality of collapsing economic, political, religious, and social tension which have manifested themselves through persistent communal conflicts and insurgency in tackling the problems associated with poverty. Nigeria's government had at various times involved policies with practical steps taken to do away with poverty but it has persisted without any solution in sight. From the attainment of independence to date, the government of the Federation had tried methods such as indigenization decree, import substitution, industrialization, structural adjustment program, counter trade, privatization, etc. Yet the poverty level has remained at an alarming rate.[1] This poverty has added to the bigger problems of Nigeria such as incidences that have unleashed a lot of hardship on the Nigerian masses. This paper tries to answer the whys and how poverty manifested to a large extent crippling the socioeconomic development of the nation.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Concept of Poverty

There is no single definition to the question "what is poverty"? Poverty has many faces, which a vast and expanding body of welfare economics and applied sociology has sought to understand. In other words, there is no single accepted definition of poverty. However, poverty as observed in historical analysis can be divided into two. There is absolute and relative poverty.

Absolute poverty is defined as the inability to meet needs that are essential for survival. It is usually expressed in terms of food and may or may not include a requirement for shelter, education and health. If these needs are not met, a person or household is unable to enjoy a minimum acceptable living standard. These needs can be translated into a requirement to possess commodities (goods and services) and into minimum income to acquire them – the poverty line.[2] Proponent of absolute poverty holds that poverty can be eliminated by ensuring that all have at least income allowing them to procure or obtain a minimum basket of goods and services.[3]

Those who espouse the relative concept of poverty argue that needs cannot be absolutely fixed. Need change over time, for instance, with increasing stratification and change in the division of labor in a society and with increased overall prosperity. Therefore, a move effective way of defining poverty persons or in other words, to see it as a matter of inequality. Under this approach, poverty cannot be eliminated or even increase with overall economic growth in a country. Policies therefore should aim at poverty eradication.

According to some the theoretical drawback of the concept of relative poverty is that, should there be a generalized fall in prosperity that does not affect distribution the lowest household or persons may face hardship. Thus people would slip into poverty without it being so recorded. On the other hand, this concept helps to keep policy – makers aware of the distribution aspect of development. This is all the more important as inequality tends to increase with increases in overall GDP until a certain threshold level is reached, after which it tends to decrease.[4]

The persistent level of poverty in Nigeria has diametrically led to insurgent activities. Some Nigerian past administrations made efforts to bring an end to or terminate poverty which becomes a worm that demolished or destroyed the lives of the majority of Nigerians but failed. Politicians manipulate and win elections through falsehood in line with lavish gifts to electorates.

When they observe that a candidate who is accepted by people will defeat them, they observe that candidate who is accepted by people will defeat them, they use all means by using any unlawful means to mantle the leadership of power, given the fact that poverty has permeated all the nooks and cronies of a large population of Nigerians.

CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Though many believe poverty is a relative term, yet it is known a fact that poverty is feared by many people, especially in the developing world where the phenomenon is glaring.

Adam Smith[5] started in1776 that "no society can surely be flourishing and be and be happy of which by far the greater part of the

members are poor and miserable" poverty amid plenty is the greatest challenge to the world and, not only that humans poverty is more than income poverty.[6] it is the denial of choice and even the opportunity for one to live a meaningful life. Poverty is manifested in poor health, sanitation and safe drinking water.

Barnes in his study on the poverty trend, states that "Poverty is not new but at each mention, it stirs a lot of misgiving. This is because it has the very social and psychological prestige of its victims.[8] Poverty today represents a vicious cycle in many developing nations like Nigeria. The cycle goes this way: low productivity leads to a low increase, to low savings, then low investments, to capital deficiency and back to low productivity.[9] This vicious cycle of poverty has evacuated across many third nations and retarding the pace of development resulting in underdevelopment. Bhattacharya, cited in jhingan, contributed to this position by thus:

Poverty and underdevelopment of the economy are thus synonymous. A country is underdeveloped because it is poor and remains underdeveloped as it has not had the necessary resources for promoting development. Poverty is a curse, but a greater curse is that it is self- perpetuating.[10]

The study further indicates that the poor also face extreme vulnerability to poor health conditions and economic crises. Almost always, these individuals are often exposed to ill-treatment by institutions of the state and society. In Nigeria, the poor and powerless influence key decisions affecting their lives. These and many more are glaring dimensions of poverty indeed of the world's 6 billion people 2.5 billion lives less than 82 a day,1.2 billion with less than 81 a day, among which are Nigerians.[11]

Sometimes it is awful and other times pathetic when one comes across the situation of the poor especially in Nigeria's remote villages. For a poor, person everything is terrible illness humiliation and sham. They are afraid of everything, depending on what everyone wants to get rid of.[12] At the end of 2009 African countries lost more than $50 billion in income largely due to the financial crisis of the period. The human consequences are mounting, Unemployment, and poverty.[13] If

one takes the situation of very reduced consumption from already very low levels, even for a short period, can have a long-term impact. They may experience a decline in the quantity of food intake; consume leading to substantial damage to the health and education of millions of children.[14]

Nigeria is the most popular nation in Africa. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report ranked the country 158 in the Human development index out of 177 countries with165 in life expectancy at birth and 155 in GDP per capita. Another report in nations in the world, with 70 of its population as poor and 54.4% living in absolute poverty.[15]

The resultant impact has been manifold, Upkere reported in his study that over 7 million primary-aged children are out of school in Nigeria. The study further stated that 201 out of every 1000 children risk dying before the age of 5 due to chronic diseases and 80 out of women lost their living during pregnancy and resulting from poor antenatal care and nutrition. Another aspect that deserves mention is the rising incidence of prostitutes level which leads to escalating rates of HIV/AIDs.[16]

According to Suberu "Nigeria has around $50 billion in oil revenues since the 1070s, yet remains mired in poverty, unemployment, a bourgeoning domestic debt, infrastructural sector, abysmal health and education services and attendant social frustration and unrest.[17] The reform, despite regimes of increasing revenues, the Nigerian people have further slumped into the poverty trap. It is a fact of life in Nigeria that more and more people are joining the poverty train daily.[18]

Nigeria and most African nations are regarded as not being poor resources fully. This is because the country seats on abundant natural resources, yet its people are poor. These set a poor why and how? The answer to this question is cannot be farfetched. First, the continent is blessed with huge natural resources mostly untapped or consisting of crude oil and other mineral resources, wild life lakes and river basins, and military despots are detailed progress across Africa. Other issues such as corruption and mismanagement have robbed the continent of about 140 billion or about 25% of GDP in Africa.[19]

However, other factors like capitalism and poor social services have accelerated the pace of poverty in Nigeria and poverty is today an institute of its own in Africa. A similar viewpoint was added by Dare as cited by Abdullahi, as he observed that many trans-national corporations in Africa have pounded on the resources and its people, acting more like predators, chopping up natural resources, distorting economic and other policies, exploiting the environment negatively and manipulating government and media.[20]

POVERTY AS A BANE TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA UP TO THE 21ST CENTURY

To start with there is this ardent saying that one person is poor because another is rich. Poverty is not a state of deprivation, which has come about by chance; rather it is a result of the richness of the rich. Nowadays the rich no longer ask the poor "why are you poor"? The poor ask the rich with increasing urgency, "why are you so rich"? Poverty is no accident; it is determined by the structure of the society. This definition plays an important role in the debate on development. There are those who look for economic growth as a basis for prosperity (the prosperity of the west needs only to trickle down the poor countries and everything will be right. Others are more concerned with just relationships and want to politicize aid, while a third group lays stress on men themselves as the basis for development (self-reliance). A popular and acceptable dictum for development, which defines poverty, has preferred economic growth based on justice and independence of those concerned (self-reliance). This trio (justice, self-reliance and economic growth) is the basis for society in the so called developed countries.[21]

With the deepening social and economic crisis in Nigeria which resulted in poverty and frustration on the land, there is a need to rethink paradigms and strategies for addressing the paradox of development in the country i.e poverty in the midst of plenty. This is because, Nigeria in the last few decades witnessed the intensification of upheavals and crises with a vast majority of the populace currently facing a heightened sense of insecurity, increasing frustration and total disillusionment with

the state of the nation. Despite numerous attempts by successive Nigerian governments to lay the foundation for sustainable growth a striving characteristic of underdevelopment and poverty which is growth without sustainable development persists. Therefore, there is an urgent need to arrest the situation within the context of reflections on the national question.

The phenomenon of poverty and rising inequalities constitute the moral care of the crisis of the present world system particularly as it affects Nigeria which is unarguable, the poverty capital of the world. Why should we have growing wealth with rising poverty in Nigeria? Why should a tiny percentage of the population persistently consume the greater of the country's income to the detriment of the larger majority-masses?

These questions relate to what some writers have styled., Mal-development and others as per verse development. The above questions need to be answered urgently in order to halt the ugly situation and effectively rethink and tackle the problem with a view of providing a fresh perspective on the issue.

The persistence of poverty in Nigeria is one of the cumulative consequences of foreign domination and exploitation as well as internal policy failures, particularly in governance and resource management.[22]

Nigeria has been trapped in a serious web a circle of poverty which requires a clear and serious attempt at that to get it out of the quagmire. For the country to get it right and rightly fix the problem, there should (must) be a deliberate policy on the side of the government to do away with this monster – poverty once and for all.[23]

The federal and state government must be seen to be serious about how to approach the answer to national questions robustly. What is Nigeria? Who is a Nigerian? How is the national wealth be shared and evenly distributed according to an agreed revenue sharing formula to the constituent units of the country?

Therefore, until, the aforementioned questions are answered rightly and the culture of entrepreneurship enterprise is been inculcated in our youths towards changing their mindsets poverty will continue to be a big problem in the country.

It is also an indubitable fact that bad governance has contributed to compounding the problem in Nigeria. The citizens of the country have been undeniably living in poverty in the midst of plenty which the country has to trace to get its bearing.

GOVERNMENT EFFORT TO ERADICATE POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Attempts by various governments in Nigeria to tackle poverty as a bane on socio-economic development have drastically worsened. As earlier stated in this discourse, various government at different times tried their best but had no positive result. For a society to witness socio-economic development, she needs prudent, uncorrupt, detribalized leaders with a focus that can carry along her people to the "promised land" of justice, fairness, agriculture development, employment and security. But, if these are lacking it means a country will enter an era of jeopardy, theft, robbery, corruption, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping etc.

The pursuit of better living conditions for Nigerians and obligating the country owes its people and these MDGs have reiterated that in every clear term, some of the different programs (not, an exhaustive list) that have been pursued in the country and given different nomenclatures in both the urban and rural areas and the number of resources that have been committed to some of these and which have left much to be desired are presented below.

Agriculture-based programs which targeted improved food security and poverty reduction include the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which started in 1976 and gulped a total of ₦46.9 million before it ended in 1979.[24] The second republic in 1980 replaced the OFN with the green revolution which had the objectives of boosting crop and fibre production and reducing importation of food.[25] At the end of the Green Revolution, ₦2 billion had been spent. There was Directorate for food, roads and rural infrastructure to improve the condition of the vulnerable poor, for which about ₦1.9 billion was spent.[26] The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was also set up in 1986 to tackle the problem of mass unemployment.

Next on the list was the move gender- specific better life programme (BLP) in 1987, to provide self help and rural development, skill acquisition and healthcare, in 1989, the people's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) was established in cater to the credit needs of Nigerians and similarly the community Bank (CB) was established in 1996 to concentrate on the provision of banking facilities, mobilize savings and investments among rural residents. The family support programme (FSP) was embarked upon in 1994. It was gender sensitive and improved life of the rural women and children and simulated youth development as well and it gulped N10 billion.[27] the family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) took off in1997 to provide credit facilities to support the establishment of cottages but accounted for only N250 million before it ended in 1998.

In the wake of the third republic, the poverty Alleviation programme (PAP) was launched. Ten billion naira was embarked on to create 200,000 jobs nationwide, after yielding no result it was restructured into the national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP) in 2001, generally refocused in the light of the MDGs and most recently the SURF- P scheme was launched to used up funds saved from the removal of the fuel subsidy to encourage entrepreneurship.

In spite of these and the resources as committed to this course, the National eau as statistics (2012) estimates that as of 2010, 66m Nigerians or 40.63% of Nigerians do not have access to standard health care and shelter. It is also reported that 112 million Nigerians are relatively poor and 99.5 million live on less than a dollar per day.

This report is a reflection of worsening conditions rather than improvements. In the light of all the resources spent on the cause. It is a worrisome situation. The question that arises is whether significant changes will be recorded in the direction of poverty reduction. From insecurity rising o fraudulent government officials looting the treasury to bribery and other practices, Nigerians have waited for the government for a very long time to fulfill promises, complete projects and instill hope in them but the media and the internet dish out daily. The picture seems bleak. This is not to say that there are no cases of

success achieved by the government but await the isolated success to reach the majority.

While it is true that well-meaning individuals and donor agencies may participate in the process of poverty reduction. What this means is that ensuring the security and minimal/basic welfare of citizens. It must be seen to be succeeding in its function.

THE WAY FORWARD

Poverty in Nigeria has been a natural phenomenon that became so disastrous to the peaceful co-existence of human development and progress, from the ongoing analysis, one can aptly argue that the Nigerian government is trying their utmost best to tackle this menace yet, could not achieve any fruitful result. I suggest that government should stand up without fair or favour to handle corruption with an iron hand, Government must rise to see that citizens are benefiting from social amenities as others countries are enjoying a high rate of inflation must be squarely dealt with to meet the contemporary international standard. There should be employment for teaming youths wandering the streets. Citizens should obey the rules and regulations as stipulated by the constitution of the country. The educational sector must be given a premium advantage. People should be allowed to transact their business without any jeopardy as long as they abide by the rules and regulations of the land.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has been living with the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty. This ugly situation has persisted so much so that the country is now the poverty capital of the world having overtaken India to clinch the medal. This to all intents and purpose does not argue well for the African country which prides itself the "giant of Africa". Therefore, all necessary measures must be put in place in other to roll back poverty whereby Nigeria must not live below the poverty line thereby earning the title of the capital of the world.

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3. For instance, in the World Summit for Social Development in March 1995, 117 Head of State in Government pledged "we commit ourselves to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world".
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