REVITALISING AGRICULTURE: A PANACEA FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty is a dreaded condition of human existence, where resources for meeting basic and essential human needs for survival and sustenance are extremely limited and inaccessible. This paper has enumerated the causes and effects of this monster called Poverty. This problem despite successive government efforts in Nigeria at alleviating it, rather than abate is proving intractable. This paper therefore recommended a revitalized agriculture as the way out of this ugly scenario because of its multi-dimensional approaches that will bring about manpower development those who would harness the nations naturally endowed agricultural resources in order to bring about food security, generate employment, income for farmers, foreign exchange earnings, establishment of agro-allied industries, reduce crimes and at a long run national development.

Half a century after the pledge to abolish hunger and poverty, millions of people with their number growing daily still live a life of destitution. Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing mankind. About one and half billion people live on less than one US Dollar a day, this is world’s bank concept of poverty or an equivalent of #150.00 and majority of this people are found in developing countries of Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) (Yusuf, 2003 and Ratemo, 2003).
Table 1: Poverty Profile for Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Poverty level (%)</th>
<th>Estimated Population in poverty (million)</th>
<th>Estimated Population in poverty (million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As shown in table 1, the incidence of poverty increased during the period 1980-1985, however, there was a decline in poverty level between 1985-1992. The proportion of people living in poverty in 1980 was 28.1 percent which later rose to 46.3 percent in 1985; but decreased to 42.7 percent in 1992 before escalating to 65.6 percent in 1996, 70 percent in 1999 and 77 percent in 2001 (Okunmadewa, 2001). Nevertheless, the proportion of people living in poverty declined to 54.4 percent in 2004. This translated to 17.7 and 34.7 million poor people in 1980 and 1985 respectively (Okunmadewa, 2001). The number of people in Nigeria also increased from 39.2 million people in 1992 to 67.1 million people in 1996, and 68.7 million poor people in 2004. In spite of the observed drop in poverty in 1992 and 2004, the population in poverty was 4.5 million higher than the 1985 figure and 1.6 million higher than that of 1996 figure respectively. The reduction in poverty level to 54.4 percent is traceable to reforms introduced to alleviate poverty since the declaration of the MDGs in September, 2000. Bulus (2005) puts the figure of the poor in Nigeria at 70 percent of her total population. Literatures have it that, the total numbers of people, who are poor in Nigeria. This is however on the increase as it is in agreement with the socio-economic profile of Nigeria (Olaitan, Ali, Onyemachi and Nwachukwu, 2000 and Patrick, 2005).

Before the discovery of oil in Nigeria, the agricultural sector was very buoyant. Nigeria was self-sufficient in food production, able to feed her citizens while excess was exported to other countries. Agriculture then also employed about 70 percent of her populace and as the mainstay of the nation’s economy, which contributes substantially to her GDP. Nigeria poverty situation started with the onset of oil boom when agricultural production started to decline as able bodied youth resulted into rural-urban migration in search of non-existing white-collar jobs thus leaving the aged behind on the farms (Oluyomi, 2005a). Nigeria soon became a major importer of major staple food crops those she used to produce in abundance even for export before.
It is pathetic to note that despite the fact that Nigeria is the sixth richest nation in the world in terms of crude oil reserve and supply. She is the only OPEC country categorised among the world poorest 20 countries (Adeola, 2001). Though that the country ranks among the nations that are blessed in terms of human and material resources, yet her citizens are wallowing in abject poverty with little or no economic empowerment for the larger percentage of its populace. No wonder World Bank (1996) has since referred to the situation in Nigeria as poverty in the midst of plenty. This worrisome reality of fact was aptly described by Shaban (2001) that Nigeria poverty stares her citizens in the face right from their bedrooms, to the kitchens and then to the streets. Where on daily basis, one watch helplessly, poverty stricken Nigerians wondering about in search of means of survival.

The poverty situation is getting worse by the day coupled with the bitter reality that Nigeria ranked 54th with respect to Human poverty index (HPI), making it the 20th poorest country in the world, while occupying the 40th position from below in its Human Development Index (HDI) (Okunmadewa, 2001). Under the UNDP – HDI Nigeria is ranked the 142nd with HDI of 0.400 among the 184 countries listed in 1997, by 1998 she fell among the 40 poorest countries. By year 2006 Nigeria ranked the 159th among 177 poor nations in the world (IMF, 2005 and UNDP, 2006). It is therefore not an overstatement to say that poverty has been on the increase commensurate with the extent of deterioration in the economy. This is because despite the high level of resources endowment (Human and Material) in the nation, the people are extremely poor. This serious and disastrous state of the nation motivated this research work. This paper thus attempts to define the concept of poverty, enumerates the types, causes and effects, poverty alleviation programmes by previous governments with their successes and failures and made workable recommendations.

Meaning of the Concept of Poverty

The understanding of the concept “poverty” is very germane in this write up. This is because an understanding of any concept provides the basis for meaningful discussion of such concept. Poverty is a hydra headed condition, a complex and multidimensional socio-economic phenomenon that eludes any precise definition. The various dimensions of poverty includes; Economic poverty, institutional poverty and environmental poverty (Oladotun, 2001). This is corroborated by Okunmadewa (2001) who identified three broad forms of poverty which in his words include; physiological, social and human freedom deprivations.

We tend to think of poverty purely in economic terms (e.g. low income and expenditure, unemployment, debt, lack of land ownership, and poor housing) but this only describes one aspect of poverty. In fact, the notion of poverty also encompasses other aspects of life, such as a lack of access to services (e.g. education, health care, poverty alleviation and literacy programmes, or development assistance). There are
also social and psychological elements to consider when we think about poverty: lack of social contact, limited marriage prospects, poor self-esteem, exposure to stigma, violence, and abuse of authority, and not having the ability to make one's needs and feelings known in society. Poverty can, therefore, be thought of as the absence of opportunities to lead a life of dignity and respect.

NISER (1999) sees poverty as a living condition in which an entity is faced with chronic economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivations to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected. Poverty is a dreaded condition of absence of capacity to maximum at least basic levels of decent living. It tends to restrict people from socio-economic opportunities because it goes beyond condition of lack of resources, it extends to social inequality, insecurity, illiteracy, poor health, restricted or total lack of opportunity for personal growth and self realization.

Oladotun (2001) defines poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. He/she is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lack gainful employment, skills, assets and self esteem. He/she has limited or no access to social and economic infrastructures such as education, health, potable water and sanitation. Such individual have limited chance of advancing his/her capabilities. In this situation, such individual cannot maintain or sustain him/her self in accordance with the living standard of his group or community, hence making him/her unable to achieve physical and mental deficiency for the purpose of useful functioning to oneself and the community.

Poverty is also viewed as absence or lack of basic necessities of life including; material wealth, common place, regular flow of wages and income and ability to sustain oneself based on the existing resources available in the society (Daramola, 2004). It could also imply located within the context of contradiction between resources available to an individual and the demand and condition of his/her environment.

Poverty could mean working sore and yet not gaining enough thereby leaving such individual perpetually in want. That is why individuals who are victims of poverty are usually referred to as poor, while nations suffering from it are called poor nations. UNDP (2003), states that, the poor are those who are unskilled, unemployed, and as a result of little or no income are totally dependent on others for the satisfaction of their daily needs.

Types of Poverty

Anyakoha (2001) identified three types of poverty namely; absolute, relative and material poverty while Haralambus (1980) added subjective poverty to the above list.
Absolute Poverty: - Means that the inability to provide for physical subsistence to the extent of being incapable of protecting human dignity. These include food, clothing, shelter, potable water, health services, basic education, public transportation and other basic necessities of life. People at this level have merge income and their marginal propensity to save is zero and their lives are short and brutish.

Relative Poverty: - Is where the resources of a family or individual are significantly inadequate to provide or avail such a family or individual the acceptable standard of living. It compares an individual or household with lowest amount of resources with others in the society. Poverty is thus determined by the standard that exists within the society.

Material Poverty: - A condition of human existence where resources for meeting basic human needs are extremely limited or inaccessible resulting into lack of ownership of physical assets such as land and animal husbandry.

Subjective Poverty: - Refers to the feelings of individuals or groups on whether or not they consider themselves poor. This group feeling of being poor or not has so much to do with perception in the sense that “people act in terms of the way they perceive and define themselves. These types of poverty are cause by so many factors acting singly or in combination with others.

Causes of Poverty

In Nigeria, poverty situation started with the onset of oil boom, when agriculture started to decline leading to rural urban migration of able – bodied youths. A number of reasons have been advanced to be the causes of poverty in Nigeria, all of which reinforce one another. Such reasons included among others are;

1. Increases population and low agricultural productivity. There is a sudden increase in family size and population and there is need for high productivity to meet the growing population (Oluyomi, 2010). Anya (2003) noted the sudden decline in agricultural production. But in Nigeria there is low production in agricultural products resulting into inflation thus causing families to maintain low standard of living and poor feeding (Mwanse and Lister, 2006). Okunmadewa (2003) states that “The adverse impact of high population growth, slow agricultural growth and environmental degradation in the absence of strong sustained growth of the economy has aggravated the poverty problems. Inadequate access to physical assets or productive resources such as land, tools and credit by the aged and illiterate generations who are left behind in the rural areas (Okozor, 2001 and Uthman, 2003).

2. Olagbemiro (1999) observed that immediately after the post independence, there was liquid cash and the period witnesses financial recklessness,
extravagance and resource mismanagement become the order of the day. Nigerians abandoned agriculture which was the pivot around which her economy revolved during pre-independence years. She was consequently unable to feed herself let alone to export food to neighbouring states.

3. Having only a monocultural economy with only one product as foreign exchange earner is a problem. For example in Nigeria crude oil is the major foreign exchange item which she exploits because it is the mainstay of her economy and it is not renewable.

4. Negligence of rural settings leave rural areas poorly developed because they lack basic amenities such as good roads, potable water, electricity, health centre, schools e.t.c. Most rural dwellers levy themselves to provide these amenities thereby wearing them down economically and increasing their level of poverty.

5. Destruction of natural resources and environmental degradation through activities such as deforestation, oil exploration and oil spillage leading to reduced productivity in agriculture, forestry, fisheries e.t.c.

6. Most rural dwellers have poor or half baked educational background which is said to be more dangerous than no education at all, resulting into poor quality labour force with which they cannot get better job. The type of job available for such people will place them in low-income group.

7. Inadequate access to income generation and employment opportunities resulting into high rate of unemployment especially among graduate youths who roam our streets seeking non-existing white collar jobs.

8. Inadequate market for goods and services produced by the poor due to geographical location and limited physical infrastructures.

9. Lack of good governance or leadership, Poor allocation and management of resources, absence of comprehensive national policy or incoherent policy reforms on poverty alleviation and insecurity of lives and properties, officials are corrupt, unresponsive to local demands and unaccountable.

10. Lack of involvement of the poor in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes that affects them. The consequences of all these are the effects listed below.
Effects of Poverty
The effects of poverty as outlined by Ibiezugbe (2005) and Mohammed (2006) are:

a. Low level of education.
b. Malnutrition
c. Lawlessness
d. Prostitution
e. Moral decadence
f. Armed robbery
g. Social revolution e.g. militancy and indiscipline
h. Crime increase e.g. cultism, drug trafficking, 419 e.t.c.
i. Social vices such as nepotism, tribalism, child trafficking and labour e.t.c.
j. Examination malpractices due to education deprivation
k. Shady deals

Poverty contributes to poor agricultural productivity as many farmers in Nigeria cannot afford to adopt modern technology and purchase necessary inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and improved seeds which could bring about increased productivity. The ability of poor consumers to purchase food necessary for maintenance of healthy and productive life is reduced, meaning that there will be food and nutrition insecurity. A food secured household is one that reliably obtains food of adequate quality and quantity to support a healthy and active life for all members of the household (Heldhues et al, 2004). The persistent chronic food insecurity level will cause acute poverty and poverty questions the stability of the nation and more importantly the citizenry. Reason being because the citizens have to fend for themselves going out of their houses in order to earn money in an unfriendly, frustrating and saturated labour market result into the following socio-economic and political cost. It brings about; Inequality, Rural – urban migration of youths and Infant, child and adult mortality. All these effects of poverty do not bring any form of development to any nation, therefore government should fight tooth and nail to reduce and eradicate poverty by all means.

Poverty Alleviation Programmes Initiated by Government in Nigeria
Ordinarily, the Federal Government would be seen as taking the fight against poverty very seriously. To the undiscerning, there can be no better indication of this seriousness than the establishment of such poverty fighting institutions. It is instructive to note that, successive government in Nigeria have been concerned with poverty alleviation and have adopted different approaches in the form of policies and programmes on poverty alleviation. Examples are; National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Peoples Bank (PB), Community Bank (CB) now Micro Finance Bank (MFB), Family Support Programmes (FSP), Better Life for Rural People (BLRP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) or Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National
Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Millennium Hope (MH), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) which has extension, research and input supply component, River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), National Productivity Centre (NPC), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), Rural Infrastructures Development and Construction Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWSS). Dyikuk (2006) added Ethical Revolution (ER), Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM), Privatization Act (PA) and Open Apprenticeship Scheme (OAS). Datiri and Yusuf (2006) added Universal Basic Education (UBE), National Resources Development and conservation Scheme (NARDCS), Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP), Capacity Attachment Programmes (CAP), Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP).

All these poverty alleviation programmes may differ in scope, administration and operation, but by and large, their ultimate goal is the same; that is raising the Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the citizenry, thus enhancing quality life. This way, it is believed that poverty shall be reduced to the barest minimum. Available records according to Onu (2004) reveals that these programmes have not yielded the much expected result because the implementation of these programmes were characterised as usual by sentiments and lack of purpose. Intended beneficiaries of these programmes were mostly elites in the urban centres, that is the working class and their family members are not left out in this unwholesome act of hijacking such programmes to their own advantage at the expense of the intended beneficiaries. The poor in Nigeria will continue to wait for their programmes yet to come their way. All these efforts seem not to have any remarkable impact because the execution lacks purpose or focus, plus lack of monitoring and evaluation.

Problems of Poverty Alleviation Programmes

All these poverty alleviation initiatives have however not yielded the much desired result. Their failures according to Uthman 2003 and Ejima 2005 were largely attributed to;

a. Inadequate funding and commitment.
b. Inconsistency in policy formulation and implementation.
c. Lack of prioritizing the poverty alleviation need of largest groups for development of relevant initiatives.
d. Lack of proper co –ordination at all levels.
e. Officials’ dishonesty among implementers.
f. Little or no element of evaluation of progress and success for relevant adjustment.
g. Ethnic and station politics causing discrimination.
h. Unwillingness of succeeding government to continue poverty alleviation programmes of their predecessors.

i. Absence of functional implementation and participation performance.

While Olaitan (2000) stated that despite the plethora of poverty alleviation programmes, Nigeria and Nigerians still remain poverty stricken because of the problem of conception associated with the programmes. He maintained that most programmes were conceived primarily to address poverty issues but mainly to score cheap political popularity because;

1. Most of these programmes suffered content deficiency as due consideration has never been given to agriculture as tool for empowering people against poverty.

2. These programmes have always been a top-down arrangement with little or no input from the grassroots.

3. Lack of proper co-ordination at all levels may be due to these are always the existence of too many agencies established to do the same thing, thus resulting in rate overlap and confusion which renders co-ordination difficult.

4. Corruption which remains the bane of Nigeria’s development efforts. Where poverty alleviation programmes are put in place, such end in some cases in further empowerment of the rich as the actual beneficiaries turn out to be privileged class or their cronies.

This paper suggests revitalising our agricultural sector as the best way of eradicating poverty in Nigeria.

**Revitalizing Agriculture Poverty Alleviation**

To revitalize according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2009) means to put new strength or power into something, in order to recover, bring back or restore strength or vigour into it. If something is therefore to be revitalized, it means that such a thing has lost power or strength and therefore not performing or functioning as before or as expected. Such is the situation and state of agriculture today in Nigeria.

Agriculture used to be the mainstay of Nigeria economy and where about 75 percent of her estimated population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihood (Oluyomi, 2005b). But in spite of the fact that Nigeria is endowed with superfluous human and natural agricultural resources, her per capital agricultural productivity seems to be degenerating (Oluyomi, 2010) and so the expected roles of agriculture in the provision of food for the teeming population, raw materials for local industries, employment and foreign exchange are not being met again (Oluyomi, 2007). These failures can be attributed to poor funding for agricultural research, extension, inputs and agricultural education (Formal and Non-formal) (Oluyomi, 2005a). So also are the issues of inadequate chemicals, storage and credit facilities,
non-mechanized agriculture and poor rural and market infrastructures which has led many able bodied youth who would have made valuable and productive use of the vast agricultural resources to abandon the rural setting in search of non-existing white-collar jobs in the urban centres (Oluyomi, 2005a) where they become unemployed, idle, poverty ridden and all the effects of poverty earlier enumerated become manifest.

As earlier stated that poverty is multi-dimensional in nature it therefore requires multi-dimensional solution for its reduction. In order words, poverty is caused by multiple factors and cannot be alleviated through a single measure. Therefore, revitalizing agriculture will provide the much desired multi-dimensional approach to poverty alleviation for this reason; the following are suggested ways of revitalizing agriculture in Nigeria as a panacea for poverty alleviation by addressing the problem of low agricultural productivity through the collaborative efforts of public-private partnership in the following ways;

1. Proper funding of research into new technologies aimed at improving seeds, seedlings, animal breeds and farm practises.
2. Proper funding of agricultural extension programmes through the provision of extension tools to reach and train farmers in new technologies. Seminars, workshops and conferences should be organised for extension agents at intervals.
3. Agricultural Education Programmes for in-school youths (formal for students) and out of school (non-formal for farmers) should be adequately funded.
4. Micro-credit schemes and formation of farmers into agro co-operative groups must be encouraged, strengthened and re-invigorated.
5. Ailing Agro-allied and Agro-chemical industries must be revitalized and made productive while news ones established to generate employment opportunities for youths
6. Agriculture must be mechanised in order Farm machineries must be provided to farmers at subsidized rate, with well transformed operators and engineers and readily available spare parts, in order to reduce human drudgery and to make agriculture more attractive to youth.
7. There should be rapid rural development that will make available in rural areas some basic social amenities such as electricity, potable water, health services, educational facilities, good road networks and the likes. These will keep more able-bodied youth in rural areas to practise agriculture.

All these when properly put in place will help to achieve food security and remove hunger from the land, then this Yoruba adage which says “Bi ebi ba kuro ninu ise, ise buse” meaning “If hunger is out of poverty, then the problem of poverty is near solved” would be achieved.
Conclusion

There is no doubt that poverty, defined in whichever context and measured by whatever yardstick, remains central in the character of a developing economy. Fighting poverty requires strong political will on the part of the leaders, ethical re-orientation of the populace, mass education and skills acquisition, capital formation, security, provision and maintenance of infrastructure, among others. In a country where the average daily expenditure per person is less than N200, the ability to afford the three basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter becomes less than meagre. Again, with the average daily calorie intake per capita falling below 2,900, malnutrition looms large.

Nigeria is certainly a developing country still grappling with the problem of acute poverty and squalor (Patrick, 2005). Poverty reduction will have to adopt a holistic approach through revitalizing agriculture as enumerated above, this is a vital component of integrated strategies for poverty reduction, that has crucial roles to play in creating escape from food insecurity and poverty by improving farm income, generating employment for farm workers, reducing food prices and fuelling economic growth.

References


