

## **FIGHTING POVERTY AND HUNGER IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*Poverty and hunger have been identified as endemic and chronic diseases that affect the progress and economic development of any nations. This is because aggregate poverty and hunger of individuals in the society is regarded as the aggregate poverty in the nation. However, when such poverty is tackled using appropriate measures/ strategies, the welfare of individuals and the nation are restored. This paper therefore examines the causes of poverty and hunger, as well as the effects and possible strategies that can be used to fight such social ills in our society. The paper then recommends that for sustainable economic growth and development to be attained the attitude of Nigerians towards government projects, non politicization of policies and programmes meant to fight poverty and hunger should be encouraged.*

*Keywords: Poverty, Hunger, Development, Economic growth, Sustainable Development*

## INTRODUCTION

Poverty is an undesirable state of affair. It is defined in absolute term as a situation where a population or section of population is able to meet only its bare subsistence essential of food, clothing and shelter in order to maintain a minimum standard of living (Oladunmi, 1991). Poverty according to Ajegi (2002) is a state of want where human beings are unable to meet their basic needs of household such as social amenities and economic infrastructural development needed for survival. Poverty is also the state of deprivation of basic necessities of life which are the germane of meaningful existence. It is a situation where individuals and groups are not able to adequately cater for their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing to meet its social and economic obligations. Poverty may be absolute, relative, chronic, transient, mass or localized. In whatever form it may take, it inflicts both real and psychological pains on the people.

Poverty where ever it may exist, rural or urban have serious and negative impact on the society. Deviant behaviour experienced in our society today such as armed robber, prostitution, embezzlement, divorce, drug addiction and other forms of immorality are attributes of poverty (Anyanwu, 1993). These poor economic conditions have become worsened with the false consumption pattern of the populace (Sule, 2006). In most specific terms, the poverty situation in the country took a more drastic turn for the generality of the citizens with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986 following the agreement between the Nigerian government and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The aftermath of the agreement was the loan which the Nigerian government took to pursue its development programmes. The consequences of such loan on Nigeria economy has distorted growth and negates the welfare of the citizens. This situation since past two decades has created a gap between the poor among the poor leading to abject or extreme poverty and hunger in the society. In this case therefore, poverty is regarded as the state of been sick and not being able to see a doctor. It is the state of not being able to go to school; not knowing how to read and not being able o speak properly. Poverty is not having a job, it is far from future. It is losing a child to ill-health brought about by no clean water and good nutrition. The poor are those who lack adequate level of education and cannot satisfy their basic health needs (Sule, 2006). Thus, the poor are often regarded as illiterates in poor health with short life span (World Bank, 2003). It is a situation of extreme deprivation in living standard resulting from poverty and hunger.

### **Extreme Poverty and Hunger in Nigeria Society**

Extreme poverty according to Obadan (1997) occurs in any society when the minimum standard of living and necessities of life is very low. Accordingly, people are counted to be extremely poor when their measured standard of living in terms of income or consumption is far below poverty

line. Poverty line is the measure that separates the poor from non-poor. Extreme poverty is a sub-set of general condition of deprivation which include social deprivation, inferiority complex, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerless and humiliation and poor nutritional value (Unieimkogbo, 1997).

Essentially, in Nigeria, it is very difficult to separate the poor from extreme poor; this is because the two are somehow the same. However, the poor are those who are unable to obtain healthy living conditions. On the other hand, extreme poverty is a long-term or persistent poverty. It is majorly caused by the following factors.

- **Limited productive resources:** Those living in abject poverty have limited or little productive resources on which to depend upon. (Gbosi 2001). Most of them are unable to have adequate food on their dining tables. They lack farm implements as well as inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, and finance which are the germane of proper agricultural production. Most of them end up dying young because of different disease attack resulting from hunger. On the other hand, the non-farming segments of the poor population find it difficult to obtain soft loan to argument the financial base for their businesses.
- **Lack of skill for gainful employment:** The extreme poor in the society are often the chronic illiterates who have never entered the foreword of education or acquired any skill meant for any gainful employment. Most of them especially in the rural areas depend on subsistence farming for livelihood. In urban areas, they live from hand to mouth by exposing their children into hawking, prostitution and other social vices (Ajegi 2002)..
- **Location disadvantage:** The extreme poor in any society according to Agbaje (2010) find it difficult to acquire good location for living. In rural areas they are often characterized by poor material condition living mostly in thatched houses dominated by bush environment, with inadequate welfare services. While in urban area, they are akin to some conditions in the rural areas, in addition, they experience urban slum, inadequate welfare services, social deprivation, overcrowded accommodation, low or no level of capital resources and no-form source of capital for business (Sule, 2006).
- **Differences in environment:** Environmental factors usually affect people differently. For instance, those who are born and brought up in poor families living in slums, getting bad food, having poor health and bad educational facilities are often bound to be poor when they grow up because of their environment (Ajiola 2010). This is because the vicious cycle of poverty in them begins from birth and continues throughout their life time. They do not get a fair chance in anything they do. Usually, extreme poverty breeds a special environment and environment bread further poverty. Extreme poverty according to Sule (2006) erodes income earning capacities and result to hunger.

- **Low nutritional values:** Extreme poverty implies that regular and adequate feeding is beyond the reach of the poor. It is said that a hungry man is an angry man, and when a large and increasing proportion of the population are hungry, the same proportion in most cases are angry. In this case, no sustainable peace can be guaranteed in society where majority of people are hungry due to poverty.

## **EFFECTS OF EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER ON INDIVIDUALS AND ECONOMY**

Extreme poverty according to Ajegi (2002) affects individuals and nations' economy negatively. This is because, extreme poverty can thwart a nation's economic planning and lead to bad economic and social policies which can render the majority of the people neglected, dejected and hopeless. Extreme poverty and hunger on individuals and nations at large according to Balogum (1999) include the followings:

- **Distortion on individuals and economy as a whole:** Since extreme poverty and hunger result to low nutritional values, it distorts the growth pattern of individuals and groups in the society. Food as an essential ingredient for body growth according to Sule (2006) is required regularly in homes and in a nation at large. Any individuals or groups or nations that lack such essential items are likely to be exposed to diseases attack and other vices that can lead to death. On the other hand, a nation that is exposed to hunger and result into importation of food from foreign countries to augment its country's food intake may be exposed to further poor and unfavourable balance of payment (Balogum 1999),
- **Deviant behaviour:** When people are poor, they look for means of livelihood. This means may result to deviant behaviour such as violence, corruption, prostitution, armed robbery, stealing, hawking and host of others.
- **Lack of peaceful co-existence:** Extreme poverty posses' serious threat to peaceful co-existence between individuals and groups in the society. This means that if one is extremely poor, his/her co-existence with other people becomes very slim. Usually, the poor feels dejected, humiliated and rejected in the society.
- **Limited capacities:** Extreme poverty may result to limited chance of capabilities such as meeting ones social and economic obligations, assets and social esteem. No individuals or groups can surely be flourished and happy when he or she is poor and miserable. Extreme poverty according to Obadan (1997) has tremendous establishing potentialities because of its constraints on economic and social livings of the society.

## CONSTRAINTS OF FIGHTING POVERTY AND HUNGER IN NIGERIA

There is no reason(s) to state that various governments in this country have not made any effort to fight hunger and extreme poverty. However, all their efforts have not yielded fruitful result due to the following militating factors:

**Political instability:** Nigeria for the past two decades has witnessed series of political changes leading to instabilities in governance. These changes often lead to a discontinuity in the planned policies and programmes and sometimes, total re-arrangement of priorities. Usually, no progress can take place in a country that is beset with political instability.

**Faulty design/implementation government strategies:** poor implementation strategies of most government policies and programmes are formulated using bureaucratic principle. In other words, the largest beneficiaries are usually not involved from initiation to completion stage. The non-involvement of the beneficiaries is also an issue.

**Misplacement of priority:** In Nigeria, most programmes and policies fail to address the felt needs of the people since in most cases; the choice and siting of projects meant to eradicate poverty are done using political consideration, rather than the needs of the poor. For instance, the micro finance banks, the agric development banks and host of others established to encourage the poor in agricultural sector are mostly sited in urban and semi-urban centers instead of rural area of the country. This according to National Bureau of Statistics (2005) is a misplacement of priority since most people who benefits from the project in the areas they are sited may not be the real benefactors of the project.

**Lack of social security:** The Nigerian government does not operate a welfare scheme for the poor and less privilege in the society. This apparent state of insecurity among the poor and the less privileged in the society according to Agbaje (2010) contributes to the myriads of social vices in the country. Thus, the high spates of kidnap, thuggery, robbery, prostitution, etc. are results of government instability to address the issue of social welfare in the country.

**Cultural and religious factors:** The dichotomy and difference in culture and religion of Nigerians have tended to inhibit the introduction of certain policies for poverty and hunger eradication in the country. Sometimes, government intentions are viewed with suspicion and negativism because of people's religious belief and culture.

## METHODS THAT CAN BE ADOPTED IN FIGHTING EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER IN NIGERIA

Extreme poverty and hunger eradication strategy has for long occupied the mind of various governments in Nigeria over the years. This is why in the last two decades or more, various policies and programmes meant to eradicate poverty has been initiated and pursued. Although

most of these policies and programmes could not work because of political instability and weak governance. However, to achieve the desired objectives of fighting extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria, the following strategies may be useful.

### **Education of the poor through formal and informal channels**

The education of the poor through formal and informal channels may raise their level of illiteracy and help them understand their rights and civic responsibility as full citizens. This may eventually, resuscitate them into full awareness of the economy they belong and improve their production knowledge which in turn will bring them out of poverty and hunger.

### **Provision of training opportunity through skill acquisition**

Training opportunities through skill acquisition established in different communities in the country may enhance the productivity of the people under extreme poverty encouraged to participate. This according Wodon (1997) will improve their income and hence poverty and hunger eradication.

### **Access to land, Credit Facilities and Other Productive Resources**

Guaranteeing the access of the extreme poor to land, credit facilities and other productive resources may encourage them to improve in their potentialities to food production and income. This is because since access to land and credit are the major obstacles to the improvement of the welfare of the poor, its accessibility to whosoever is poor according to Ajegi (2002) will help in eradicating poverty and hunger in the society.

### **Encourage Poor to make better use of their talents & Local Productive Resources**

Most people in poverty are talented in one productive resources or the other but they are not encouraged to make better use of such talent. If they are encouraged, it will eventually improve their welfare and standard of living and poverty may be a thing of the past.

### **Co-ordination of all existing programmes and institutions involved in poverty eradication efforts**

To achieve the objectives of extreme poverty and hunger eradication, all existing programmes and institutions of poverty and hunger eradication efforts have to be coordinated and supervised to yield efficient result. This approach according to Sule (2006) will resuscitate individual and groups from the chronic devices of poverty entronement. Furthermore, the use of appropriate

indicators to monitor and evaluate programmes designed for poverty and hunger eradication will lead to the achievement of the desired objectives if not distorted.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that the development of any nation depends on individual citizen's welfare. This is so because the aggregation of individual poverty results to the poverty of a nation. However, for the above strategies to work in Nigeria, the following steps have to be taken:

Firstly, to be able to fight extreme poverty and hunger in our society, the government should operate a welfare system in every nooks and corners of the country to cater for the poor, the aged and unemployed in the society. Such welfare system if established should be managed by government representatives, community leaders, and the representatives of the benefactors. This process will ensure proper monitoring and accountability of the scheme and hence improvement in welfare which will eventually lead to sustainable development in the country. Also, the small scale farmers should be encouraged through the welfare scheme to improve their food production in the country.

Secondly, government should as a matter of priority make sure that policies or programmes meant to fight poverty and hunger in our society are not politicized. Such policies and programmes should be initiated and completed before the end of each administration. Also, for the sustainability of such programmes, the beneficiaries should be involved in the planning and execution of the project. The local environment in which such projects are sited should be Co opted in the monitoring agents of such projects to make sure that the projects are not abandoned.

Thirdly, to be able to achieve sustainable economic growth and development especially in the area of extreme poverty and hunger, the attitude of Nigerians towards government policies and programmes should be changed. People should be made to understand that government properties are their property meant for development purposes. Any contract awarded to execute government projects meant for sustainable development should be properly monitored and policed where necessary. All defaulting contractors should be brought to book and blacklisted. This will serve as deterrent to others and correct their negative attitude towards government projects.

Fourthly, government can as a matter of priority, establish poverty eradication agencies in different villages in the country to help in identifying the extreme poor and aid them though food aid to improve their nutritional values. Government and public spirited individuals in the

society can also use these agencies to help and sponsor the children of the less privileged to break the yoke of poverty in them.

Finally, skill acquisition centers should be established in every nooks and corners of the grass root levels to exploit the talents and potentialities of extreme poor. Thus involving them in one productive ability or the other. This will bring them out of the inferiority decomposition, giving them the room to belong.

## CONCLUSION

Extreme poverty and hunger are two edged swords that thwart and disrupt the development process of a nation. This is because extreme poverty does not only lead to physical deprivation of essential items for better condition of living, but has a serious psychological implication of the deprived. A poor nation is as a result of the aggregate poverty of its individual citizens. Therefore, any nation that strives for greater height in her development, must tackle the issue of poverty and hunger with all seriousness it deserves.

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