

**A REVIEW OF THE ETHICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF POVERTY AND  
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**Abstract**

*Economists, demographers and other social scientists have long explored the relationship between population growth and economic development. General consensus has arisen in recent years that better economic opportunities for individuals typically leads to lower birth rates. However, there is far less consensus on the proposal that lower birth rates lead to economic growth and allow individuals and communities to avoid poverty. This paper reviews recent developments in population change and economic growth in Nigeria, and argues that the countries representing the last development frontier, especially those within the Sub-Saharan Africa, will be better off to implement policies and initiatives that helps minimize high levels of poverty. The level of poverty remains unsustainable for Nigeria with vast wealth and a large population. Nigeria's population growth rate has been higher than the rate her economic growth, leading to a steady rise in poverty. Nearly half the population lives below the international poverty line of (\$2 per day). The main objective of this paper is to identify some of the main factors responsible for rising poverty in Nigeria and to provide practical solutions that could lift the country out of its current abysmal poverty level. Therefore in light of this background analysis, this paper critically examines the prospects of achieving a significant reduction in Nigeria's poverty and population profile through the policy harmonization of all poverty alleviation programs and effective implementation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Challenges of Poverty in Nigeria, Poverty Alleviation programs in Nigeria, Effective implementation of policies.

**Introduction**

Global initiatives are being stepped up by reforms, programs and sustainable development goals to counter poverty and raise living conditions. Nations are classified on the scale of growth based on indexes that have a direct impact on poverty. The complexities of Nigeria's suffering have drawn the attention of successive administrations. However, it remains a paradox-poverty in the middle of prosperity and increasing in times of economic development (Omoyibo, 2013). There is no gainsaying that Nigeria is caught up in a web of persistent poverty negatively impacting its growth performance (Nigeria Economic Report, 2019). The country has all it takes to grow, but inevitably it has not considered deleting the complicated nature of its social problems. The country has vast agricultural and natural resources and a

relatively significant manufacturing sector (48% of GDP in 2001) compared to other countries in Western Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa (less than 30%). The 2013 Human Development Index listed Nigeria among the world's 20 poorest nations. Up to 70 per cent of Nigerians are projected to live below the poverty line. Using poverty measures such as schooling, access to drinking water, education, child and maternal mortality and the number of people living on less than \$1 a day, Nigeria is among the 25 poorest nations in the world below Kenya, Ghana and Zambia (Nigeria Economic Report, 2019). The labour market is over-saturated and Nigeria's literacy level remains at the bottom. In order to simplify the global measure of poverty on a universal scale, a very simplified denominator of one (US\$ 1.0) was below which an individual is classified as poor. Poverty is best understood and seen as a situation in which its victims are unable to have access to the basic needs of life.

Despite the high growth rates as the second largest economy in Africa, Nigeria's poverty has risen so much that about 100 million people live below its \$1/day poverty line (Daniel 2009). (Daniel 2009). The percentage of the totally deprived Nigerians improved from 54.7% in 2004 to 69.9% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] 2011; Omoniyi 2016). The economy of Nigeria is supposed to continue to improve, but the poverty disparity between the wealthy and the poor will undoubtedly widen every day. For this reason, Kale (2012) argued that considering the steady development of Nigeria's economic year after year, "poverty is still a paradox in which a greater proportion of Nigerians are ensnared".

The Nigerian Statistics Bureau (NBS 2010) announced the relative poverty of 112 518 507 million when the population of Nigeria was 163. This is also an indicator that there are nearly five times as many people in poverty living in Nigeria as in Uganda, with just 28 million poor people living in the region. This indicates that all of the poverty assessment standards, including the relative poverty index, were not used by Nigeria. Nigeria's multiple poverty indices give varying characteristics; for example, total poverty is 60%, 61.2% for \$1 a day, and 93.9% for the quantitative calculation while a new analysis carried out by the Harmonized National Living Standard places the poverty profile at 69.0%. The much praised GDP growth rate of 7.4% in the last 10 years is doubtful. The GDP is the best in the last 10 years.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the various factors responsible for the deepening of poverty and overpopulation in Nigeria
2. To review and examine the levels of success and failure of the various poverty alleviation programs that has been operated in Nigeria.
3. Suggest solutions towards the reduction of poverty and overpopulation in Nigeria as well as offer strategies for the sustainable preservation of social and economic development of the country.

### **Literature review**

Poverty is hunger. According to the World Bank, it also entails lack of shelter and other social but essential facilities ranging from health to security (Wikipedia 2020). Poverty can be described in both absolute and relative terms. Relative poverty is said to occur where the subjects under consideration are weak in comparison to others. Poverty is comparative and subjective in this situation. Absolute poverty is however a condition characterized by extreme deprivation of basic human food needs, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health care, shelter education and information. In general, poverty is best described and appreciated as a situation in which its victims are unable to have access to basic life needs.

These needs include getting enough to eat, clean drinking water, sufficient housing and health Intellectual growth through schooling and adequate access to economic capital and participatory opportunities for victims to liberate themselves from the impact of poverty can be added to these basic needs. Certain common indices and factors are

commonly used to classify the different forms of poverty at a given time and place. Irrespective of the yardstick used to quantify poverty, it has been identified that poverty is caused by several factors. (Khalid, S. 2008) argued that the key causes of poverty in Nigeria are employment, ignorance, bad governance, corruption, high inflation, environmental degradation and high population growth." The World Bank's Poverty Task Force listed the following as the main causes of poverty: "Inadequate access to job opportunities. The World Bank's Poverty Support Task Force listed the following as the key causes of poverty: insufficient access to job opportunities, inadequate physical assets, such as land and capital; and limited access to credit for the poor, even on a small scale.

Nigeria is a highly populated country and there is evidence that her large population inhibits the government's efforts to meet the basic needs of the people. With a population that already exceeds 130 million and is fast growing at around 3% annually, a considerable proportion of the country's resources are undoubtedly consumed rather than accumulated as capital for development purposes. To this extent, the rate of development lags behind in comparison to that of population growth, and this negative synergy naturally triggers stagnation in the delivery of social services to the citizens. This necessarily prevents any progress being made in the fight against poverty in Nigeria.

However, considering the country's large population, GDP per capita was just USD2.980 in 2013, ranking 131th in the world compared to South Africa, which had a GDP per capita of USD6.886 at 88th according to World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2015). The rebasing also suggested that the Nigerian economy is moving from an agricultural economy to a tertiary service economy, without going through the intermediate stage of industrialization. This transition, has so far struggled to produce quality employment and therefore presented major challenges to the sustainability and inclusiveness of economic growth across all social-economic strata in the country.

Also, recent government economic programmes, vision and efforts are yet to translate into substantial social and human development indices for the citizens in the country, especially when contrasted to various development plans that produces faster economic growth while reducing poverty in other countries like Malaysia, India and Singapore. Nigeria's 2010 Poverty Profile Study by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2010) estimated the incidence of poverty stood at 69 per cent in 2010, rising up from 54.4 per cent in 2004, using the 2010 Harmonized National Living Standard Survey (HNLSS). The country's output is in contrast to the general international trend of poverty reduction indicator, especially in those countries that are experiencing rapid economic growth (Ajakaiye, O., A. Jerome, O. Olaniyan, K. Mahrt, and O. Alaba 2014).

Nigeria's socio-economic indicators are also weak. The unemployment rate grew from 23.9 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2014, while the country's human development index (HDI) rose by just 8.1 per cent in the last decade, from 0.466 in 2005 to 0.504 in 2013, putting the country at 152 out of 187 countries. Nigeria has made some progress in other growth metrics, although marginally. According to the UNDP (2014) HDI, which takes into account life expectancy and literacy as well as per capita GDP, life expectancy at birth increased by 6.9 years between 1980 and 2013, mean years of schooling increased by 0.2 years and predicted years of schooling by 2.3 years. Gross national income per capita has increased by around 25.7% between 1980 and 2013. The under listed theories of poverty are employed in this paper to further buttress the topic under review

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Individual Deficiency Theory**

This hypothesis relates poverty to human shortcomings. It is believed that the disadvantaged are responsible for developing their problems by lack of hard work and poor decisions. Some variants of this hypothesis attribute poverty to loss of such hereditary qualities, intellect, and even retribution from Heaven for sins committed. This can be applied in the sense of the Nigerian poverty study. Poverty has been compounded by the inability of some categories of people

to take responsibility for their fate in order to have a brighter future. Failure to learn appropriate skills and preparation may lead to a lack of job prospects and poverty. Analyzing how individuals make the wrong option that creates suffering, Dike (2009, p. 130) describes that the wrong attitude and behavior of young people in Nigeria towards technological and vocational subjects means that young people lack the skills and expertise to perform successfully in the very tight labour market and therefore to remain in the villages and cities from dawn onwards.

### **Progressive Social Theory**

Proponents of this theory see not individuals as a cause of poverty, but economic, political and social distortions, as well as inequality, which restrict opportunities and capital to build wealth and overcome poverty. The social scientists of the 19th century waged a complete assault on the individual poverty hypothesis by analyzing how social and economic processes overcome and produced individual poverty circumstances. They discuss how the capitalist structure of capitalism has created a surplus army of unemployed workers as a systematic tactic to keep incomes down (Bradshaw, 2005). They claim that people may work hard and have acceptable attitudes, but are still in the poverty trap due to broken social and economic structures.

The theory relates poverty to economic, social and political systems that make the poor fall behind, no matter how committed they might be. Another type of poverty-related framework flaws applies to categories of individuals who are discriminated against on the basis of personal characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, disability and faith, which, despite their personal potential, restrict their opportunities. Government policies and actions in Nigeria worsen poverty. They could be implemented in search of good intentions, but bad execution may make people poorer. The SAP and its numerous effects in the form of a major devaluation of the Naira, high inflation, factory closing, privatization, commercialization, appropriate prices of petroleum goods and an unregulated free market added to the poverty condition. Nigeria's political economy has added greatly to the country's level of poverty. There is a strong connection between the essence of government and the extent of poverty in Nigeria (Omoyibo, 2013).

### **Geographical Disparities Theory**

This theory focuses on poverty from a regional point of view, e.g. rural poverty, ghetto poverty, southern poverty, poverty in the Third World, etc. It calls attention to the fact that people, institutions and societies in certain countries do not have access to resources that provides opportunities. This concept is closely related to the urban agglomeration principle, which describes how the concentration of similar businesses draws supporting capital and markets that further draw more firms while poor communities cause more misery, while low household prices in these areas attract more people. This type of poverty can be resolved by urban expansion in deprived areas where poverty is widespread (Bradshaw, 2005).

This idea is valid in the Nigerian sense, where poverty is widespread in many geographical locations: rural regions, slums and areas vulnerable to natural disasters such as flooding, draughts and desertification. The level of economic development is poor, leading to high levels of unemployment and other sources of poverty. The gross neglect of rural areas in the provision of social services and empowerment opportunities by successive governments has led to a disparity and a broad gap between rural and urban dwellers resulting in challenges to rural – urban drift. Poverty remains large because states and societies have not used money and opportunities in deprived regions to enhance the well-being of the population. Food shortages, housing crises, low power production, fuel crises and other deprivation prevail in a world well-endowed with vast and arable land, rivers, waterfalls, mineral reserves and other resources that could reap enormous benefits if properly exploited. Populations of deprived communities are living in sub-human environments and are plagued by hardship and lack of resources to escape it.

## **NIGERIA'S PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES INSTITUTED TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN NIGERIA.**

Often times, the youths are at the fore-front of civil disturbances, violence and attacks as a means of expressing their anger and frustrations due to deteriorating conditions of life for them (Olowa, 2012). It is the quest to alleviate the growing poverty and accelerate youth empowerment that some certain strategic programmes were designed by the government as a panacea to addressing the problems of massive youth unemployment, juvenile delinquency, as well as manpower depletion. This paper looks into the following programmes to address poverty and youth capacity dissipation;

### **The National Poverty Eradication Programme**

This focuses on the provision of strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria. Introduced in early 2001, National Poverty Eradication Programme was complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Council which coordinates the poverty-reduction related programmes of all the relevant ministries, parastatal and agencies (Olowa, 2012).

**Youth Empowerment Scheme:** This focuses on capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprise promotion which are pivotal for developing the youth for productivity and entrepreneurship.

**Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme:** This deals with the provision of portable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power support (Obadan, 2002). This is to encourage the youths into medium and large-scale agricultural practice to boost food production in the political system. According to Ledford and Luca (2013), this improvement in food production will be very functional in totally alleviating poverty and dissipation of human capital resources.

### **Social Welfare Service Scheme:**

This focuses on special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centres, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development (Darwell, 2002), environment protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credit delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit, and maintenance culture.

### **Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme:**

Ironically, in spite of all the resources deployed to implement National Poverty Eradication Programme since 2001, absolute poverty still persists in Nigeria. National Poverty Eradication Programme was instituted with the primary objective of eradicating absolute poverty in Nigeria by 2010. Huge amounts of resources have been deployed through National Poverty Eradication Programme since 2001 till date to reduce poverty in Nigeria (Irobi, 2008). Unfortunately, the intensity and severity of the incidence of poverty and youth unemployment seem to have increased. According to NBS (2015), absolute poverty increased from 54.4% in 2004 to 60.9% in 2010. The inhabitants of some northern states languish in abject poverty and some parts of the south are becoming vulnerable to the poverty as well as youth restiveness (UNDP, 2014).

### **Why have efforts to end poverty fails in Nigeria?**

Warwick (2013) pointed out six reasons in explaining why conventional methods to eradicate poverty have been unsuccessful. The reasons are presented below:-

i. Most Nigerian poverty alleviation projects are designed by people wearing suits in air-conditioned workplaces. Many times, poverty alleviation program managers are outsiders who do not know or understand the native language of the people. Even if the anti-poverty projects are designed by the indigenous people of the world in which they are to be applied, they might not have an in-depth understanding of the needy.

ii. Anti-poverty efforts are also of a top-down nature hierarchy in Nigeria. Top-down development projects by states, non-governmental organisations or foreign partners are often counter-productive due to bureaucracy, bureaucratic bottlenecks and the distance between the planners and the intended beneficiaries.

iii. Efforts to reduce poverty have seldom been aimed at poor communities or at the obstacles they face. Rather than dealing directly with the needy, most of the attempts to end poverty have followed indirect approaches by trying to improve the economic climate rather than the poor.

iv. Give-aways give rise to dependency and self-doubt instead of social progress. It's difficult to donate people out of poverty; people need to spend their own time and resources to change their lot. Teaching a person to fish will not be the solution if the person in question is not concerned about fishing.

(v) There is seldom enough funds left for humanitarian assistance or philanthropy to extend active anti-poverty programs. Although the most promising and cost-effective traditional development programs that have a real impact on the vulnerable are unable to make strides toward poverty due to financial restrictions. This is why injustice remains in the face of a variety of attempts being made.

(vi) Anti-poverty efforts have been scattershot and uncoordinated; hence much progress is not achieved at the end of the programme.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopted a systematic analysis approach including a thorough review of previously published study papers in order to examine and synthesize the relevant details. The paper has used a number of secondary data points, including magazines, newspapers, websites, government documents and the related published works.

## **Discussion and Findings**

For a nation that is so richly fortunate, Nigeria's story of suffering is a shame for its people and outsiders. Successive regimes with incompetent, corrupt and irresponsible leadership have conspired to make the world a laughing stock of nations. Nigeria, as Africa's largest producer of crude oil and one of the world's biggest competitors, has little poverty-stricken industry. Tim Okon, former director of the world's oil behemoth, Nigeria's National Petroleum Corporation, said that the country gained nearly \$300 billion from oil sector between 2010 and 2014. Yet she became poorer than ever.

While other oil-producing countries especially in the Middle East, now boast of state-of-the-art infrastructure, Nigeria has remained decrepit and outdated. Norway, a Scandinavian oil-producing nation that launched its Sovereign Wealth Fund in 1996, was able to top the \$1tn mark as of September 2017. This makes Nigeria a non-starter with an investment of \$2 billion as of September 2017. Although Norway may have used the Fund to resolve any financial emergency, Nigeria had absolutely nothing to do with the contraction of the country's economy in 2016.

Inequality, exclusion and adverse incorporation are key drivers and maintainers of poverty. Inequality, which is generally defined as the proportion of, and gaps between, the rich and the poor, can exist and contribute to poverty in

a range of dimensions. Inequalities in income and other economic indicators, such as asset ownership, are often persistent, deeply rooted and typically a result of political forces that enable powerful groups to protect their wealth, and of market imperfections that make it difficult for those who have low incomes and low savings to accumulate capital. Importantly, then, in any society there is a generally positive relationship between high levels of income inequality and low school enrolment, low life expectancy, high fertility, corruption, insecure property rights and macroeconomic instability, which demonstrates the multidimensional impact of income inequality (Geoff Handley, Kate Higgins and Bhavna Sharma with Kate Bird and Diana Cammack 2009).

In addition, the federal government of Nigeria must create an investment friendly environment that encourages the development of the private sector and at the same time empowers vulnerable citizens to engage in that growth. Eradication of poverty would remain a mirage in Nigeria and in black Africa as a whole if there were no good governance. Democracy is not just the solution, it is engendered by visionary leaders. It must introduce human-oriented policies that reduced the misery of the people and put a lasting smile on the faces of the governed. Providing a healthy investment climate goes beyond good policies. It also requires the right institutions, good government, security and quality infrastructure.

## **Conclusion**

This paper concludes that at a time when coordinated efforts by policymakers around the world have seen global poverty taking a tumble, Nigeria has taken on the dubious distinction of replacing India as home to the largest number of the extremely poor. A recent research by the Brookings Institution found that Nigeria was the undisputed capital of global poverty, with some 87 million people living in severe poverty, rising to India, which now has 73 million. While the Democratic Republic of Congo is in third place with 60 million extremely poor citizens, the prediction is that India will be overtaken by Nigeria by the end of 2023. Obviously, this is another of the derogatory attribute that have characterized the picture of Nigeria in recent times. Nigeria has also been variously described as the "kidnap capital of the world" in the last decade or so.

No matter how diverse poverty can be the coping mechanisms converge into certain basic themes. The most popular is to augment one's income by farming, casual labour, trade, and other small business practices, etc. Nigeria's biggest poverty eradication initiative should be back to the farm i.e. agriculture. A family that cannot feed itself would either go without food or end up begging.

## **Recommendations**

From the foregoing, this paper recommend that Nigerian Government has to take bold actions to restore Nigeria's agriculture programme. Government may be active in a variety of areas. The federal and all state governments need to provide, inter alia, farmers with the requisite fertilizers and agricultural equipment, insecticides and high yielding crops. Experience has shown that when farmers are granted actual cash in the form of loans, those funds or cash are often transferred to other unproductive or non-farming practices.

The country will be split into at least 10 different zones. Based on suitability, each zone could be used for various kinds of crops, i.e. the Kwara/Oyo State Zone will be used for crops such as cassava, guinea corn, maize, etc., while the region around Benue could be used for crops such as yam. Infrastructure such as hostels, hospitals, highways, vehicles for transport to farms will be built in each sector, while hostels and hospitals will be built within the farms. These hostels and hospitals will run on their own as mini-villages. The government will also provide the requisite mechanized machinery in these areas, such as tractors, irrigation facilities, agricultural implements, etc.

It's time to come up with new solutions. It's time for Nigeria to do something differently. If the problem is fast population growth, there is no reason why it should not be addressed. But beyond that, if China and India will pull hundreds of people out of poverty, Nigeria could also find a way to do the same. In addition, the war against corruption has to be stepped up. A 2010 report by the Washington-based Global Financial Transparency found that \$854 billion was illegally moved from Africa in the 38 years to 2010. Of that, \$89.5 billion came from Nigeria. If this habit of unlawfully moving money abroad ceases, poverty will continue to stagnate across the continent.

*Suggestions for Further study:* This paper has not been exhaustive within the context under review. A further study of the topic including new dimensions and discoveries are recommended for deeper exploration, understanding and addition to the body of existing literature on the topic.



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