

Rural Poverty and its Implication for Regional Planning in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Poverty is a state of being poor, being deprived from opportunities as a results of several factors and a state of inequality. It is a situation of low income or low consumption, Jamison and Lau the situation when the resources of families or individuals are inadequate to provide a socially acceptable standard of living. People all over the world should not be allowed to become so poor that they offend or are hurtful to society. It is not so much misery and plight of the poor but the discomfort and cost to the community which is crucial to this view of poverty. In Nigeria for example, the problem of poverty is all over to the extent that low income creates problems for those who are not poor. In this research, the poverty situation and various ways through which the cankerworm has manifested in Ekiti State, the case study, was looked into. The research work employs Orthodox Western views, Marxian theoretical formulations and other social Scientists view to conceptualize the phenomenon. It examines the causes of poverty in Ekiti State and looks into the prospects of poverty in Ekiti State.

Key words: Orthodox, Ekiti State, conceptualize, community, consumption

INTRODUCTION

Poverty remains one of the most pressing issues in Nigeria developments. It has not only become entrenched and multifaceted over decades, but has also continued to elude efforts made at eradicating it. Poverty connotes a living standard below the acceptable level^[1]. The concept of poverty is broad and very elusive, this is because it affects many aspects of the human conditions, including physical, moral and psychological. Poverty could be as a result of insufficient income for securing basis goods and services. Infact, the poor have been described as the proportion of the population that is unable to meet basis nutritional needs^[2].

Today, the evidence of poverty is seen in Nigeria and in Ekiti State in particular. The situation is apparent when people are unable to have three meals, unable to afford a decent home, unable to have potable water at home for safe drinking, unable to afford children fees and even, unable to afford medical expenses of the family. According to Jamison and Lau^[3], it is a situation when the resources of families or individual are inadequate to provide a socially acceptable standard of living.

Further, Sen^[4], related poverty to entitlements which are taken to be the various bundles of goods and services over which one has command, taking into cognizance, the means by which such goods are acquired (for example,

money and coupons) and the availability of the needed goods. Yet, other experts see poverty in very broad term, such as being unable to meet 'basis needs-(Physical; food, health care, education, shelter etc and non physical: participation, identity etc) requirements for a meaningful life^[5].

Considering the situation in Nigeria, Olayemi likens poverty to elephant which is more recognized than defined. It demonstrates the growing unemployment, mismanagement of available resources, technological backwardness, low capacity utilization and the predominance of African economy which leaves the citizens to live a low standard of life. In line with Olayemi's^[6] perception of poverty above, Anyanwu^[7] gave a broad perception of poverty as being reflected in Nigeria today. According to him, poverty is metamorphosed in Nigeria in these areas. When households or individuals below the poverty line and whose incomes are insufficient to provide for their basic needs, households or individuals, lacking access to basic services, political contracts and other forms of support, people in isolated rural areas who lack essential infrastructures; female headed households whose nutritional needs are not being met adequately, persons who have lost their jobs and those who are unable to find employment as a result of economic reforms and those who are in danger of becoming, the 'new poor' due to

retrenchment or retirement, gender minorities especially women who are marginalized, deprived and persecuted economically, socially, culturally and politically and households with higher level of poverty among farming workers.

Poverty situation in Ekiti State: In Ekiti State, the study area, poverty manifests in all facets of life social, economic, political and cultural. It is not gainsaying that in Ekiti State, it is still rampant that people, especially at the rural suburbs are not able to cater adequately for the basic needs of food, clothes and shelter, obligations, lack gainful employment, skills and have limited access to social and economic infrastructures such as economic, health, potablewater and sanitation and consequently, limited chance of advancing welfare capabilities.

Moreover, the situation is manifested in Ekiti State when there are inadequate access to the means of supporting rural development, inadequate access to market for goods and services that the poor can sell, low endowment of human capital, destruction of natural resources endowments; inadequate access to assistance for those living at the margin and those victimized by transitory poverty because of droughts, storms, floods and pest. There is inadequate participation of the poor in the design of development programmes; coupled with poor maintenance culture or the failure to retain and maintain existing structures.

Falegan^[8] sees the situation in Ekiti State as an all embracing definition, when he sympathetically views that “in the year 2001, you still see women (the most hard-hit and yet most enterprising) carrying firewood, farm inputs and products on their heads and walking five and eight kilometers of roads to reach their homes and markets to sell their farm products”. He sees it as poverty of a vivid dimension. Furthermore, Falegan^[8] sees poverty in Ekiti State beyond mere inadequate resources, lack of knowledge of personal human rights according to him, poverty include lack of exposure to the outside world and the new frontiers of human endeavours and application, which make us un-innovative and lack necessary resources to simple basic technology and initiative. In general, he identifies six characteristics of poverty.

- Skill and management constraints;
- Low productivity;
- Market imperfection;
- Physical and environmental inhibition and degradation;
- Attitudinal and inadequate commitment to programme implementation and
- Corruption;

A close study of his analysis of his characteristics makes it desirable to revisit his thesis on the scourge of Poverty Around Us”. Apparently, from the exposition above, it is easy to identify the poor and its composition.

Theoretical background and literature review: Various theories have been advanced in order to put in proper perspective the mechanism of poverty. The Orthodox Western views of poverty, reflected in the ‘vicious circle’ hypothesis stating that a poor person is poor because he is poor And may remain poor, unless the person’s income level increases significantly enough to pull the person in question out of the poverty trap. To the classical school of thought, such improvement can only be real and sustained, if and only if, the population growth is checked and the limits of growth” are eliminated. Further, the early classical theorists, in the attempt to illustrate the concept of poverty based their analytical framework in the laws of diminishing returns which was believed to be universal in content.

Understanding the nature of poverty, perhaps received a boost following Marxian theoretical formulation largely based on the principle of exploitation of labour. Marxian theoretical formulation presents the economy as ultimately polarized into a rich capitalist and the masses made up of the poor miserable workers. Technological progress, it was argued, would be labour saving, resulting in displacement of workers to join the reserve army of the unemployed, whose presence depresses the wage level.

Social scientist and others have tried to conceptualize the phenomenon of poverty. Poverty can be conceptualized in four ways; these are lack of access to basic needed goods, a result of lack of or impaired access to productive resources; out come of inefficient use of common resources and result of “exclusion mechanism”. Poverty as lack of access to basic needs/goods is essentially economic or consumption oriented. It explains poverty in material terms and specifically employs consumption-based categories to explain the extent and depth of poverty and establish who is and who is not poor. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households, in a particular society, in capable of purchasing basic goods and services. Basic goods and nutrition, shelter/housing, water, health care, access to production resources including education, working skill and tools political and civil right to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions^[9].

The first three are the basic needs/goods necessary for survival. Impaired access to productive resources (agricultural land, physical, capital and financial) lead to absolute low income, unemployment, undernourishment, etc. Inadequate endowment of human capital is also a

major cause of poverty. Generally, impaired access to resources shifts the forms on poverty and it curtails the capability, of individual to convert available productive, resources to a higher quality of life^[4].

According to Ajakaiye and Adeyeye^[10], poverty can also be the outcome of inefficient use of common resources. This may result from weak policy environment, inadequate infrastructure and weak access to technology among others. It can be due to a certain group using, certain mechanism in the system to exclude problem group' from participating in economic development, including the democratic process.

Silver^[11] opined that poverty can be structural (chronic) or transient. The former is defined as persistent or permanent socio-economic deprivation and is linked to a host of factors such as limited productive resource, lack of skill for gainful and cultural factors and gender. The latter is defined to natural and man-made disasters. Transient poverty is more reversible but can become structural if persists.

Furthermore, in conceptualizing poverty, Akeredolu-Ale,^[12] shifted in "individual attributes theory". This theory holds that the poor in the society are the architects of their misfortune. The argument of this theory is that the position of an individual in the society's hierarchy of income and wealth is assumed to be determined mainly by that individual's motivations, aptitudes and ability. The extension of this theory asserts that these attributes operate only within a structure of possibilities and constraints defined by forces outside the scope of the individual.

Another theory in conceptualizing poverty is the natural circumstantial theory^[13]. The focus of this theory is the identification of certain important explanatory variables such as geographical location and the natural endowment of individuals, unemployment and old age as factors responsible for poverty.

In conceptualizing poverty therefore, low income or low consumption is its symptom. This has been used for the construction of poverty lines-values of income or consumption necessary to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition and other necessities of life. People are therefore counted poor, when their measured standard of living in terms of income or consumption is below the conceived poverty line.

Causes of poverty in Ekiti State: There are many causes of poverty in Ekiti State and Nigeria in general. The causes of poverty in our environment could be attributed to social, economic political environmental and mismanagement and looting of public treasury. Socio-economic factors: The factor could be explained in

that aside from book knowledge in Ekiti State, there is little or no venture capital' taking risks in the unknown and be innovative or business ideas. There is lack of exposure which constrains the risk-taking and innovative instinct. The people operate within the narrow confines of routine employment of teaching and preaching and other roadside functions in which the people were not even venturesome and innovative.

Business is virtually non-existent in terms of professionalism, manpower, skilled labour employment generation financial and technical management. Lack of industries big, medium or small scale make application of modern technology impossible. Where such skills are locally trained, they quickly migrate out of the state because of lack of employment or over-qualification for local employment and industrial level^[9]. The people lack of exposure to the outside world and new frontiers of human endeavour and application makes the people un-innovative and responsive un-innovative and responsive to simple basic technology and initiative. Everybody sits down waiting for government charity fund without wanting to contribute any counterpart funding as personal stakes.

Physical and environmental factors: It is not uncommon to note that people in the state depend on the surrounding environment for its employment income and survival, including its fertile and rich soil for food, it's first for firewood and logging, streams for drinking water and plants for medicines. Yet these endowments were turned to weakness through neglect and wrong utilization, which make the environment to be vulnerable to pollution of air, water and expose the people to poor sanitation and deadly diseases trees were felled indiscriminately for money without a conscious policy of afforestation. Indiscriminate felling of trees has led to deforestation and soil erosion as being witnessed in some parts of the state. As a result of constant felling of trees in the state this equally led to severe wind storm during which houses and other valuables are destroyed.

Moreover, environmental degradation is a cause of accentuated poverty in Nigeria and Ekiti State the case study, poverty itself can be a cause of environmental degradation. This reverse causality stems from the fact that for poor people in poor states as in Ekiti State, a number of environmental resources are complementary in production and consumption to other goods and services while a number of environmental resources supplement income most especially in time of acute economic stress^[14,15]. As earlier mentioned, an erosion of the environmental resources base can make certain categories of people destitute even while the economy on average grows^[16].

In Ekiti State for example, inaccessibility of the poor to credit and resource inputs leave them with no choice, other than to exploit natural resources such as forest, woodlands and rivers to survive. Quite often, their continuous exploitation of these resources has led to depletion and environmental degradation resulting in ecological distress. In most of the rural areas in Ekiti State, fallow duration has declined from five to four years and in several instances as low as two years. Short fallow period is usually not adequate for regeneration of vegetation and the restoration of host nutrients. Soil and water quality are therefore quickly depleted. Among the poor, frequent cutting of forest trees with low replanting rate has resulted in scarcity of fuel wood.

Also, scarcity of fuel woods. Forced women to make what is available. The incessant cutting down of trees for firewood and charcoal has hindered prospect for increased yield and hastened the prospect of the creeping desert while exploitation of environment due to poverty are depletion of fish in the local rivers and streams.

Mismanagement of public treasuring and looting: This is perhaps the main cause of poverty in Ekiti State. Mismanagement and large-scale looting of public funds are rampant in the State. Though, the mismanagement and looting of public treasuring have manifested in all levels of government in Nigeria. For example, in 1996, it was revealed that in the middle of that year, the sum of 98.8 billion United States dollar was lodged in foreign accounts by Nigeria^[1] Besides, there has been uncontrolled spending in the public service without accountability. Infact, at a stage, no government pronouncement discouraged corrupt practices. Figures of money recovered from the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha, for example, reveals the level of corruption and lack of accountability such as a loot by 'privileged' Nigerians of our resource has not helped the course of the average poor citizen of the country.

In Ekiti State, the case study, case of looting and mismanagement of public funds are common. The government and some of top civil servants engaged as a means of employment what could be termed "robber industry" as revealed in the dailies^[17], such form of robber industry takes the forms: contracts are inflated and/or awarded to incompetent hands against established procedures or to contractors using inferior and sub-standard materials for monetary reward, there is monetary loss to government and service loss and performance to the civil society.

The effect of the above is that the state directly suffers huge monetary loss several times the cost of the advantages, benefits or facilities enjoyed by the public officials from the corrupt practice. The consequence as revealed by the daily news papers. Punch^[17] The Nation^[18]

has its telling effects on the economy of the state especially how those who were initially opposed to the creation of state, rushed in to catch-in to stall good governance and transparency in the decision-making process for personal gains. By such corrupt practices, income inequality is increased and poverty is further aggravated by reducing economic growth. The level of effectiveness of social spreading is reduced, while the formation of human capital is stunted when resources available for projects are inadequate and inappropriate.

Prospects of poverty in Ekiti State: Poverty is not associated with women and children alone, this is because what affects a member of a family affects all others in the family. Therefore strategic measures that, if effectively handled, can change the circumstances of those already concluded to be born poor. The following recommendations are recommended as means of reducing poverty in Ekiti State. Good governance and proper accountability. This is an effective way of alleviating poverty in the State. Good governance with proper accountability and transparency with firm commitment to place poverty alleviation at the forefront of its development strategy. Three types of accountability necessary for sustainable development are crucial here. They are fiscal, managerial and programme accountability. Fiscal accountability requires the accounting system to prescribe procedure to ensure that applicable laws and regulation are followed; the financial records and records are accurate; and they are represent a fair result of government operations.

Managerial accountability, on the other hand, is the need to provide essential information for the use of managers, ensuring efficiency and economy of operations, avoiding waste and the like. Programme accountability deals with evaluation of programme effectiveness through the use of performance audits and monitoring and evaluation teams to find out whether a programme or activity is achieving the intended goals.

One effective way towards poverty alleviation is to achieve significant level of youths employment. This, apart from improved economic well being, it reduces considerably the incidence of crime committed by youths.

Moreover, effective and efficient provision of social amenities (road networks, electricity, water supply, waste disposal service) to improve the quality of life of the people. While economic policies that promote growth and sectoral productivity are the driving force that can generate opportunities for the poor, the level of investment in the human capital of the poor is a critical accompanying step here are: To improve the level of mutual (support and co-ordination among the tiers of government in the increased investment and efficient provision of health, education and infrastructures.

In education, Ekiti State is noted for the best. This should be vigorously sustained. There should be improvement in the quality, accessibility to all categories, financing (real per capital expenditure), monitoring and evaluation. Programmes in these higher institutions in the state should be redesigned. The higher institutions in the state should be involved in programmes aimed at developing the state in the area of technological advancement, town planning, transportation system etc. They should provide alternatives and better options in the state for the environments that are crying for development and improvement.

In health sector, the problems of inadequate access to services, poor quality care, lack of drugs, unpredictable budgetary allocations, a non-functional referral system and inappropriate resource distributions will have to be checked. Financing and resource distribution (for example, per capital expenditure) should be improved while improved management, public inter government and public private coordination of health services are pertinent.

For water supply, the steps to take are to vastly increase the resource devoted to its provision, maximize community participation in identifying, planning and maintaining low cost water supply system, as well as efficient maintenance, training and technical assistance. The present situation where by government is using water tankers to distribute water should be discouraged. Instead, sinking of boreholes into various wards across the state should be encouraged.

On roads, though the present government under the leadership of Dr. Ayo Fayose is trying but there is need to vastly increase the flow of resources for roads with emphasis on regular maintenance (relying on private sector and community based organisations) inter-governmental coordination, increase access to credit so that private operators can renew and expand their vehicle fleets by removing credit targets and liberalizing interest rates for the purpose. Subsidised busloans should be phased out as they are expensive to government. The private sector should provide all vehicle services and repairs while the state transport corporation "Ekiti Kete Transport Corporation" should be commercialized and eventually, privatized.

Furthermore, there should be more establishments of small scale industries to generate employment opportunities. These industries should be located where they can best utilized the available natural resources in the localities. The development of cottage and small scale is an effective means of poverty reduction. With the abundance of agricultural resources, the development of agro-based industries will thrive well with such

advantages as: Guaranteeing additional employment, developing inventions, adaptation and general technological development resulting in capacity building towards poverty alleviation. There should be necessary effort towards controlling population explosion within the households. Couples should be encouraged to rear only children they can properly take care. With the current population growth rate of three percent which far outstrips per capita income growth rate of 1.2 % per annum, there is need for effective reduction in population growth rate through indirect measures of better education and health policies.

Above all, the present World Bank project through the Ekiti State Community Poverty Eradication Agency (EKCPRA) should be embraced. Ekiti State is one of the six states in the federation to receive World Bank assistance on macro economic significance towards poverty reduction. It is a non-governmental Community-Based Organization (CBO). Communities are expected to enjoy specific facilities on demand, based on self-identified common needs. Identified project require the participation of such communities by contributing ten percent of the cost of such projects. Such projects may include water supply, health services, educational service or other projects of common interest and capable of reducing poverty. The state should make use of the opportunity of EKCPRA before the agency wind-off its activities in the state.

CONCLUSION

From the research work, one could see that poverty in all its ramifications is ravenous, a cankerworm which must be dealt away in any society. It is a complex, long-standing and multifaceted issue which entrenched itself at national, regional, community, house hold and individual levels, hence, a concerted effort of government, individuals and non-governmental organization as well as religious institutions should be employed in its reduction.

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