

Poverty in Uyo: Characteristics, Causes and Consequences

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Abstract: Uyo is the capital of Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria, it had an estimated population of 125,454 as at 1996. Uyo has a density of 2091 km⁻². Poverty in Uyo hits mostly young people of ages 10-20 years as most of them refuse to learn trade, practice any occupation or go to school. There is also presence of child labour. Causes of child labour include disproportional distribution of income, show of laziness and unwillingness to learn trade. Therefore, government among other things should provide good infrastructure and quality type of education, making it possible for every child of school age to attend school and in turn, reduce poverty.

Key words: Absolute poverty, longevity, health, literacy, co-habitation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

There is a problem of identifying who is poor. This may sound amusing. But the issue is that poverty incorporates absence or dearth of materials things and not necessarily the sum total of poverty. It is only the poor who knows what it means, what is involved, the characteristics and the denials of poverty. Definition of poverty has been with difficulty. It has varied with time, ages and discipline. According to Ekong (1991), Poverty is a concept that has defied universally accepted and objective definition or assessment because it is not only an expression of life situation but equally a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation.

Sometimes poverty is considered as the inability of an individual, a community or a nation to satisfactorily meet its basic needs (Burkey], 1994). Samuelson (1976) mentions three kinds of poverty: ancient poverty due to famine and inadequate production potentials unnecessary poverty in the midst of plenty due to bad purchasing power behavior of the system and poverty due to uneven and bad distribution of income and affluent GDP-poverty amidst plenty.

Others view poverty in part as a function of education, quality of health, life expectancy, etc. (Streeten, 1979; Blackwood and Lynch, 1994; Anyanwu, 1997). Equally poverty could be seen as a consequence of deprivation and denials of right, weak earning capacity and control of resources. McConnell (1975) says the poor are heterogeneous, they can be found in all geographical regions, they may be white or non-white, urban people or rural and they may be both young and old. Poverty is one of the main symptoms or manifestations of

underdevelopment and its reduction is generally considered synonymous with development (Karaosmanoglu, 1989; Salmen, 1992). Even then, pockets of absolute poor are not rare observations in the so-called affluent societies.

Uyo has an estimated population of 125,454 in 1996 (Inyang, 2000a). It has a total area of 60 km² and covers a radius of 3 km². By some calculation, Uyo has a density of 2091 persons km⁻² and by some measurement, it is densely populated area. Uyo first became District Headquarters in 1905 and by 1917, Uyo was classified a third class township. In 1957, it became the headquarters of Uyo Federated County Council and in 1965, it was granted an urban status. On September 27, 1987 Uyo became a State capital of Akwa Ibom State and also doubles as the headquarters of Uyo Local Government.

THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Measurement of poverty: To measure poverty, a fundamental requirement is some measure of standard of living (both the direct consumption aspects and the basic needs/non-consumption aspects) in order to distinguish between different individuals, households and countries from each other.

Again there is need to identify the poverty line (Ravallion and Happi, 1991; Kanbur, 1990). There are some forms of measurement of absolute poverty. Absolute poverty connotes a situation where the poor is unable to meet basic needs of life. The measurements are the headcount ratios/incidence of poverty, the poverty gap/income shortfall, disparity of income distribution, the physical quality of life index and the human development index (Anyanwu, 1997).

The headcount ratios/incidence of poverty: This is the number or the ratio of the number (or percentages) of poor individuals to the total number of individuals in the population. It could be symbolically stated as:

$$H = P_o = \frac{q}{n} \quad (1)$$

Where:

H = The headcount

q = Number of people below the poverty line

n = Total number of people in population

This measure indicates the number of people living in poverty. But it does not measure how deep the poverty.

The poverty gap/income shortfall: This measures the difference between the poverty line and the mean income of the poor, expressed as a ratio of the poverty line. The average income shortfall I measures the amount of income required to raise the income of the average poor up to the poverty line. Considering for instance Ya to be the average income of the poor and Z is the poverty line, then the measure of the depth of poverty i.e., the income gap ratio is:

$$1 = \frac{z - ya}{z} = 1 - \frac{ya}{z} \quad (2)$$

Combining Eq. 1 and 2, the quantum of income required to bring the total number of the poor to the poverty line could be obtained. The income gap ratio only presents a good indication of the depth of poverty but not sensitive to the distribution of the standard of living indicator among the poor. It does not grasp the severity of poverty.

This concerns with the distribution of income among the poor themselves not the population. The Lorenz curve and the Gini coefficient provide instruments of measurement. The Lorenz curve is a graphical representation of the relationship between the cumulative share of income (measured on the horizontal axis) and the cumulative percentage of the population of the poor (measured on the vertical axis).

The extent to which a Lorenz curve deviates from the line of equal distribution indicates the degree of inequality. The further the curve swings away, the greater the inequality (Harper, 1977). Conversely, the Gini coefficient (G) measures income inequality based on the Lorenz curve. It is the ratio of the area bounded by the Lorenz curve and the 45° line to the total area between the 45° reference line and the horizontal axis (Anyanwu, 1997).

$$G = \frac{\text{Area between the Lorenz curve and the diagonal line}}{\text{Total area between the diagonal line and horizontal axis}}$$

Where: $0 \leq G \leq 1$

Coefficient of zero indicates equality in income distribution, while coefficient greater than zero means different levels of inequality.

The Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI): The PQLI traces its origin to Morris (1994). It was devised as a reaction to the use of per capita gross national product and a recognition that there was no perfect relationship between per capita income and other indicators such as longevity, health and literacy. However, PQLI does not incorporate all components of development, nor does it measure such variables as freedom, justice, security or other intangible like happiness. The PQLI is based on three variables; infant mortality, life expectancy and basic literacy. Therefore,

$$PQL = f(im, e, lit)$$

Where:

im = Infant mortality

e = Life expectancy

lit = Literacy

The indices formed from these three variables are summed up and an average found to give the PQLI (Physical Quality of Life Index):

$$PQLI = \frac{(IMI + el + litI)}{3}$$

Where:

IMI = Infant mortality index

el = Life expectancy index

litI = Literacy index

However, Simonis (1991) considered PQLI, a limited measure of quality of life and suggests an Augmented Physical Quality of Life Index (APQLI). APQLI took into consideration some indices like health status, gender, defence effort, demography, etc.

Human Development Index (HDI): The HDI is a recent measurement of human development devised by the United Nations Development Programme. The index focuses on human development. It is people centred as the primary objective of development is people. Its measurement includes income and non-income factors. Three factors-longevity, knowledge and income are the

emphasized variables of index. Longevity is measured by life expectancy at birth (e_0). Literacy data are used as the measuring rod of knowledge. Income is proxied by per capita income. Hence:

$$\text{HDI} = f(e_0, \text{lit}, Y)$$

Where:

- e_0 = Life expectancy at birth
- lit = Literacy rate
- Y = Per capita income

CHARACTERISTICS OF POVERTY IN UYO

Uyo may be described as an urban area and therefore could share some common features or characteristics of poverty prevalent in urban centres. Comparing the urban poor with the rural poor, literature tilts to emphasize deeper severity of poverty in rural areas than urban. But there is one missed observation in this comparison. That is the extended family and knitted closed relationship syndrome is vehemently present in rural areas than urban centres. And therefore, sharing incidence of poverty among family members lessens the burden of poverty in rural areas than in urban centres where such phenomenon is almost absent.

Poverty in Uyo hits mostly young people of ages 10-20, mostly those who have refused to learn any trade, practice any occupation or go to school. Closely followed are some other unemployed youth some of whom are secondary school leavers and young graduates who have completed their National Youth Service Corp assignment but yet to find jobs. In the other class are the retired pensioners who have refused to return to their villages (non-Uyo natives) and whose gratuities and pension are not forthcoming who stay and face the incessant embarrassment from their selfish and heartless landlords.

Poverty in urban areas as well as in Uyo has compelled some young girls going into immoral relationship or co-habitation with the opposite sex, the end result of which is pregnancy in most cases this leads to the incidence of runaway fathers and thus raising the vector of single parenthood. Single parent poverty—mostly single female family head poverty is commonplace Uyo, thereafter increasing and cementing vicious circle of poverty. Able boys and girls roam motor parks and other parks without any reasonable responsibility. Most of them constitute nuisance in the name of park touting. This is an ugly development any government at Federal State and Local level is unable to put paid to. Closely followed is the area boys syndrome who go about creating problems, causing fights, produce troubles and

manufacture confusions and capitalize on these conditions to dupe, shoplift or pilfer whatever is of interest to them. There is also the prevalence of punitive child labour or perhaps child slavery. Lest we offend norms, child labour is an acceptable phenomenon when the kind of labour is one that is appropriate, commensurate and suitable for the child's age. Whether this is assigned to the child by parents, mistress or master, it prepares the child for responsible life in future. But when the child is assigned a more burdensome job of doing whatever, selling whatever, setting targets of sale, missing which attracts punishment with sole aim of making ends meet then this action is underpinned by poverty, summarizing to child slavery.

Poor feeding arrangement is observable almost everywhere. Most poor operate 0-1-0 or 0-0-1 which means eating only once either in the afternoon (lunch) a whole day or in the evening (super). Here, the quality of food is not assigned any weight. Interestingly, those that produce the food are road side food vendors, mostly in the evenings. Little or no hygienic attention is paid to conditions under which these foods are served.

In terms of housing, the poor cramp themselves about five or more into a single room of an average size 12×12. The causes of this are inadequate income to rent more spacious accommodation and the dearth of accommodation to go round. Access to clean water is not ascertained as water corporation supply water intermittently and scantily. Private borehole water supply is expensive and quality is not guaranteed. Most of the poor live in slumps.

Considering the general business atmosphere, most engage in service trade, performing very menial trading of doubtful income even to feed the trader and some young men that are assisted operate motor-cycle economy. There is the presence of street begging, some youths accepting any kind of jobs with poverty income that cannot feed the employee while some express willingness to serve as house boys or girls. Most urban poor turn to quacks when seeking health care. The causes are:

- Public hospitals lack drugs
- Private hospitals are expensive
- The poor lack income
- The quacks charge comparatively less

THE UYO ECONOMY AND CAUSES OF POVERTY

The Uyo economy: In the face of technology, geographical and vegetational influence play roles in shaping an economy of any place. Uyo has an average rainfall of

2816 mm a year (Inyang, 2000b). And rainfall is a strong explanatory variable (among others) in determining vegetation. Uyo soil could generally be described as humid and belongs to the Palm Belt vegetational zone. Uyo has seasonal lakes (ndioho). It becomes conspicuous during rainy seasons. Activities associated here include fishing, frog hunting and possibly fish farming (Inyang, 2000a; Essien, 1990).

According to Akpan (1987) in 1985, Uyo had 21 livestock farmers, farming in 80 goats, 110 sheep and 13 cattle. Among the livestock farmers, the per capita livestock came to 3.8, 5.2 and 0.6 for goats, sheep and cattle, respectively. Relating the same measurement to the population of Uyo as at 1996 which is 125454, summarizes to 0.0006, 0.0008 and 0.0001 for goats, sheep and cattle corresponding.

In 1987, there were 120 tailors, 73 iron workers, 20 electrical workers, 1 goldsmith, 17 printers, 22 photographers, 72 motor cycle repairers, 83 carpenters, 12 artists, 20 shoemakers, 43 mechanics, 18 clock repairers, 13 radio/TV repairers and 25 bicycle repairers in Uyo (Akpan, 1987). There is need to comment on some of the statistics. From 1987 to date Uyo has grown in capacity as state capital. But generally, measuring different forms of occupation so far enumerated and compare with Uyo population clearly depicts laziness or unwillingness in learning trade. There are some trade practitioners that have reduced in number as at date, this include, motor cycle repairers (even though the number of motorcycle users have increased), carpenters, clock repairers and bicycle repairers. Others have increased and they include, tailors, photographers, electrical workers and mechanics. In terms of farming, Udoh says that urban farming in Uyo is practiced by women. About 20% of farmers had their farms near their living area, 5% cultivate lands around their court yards and 61% cultivate abandoned underdeveloped plots. The number of farmers who farm on underdeveloped plots sheds light on the level of economic development of Uyo. The farm size ranges from 200 m^2 to >math>800\text{ m}^2</math>.

Over 60% of farmers had plot size of 200 m^2. Certainly in spite of good quality soil, the high density in Uyo town (2091 persons km^{-2}) inhibits any meaningful farming. The types of crop raised according to Udo by 82% of the farmers are mostly vegetables (fluted pumpkins and water leaf) and the remaining 18% mix with maize cultivation.

Industrially, Uyo produces basically nothing at any tangible level except the champion beer. The implication of this is that Uyo traders cart large sums of money out

from Uyo on daily basis to trade at places like Aba, Port Harcourt, Onitsha and Lagos while non of such money comes to Uyo on equal basis daily. This unidirectional trade covers things like edible items, garri, yam, etc. to durable consumables. The two markets at Ewet and Urua Akpan Andem serve for outlets for selling these items. Earlier mentioned Uyo operates motor cycle and service trade economy. Indeed there is no very well-known or outstanding importer/exporter in Uyo.

CAUSES OF POVERTY IN UYO

Poverty is not only caused by the individual poor but some exogenous factors also contribute to it. One of such exogenous factors is distribution of income not only among the poor but among the population. Distribution of income could be viewed from two perspectives; the fiscal distribution of income and provision of both social and economic infrastructure. In Nigeria as a whole, the practice of relative wage income hypothesis where jobs are evaluated on the basis of job content and wages are paid correspondingly is not applicable. This is also true of Uyo, the state capital of Akwa Ibom State, an issue relating to underemployment. At all levels of government, incomes are shared among the politicians, political cohorts and dubious contractors. The other face is government's reluctance at all levels too, to provide infrastructure.

There is no good road network, (however, there is road improvement now) which impoverishes car owners through going to mechanics each time their cars are put on the road. Lack of drugs in government hospitals, lack of electricity, expensive education, expensive transport brought about by the so-called removal of subsidy from petrol are all pro-poverty. These actions not only cause poverty but perpetuate it.

Poverty in Uyo is caused through most of the youth demonstrating unwillingness to learn trade, show of laziness and some who decide to learn trade terminate it mid-way. Skill acquisition is not pursued with vigour. Most still search for non-existent white collar jobs because Uyo economy is not industrial oriented neither is large scale farming possible because of high density therefore poverty has to persist. The state is often described as a civil service state and income multiplier effects in such states is minimal.

Uyo, like other urban centres continue to attract rural-urban drift, putting pressure on skeletal facilities leading to increased poverty. Few who are in commercial business refuse to pool their resources together for lack of trust

and therefore are unable to practice the business at a level they enjoy economies of scale. Some lack business acumen and sound sense of management and entrust their businesses to servants who ensure that they rob the business to stand still.

There is exploitative/fraudulent tendencies exhibited by most of the business class. This practice does not guarantee long term survival of business, as customership remains the soul of business.

Gratuities and pensions are not paid to retirees. Some of them have retired but not tired. Such money could be used in pursuing any business of their interest to reduce poverty. Lack of vibrant private sector amplifies poverty in Uyo. Those who claim they do business, end up their businesses in the government house. It is vibrant private sector that generates both employment and large scale income multiplier effects. Uyo buys everything including toothpick. Lack of capital contributes to poverty.

The cost of capital today is very high in the money market and cannot support projects of long periods of gestation. Those who afford capital become extremely risk averse and rather approach life hedonistically. Some people pin their hopes of beating poverty in politics and once politics fails, there is unwillingness to try something else.

CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY

First and foremost a major consequence of poverty is vicious poverty itself. Once poverty is not broken or halted it spreads wider than its previous level with time. Poverty causes lack of regard for constituted authorities. Poverty breeds hunger. A hungry man is an angry man. There is increasing thwarting of good efforts (if any) in provision of some social amenities, e.g., vandalizing of NEPA property, removing of some water pipes and sometimes outright up-roofing of government buildings especially abandoned projects, sometimes just to put body and soul together.

Some youths turn to political touting and tugs and unfortunately find unbelievable patronage from politicians who are expected to work towards breeding responsible citizens. Armed robbery, bribes and lives of insincerity and insecurity pervade the society as well as Uyo at an unprecedented level. These actions could not completely divorce itself from poverty. Recently there is incidence of kidnapping which is difficult to say whether it is political or poverty driven.

Many youths and able bodied men fraternize with palm wine joints or spots, pretending to drink away their frustration brought about by poverty, even now that education is free in Akwa Ibom State from primary school

to secondary school. Many children of school age (of the poor) stay at home without attending schools, meaning a bleak future of breaking away from poverty. There is a very high level of proliferation of churches in Uyo, most of them are founded on economic reasons with intent to beat poverty than truly propagate the gospel of Christ. Some poverty stricken landlords in Uyo increase their rents almost on quarterly basis and subject their tenants to frequent embarrassment. Indeed, starvation, retarded mentality, loss of social status, denial of rights and discontent in life are all parts of consequences of poverty.

CONCLUSION

The negative spillover effects of poverty can adversely affect the rich. Therefore, it is reasonable to do everything to reduce poverty. This research has made some suggestions toward reduction of poverty in Uyo. It is believed that if the implementation of the suggestions are done outside the court of corruption, discernible results could be observed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Tella (1997), if we attack poverty purely from the economists' viewpoint, without identifying the avenues of corruption, we shall overlook one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria. Individual motivation, aptitudes and abilities are cultural matters, while bad leadership and lack of revolutionary consciousness on the part of followers constitute political causes affecting the economy.

Government has a towering role to play in course of reduction of poverty in Nigeria, so also Uyo. Governments command reasonable quantum of resources, that if properly channeled can cause positive changes. Infrastructure should be provided by government. Good road network, adequate and steady electricity, affordable communication system, dependable health care system, qualitative and affordable education and security of lives and property are all non-negotiable conditions if poverty is to be reduced.

There is need to emphasize the quality and type of education. Qualitative technical oriented education should be pursued with emphasis placed on practical capabilities than paper certificate. Emphasis is for the graduate to use his hands.

Literature abound with countless poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria but none has worked. The cause is corruption. The benefit capture syndrome (Ekong, 1997) has never allowed any programme to work.

The state government should go into partnership with willing and able entrepreneurs to establish small and medium size industries in Uyo. There are a number of raw materials available in the state (Akpabio, 1991). The state can also partner with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and cause fine tuning of their operationalities to suit Akwa Ibom condition. Nothing is wrong running industrial short course training for at least 18 months for the youths. The idea is to observe individual youth's interest and capabilities and assist him to establish a business of his interest. Some ailing industries in the state e.g., Qua Steel Mill, Quality Ceramics and Pamol Industries etc., should be reactivated. It will not cost government a fortune to bring them back to work but it demands prudence and sincerity of purpose.

Government can assist in making capital available to willing and committed industrialists in Uyo. The necessity of this is informed by the high cost of capital prevalent in money market. Such monies could be borrowed at reduced cost to establish industries. Business men in Uyo should learn to formulate guides that assist them to pool their resources together to operate business at a higher level and enjoy economies of scale, agency cost notwithstanding (Adawo, 1996).

Efforts should be made by government to collect dependable statistics in area of informal sector. This sector has near-limitless capacity to absorb migrants. The informal sector should be assisted to generate employments for the youth. Uyo is a compacted capital city with very high density where a large scale agricultural development is difficult. Uyo needs to develop industrially to reduce poverty.

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