

**SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY REDUCTION AND
DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT IN NIGERIA:
A CRTIIQUE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper addressed the issue of socio-educational implications of poverty reduction in the process of democratizing Nigerian society. The study observed that poverty is a living condition in Nigeria, so its alleviation is indispensable under the present democratic experiment. To this end, the paper discusses the various poverty reduction programmes of the government by highlighting their impacts and the socio-educational implications on the masses. But given the capitalist nature of the Nigerian society, there is no assurance that poverty reduction exercise can ever be successful. The persistent of poverty presently in Nigeria, it is evident, is not the absence of programmes aimed at its reduction, it is rather the result of their failure. However, there is a very high probability that with the present democratic experiment and Nigeria's political will, the government can initiate and implement programme that could help in poverty reduction. The paper concludes that the starting point for a successful poverty reduction is from using functional education methods to attack the socio-cultural dimension of poverty problem.

Introduction

In recent times, there has been stentorian comments on poverty and poverty reduction/alleviation in Nigerian political history of democratic experiment. It is neither a fallacy nor an exaggeration to say that a substantial population of Nigeria is ravaged by poverty which is not only

a state of existence, but also a process with many dimensions and complexities.

Poverty is a living condition in which the country is faced with economic, social, educational, political, cultural and environmental deprivations laced with vulnerability (low risk and high capacity to cope) and powerlessness (Lupton and Ravallion, 1995; Sen, 1999; Ayakauye and Olomola 1999). The issue of poverty is age-long, for people, both rich and poor constitute the central subject in any poverty situation.

Generally in Nigeria, poverty appears endemic and at least its reduction has remained an inextricable part of the democratic experimental processes. World Bank (1997) has it that sub-saharan Africa is the World's poorest region in the context of both real income and access to socio-educational services, and that about 45 per cent of the approximately 590 million people live below poverty line, minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. In 1993, it was estimated that 40 per cent of the people lived on less than one dollar a day and that at least 50 per cent of the poor lived in five east African Countries and Nigeria (Obadan, 1997).

In contemporary Nigeria, poverty and its excruciating impacts are pervasive and palpable on the socio-educational life of Nigerians. AT 45, the country is ranked as a low income nation and is 119th out of 133 nations in the world, and has also plummeted to the 11th poorest sub-Saharan Africa's nation (Uya, 2004). We are also aware of the paradox of the Nigerian situation expressed in a World Bank Poverty Assessment Report (Anijah-Obi 2001) whereby Nigeria is said to be a rich nation occupied by people that are perpetually poor. Poverty by its very nature has affected the quality of life of Nigerian people and to a very large extent contributes to the various socio-educational and socio-psychological problems in Nigeria. Persistent unemployment and poverty are variables of poverty expressed in personal hardship and stress, and also have indirect bearing on social problems of health, drugs, crime, child labour and prostitution (Ghai, 1995). The socio-educational implications of unsuccessful poverty reduction effort result in limited education, illiteracy, high child mortality, poor health, unemployment and short life span.

Against this background of the correlation between the reduction of poverty and democratic experiment, this paper takes a

look at the present concern for poverty and poverty reduction initiatives by Nigerian government aimed at succeeding in fighting to reduce the miseries of the poor nationwide.

Poverty Reduction Programmes and Democratic Experiment

Several regimes in Nigeria have adopted various poverty reduction strategies in order to raise the standard of living of the people and instill in the poor a sense of belonging. These programme strategies cut across almost every sector of the country's economy. Some of these programmes include Operation Feed the Nation, (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA), the Agriculture Development Projects (ADPS), National Accelerated Industrial Crops/Production Programme (NAFPP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Peoples Bank (PB), Community Bank (CB), Better Life and Family Support Programmes, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), etc.

All these programmes are aimed at self-sufficiency in food supplies and life expectancy so as to alleviate poverty. Under the present democratic experiment, one would ask to know, to what extent have Nigerian citizens benefited from these elephant poverty reduction programmes? Analysis of the performance of Nigerian Government in these programmes reveals that basically Nigeria of today is still a poverty-stricken nation. It has been observed that between 1986, when some of these projects were introduced, and 1996, the growth rate of the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been discouraging, thereby portraying Nigeria being in a deplorable situation. Inflation rate continues to aggravate poverty through its effects on consumer's disposable income in 1986, the inflation rate was 5.4 per cent and by 1995, it had soared to 72.8 per cent. It is equally misleading to accept that the level of illiteracy and unemployment in the country is on the decrease because empirically it is on the increase due to increase in the population growth rate.

Of Poverty Reduction Exercise on Democratic Experiment in Nigeria

Poverty reduction is a policy responsible to the prevalence of poverty. It is also about increased material well being, human development through the process of education and accountability to the poor. It is a profound challenge and a cardinal policy objective with the inevitable capacity to make or mar any democratic government.

The impact of poverty is pervasive and multi-dimensional in Nigeria. Empirically and theoretically, poverty is never a condition for the triumph of any system, democratic or undemocratic; yet more than any other system, poverty makes a mockery of democracy, democratic experiment and democratization process in the country. Presently, to a great extent and as evident in Nigeria, poverty is an unacceptable human deprivation in all its ramifications. The contention here is that deprivation in whatever form negates democracy. There is need therefore for Nigerian government to intensify her effort towards a successful poverty reduction programme by pursuing exemplary poverty reduction strategies and showing commitment in terms of implementation.

Essentially, democratic experiment and poverty reduction programme are two political and economic variables which maintain a special kind of relationship, though diametrically antagonistic and repelling. By this, the Nigerian government is as opposed to and desirous of democratic experiment, and “poverty reduction” is a mechanism that not only depicts this hatred but also seeks to establish a dialectical nexus between both realms of society. In Nigeria, the democratization process has come under the negative hammer of poverty programme.

As elsewhere in Africa, Nigeria faces a number of challenges, which are essentially socio-educational, political and developmental. To be frank, poverty reduction constitutes one of the most virulent challenges, even threats, to the experimentation process. From another point of view, the analysis of performance of our government shows that government huge investment on human capital development has not achieved the desired objective of poverty reduction. This is in spite of the growth or increase in the number of educational institutions. For example in 1995, the number of primary schools were 36,677; secondary schools 6,452; and tertiary institutions about 138, with enrolment figures of 17,99 million, 5.08 million and

0.39 million respectively (CBN, 1995). Notwithstanding, the influence of poverty reduction process, educational services delivery has experienced a general declines in quality and efficiency, poor conditions of service, lack of textbooks and other related materials, poor hostel, classroom and office accommodations, incessant strikes; and distortions of academic calendars. This has greatly affected the sector negatively. Moreover, in 2000, when compared with Indonesia, Venezuela and Mexico, Nigeria had higher female illiteracy percentage and a higher level of illiteracy generally. While female illiteracy rate stood at 32; 10 and 15 percent in Indonesia, Venezuela and Mexico respectively it stood at 61 in Nigeria. Again, while the total number of those who cannot read and write in Nigeria stood at about 50 per cent, it was 33, 12 and 13 respectively, in the order of the countries mentioned above (Okoro, 2002).

The social and health sectors show the same trend. Life expectancy, infant mortality, drug abuse, etc. experienced nothing but marginal success. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (1995), the number of people having access to social amenities like water closet system and electricity, fell from 18.0 per cent in 1990/2000 to 14 per cent in 2001/2002 in the urban centres and 3.0 to 1.5 per cent in the semi-urban centres of the country.

Nigeria: Types of Poverty, 1980-2003

Year	Aggregate Poor (%) (A POV)	Urban Poor (%) (UPOV)	Rural Poor (%) (RPOV)	Core Poor (%) (C POV)
1980	27	17	27	6
1981	30	21.2	32	7.3
1982	34	25.2	39.4	9
1983	37	29	42	10
1984	41	33.2	46	11
1985	44.2	37	51	12
1986	44	37	50	12
1987	44	37	49.5	12.3
1988	44	27	49	12.4
1989	43.9	37.2	48.5	12.5
1990	43.8	37.2	48.47	13
1991	43	37.2	46.4	13.4

1992	42.5	37.2	46	14
1993	48	42.2	52	18
1994	53.9	47.2	58	21
1995	59	52.1	63	25
1996	61	58.0	66	28
1997	66	50.3	70	29.4
1998	58	60.1	70.2	30
1999	69	61	72	31
2000	70	62	73	32
2001	71	63	74	32
2002	72	62	75	32
2003	71	6.2	76	33

Source: CBN Economic and Financial Review (various issues) In J.E. Ndebio 2006

The table above shows the types of poverty existing in Nigeria between 1980 and 2003. The level of poverty has made us to believe the United States Cable News Network (CNN) Insight Programme of December 21, 2005 that over sixty per cent (60%) of Nigerians live in abject poverty. Data on the table shows that poverty level in 2003 was 71 per cent, 76 per cent, 62 per cent and 33 per cent for the aggregate poor, rural poor, urban poor and core-poor respectively.

The Need for Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Democratic Experiment

In the past few years, in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report of 1999, Nigerian was given a poverty index of 0.416 per cent. This has placed the country among the 25 poorest nations of the world and also 151 MONF 175 countries of the Human Development Index (HDI) Ramang, (Oyekanmi, 2000). The report further highlighted that 65 per cent of Nigerians were still poor, and 75 per cent of that poverty resided amongst the rural populace that lacked basic social amenities and education, totalling a whopping 70 per cent. The HDI measured the average achievement in the country in three basic dimensions of human development – a long and healthy life, knowledge (education) and a decent standard of living.

These frightening economic indices must have arisen from numerous characteristic nature of Nigeria's and society, as well as some external influences, which have created poverty and perpetuated the problem of poverty reduction in the nation. Some of the causes of these poverty reduction problems include political instability, systemic discrimination, gender, race, ethnicity, corruption, increased population trend, market imperfection and educational backwardness.

It can be conveniently argued that Nigeria's battered economy was self-inflicted and that if the country's resources as at now are well managed, poverty reduction exercise would have been successful under the present dispensation. To this end, the Nigerian government should handle poverty reduction exercise as a continuous process and not as a project under a democratic experiment. For when we look at the experience of the United States during the period of President Lyndon Johnson, when only 20 per cent of the American population were adjudged poor, he declared an "unconditional war" on poverty by tackling the root causes of poverty through a continuous programme meant specifically for the poor in the country side.

There is no doubt that democratic experiment cannot thrive when the Nigerian citizens are experiencing continued poverty in the midst of plenty and in an environment that is uncondusive for living for living, especially for the poor. The Nigerian government must begin now to see and handle poverty reduction as a meaningful exercise beginning with the poor and the educationally backward people of the rural areas. In pursuing poverty reduction strategies, Lipton (1988), Ravallion and Chao (1988) emphasize the importance of targeting the poor illiterate members of the society through various mechanisms, in order to meaningfully demonstrate the seriousness and the functionality of a democratic experiment.

Robb (2000) argues that the poor and the educationally backward ones must be directly involved through participatory poverty reduction assessments. Such exercise, he emphasizes, will facilitate information sharing, analysis and action. To this end, the Nigerian government should see the need to establish a national poverty index, below which no citizen must fall. Taking a critical look at all the white elephant poverty reduction projects of Nigerian governments, there is none that has practically and successfully alleviated the suffering of the masses. The persistence of poverty presently in Nigeria, it is evident, is

not the absence of programmes aimed at its reduction; it is rather the result of their failure. Evidences abound that poverty reduction effort of the Nigerian government has rather succeeded in pushing greater percentage of the poor into the abyss of poverty reproduction (Tell, January 1, 2001). The intensification of the present poverty level, despite the programmes and irrespective of the natural endowment (oil wells), the knowledge (advancement in education), the material and human resources with which the country is blessed, seem to support the view that poverty reduction is not the real problem of Nigeria, but leadership and bad governance.

Socio-Educational Implications of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the socio-educational development under the influence of poverty reduction and through the democratization process of the country has been observed as a negative trend. The issue is that, education has been neglected under the government in view of the fact that illiteracy level in the country is still on the high side. Many Nigerian citizens are growing up without opportunities for good education because of absence of parents and government assistance which would have placed them in a better position to conquer material poverty. In spite of the national government effort through many educational programmes and projects on eradication, most Nigerians are still educationally disadvantaged and do not know how to read and write. The purported 'Basic Education' of the government meant for the poor has not improved the illiteracy level of Nigerians who are deprived of free access to education due to their chronic poverty level in a country under a democratic experiment.

It has always been pointed out that the world map of illiteracy corresponds with the world map of poverty, and the World Bank had indicated in 1995 that the poor are often illiterates, have poor health and short life span. These illiterates are peculiar to Nigeria under the democratic experiment and cannot therefore solve the problems of the poor. In Nigeria, it has been advocated that poverty reduction exercise that can contribute to the solutions of the problems of the poor illiterate people must be functional and humanizing. Poverty reduction programmes have been known to create adverse educational situations for Nigerian families. The policy has led to negative changes in family structure, breakdown, and has put children to relative deprivation and

social disintegration. The socio-psychological implications of poverty reduction projects has succeeded in sowing the seed of criminal vices leading to insecurity of life and property such as drug addiction and trafficking, robbery, corruption, vandalism, etc. The existence of poverty reduction programme in a society like Nigeria is sometimes antithetical to effective democratic experiment. This is a truism, in that democratic experiment will thrive well when the problem of poverty in all its facets is eliminated or drastically reduced. Poverty reduction exercise, on the other hand, will be successful when democratic practices and ethos become the order of the day.

It is important to note that in the process of democratizing, investing in peoples education is the key to economic growth and social progress. Education is central to the elimination of poverty to the extent that it provides skills and abilities with which the poor secure productive and well job. Nigerians have been paid highly impaired in educational needs due to chronic poverty, in spite of the poverty alleviation programmes of the government.

Conclusion

Poverty is as old as man in the society. The challenge of reducing poverty in Nigeria is indeed huge and rampant, so, its alleviation is indispensable. But given the capitalist nature of Nigerian society, there is no assurance that poverty reduction programmes can ever be completely successful. However, there is a very high probability that with the present democratic experiment and Nigeria's political will, the government can further initiate and implement programmes that could help in poverty reduction for the benefit of the masses. The starting point for successful reduction exercise must therefore be from using functional literacy (educational) methods to attack the socio-cultural dimension of poverty. Functional education in Nigeria should also be used to raise awareness of the poor so that they could become so critical as to be able to question their existential realities. Intensification of government educational programmes can achieve these objectives.

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