



PAK Publishing Group
Growing Knowledge for Future

Proceedings Book of ICEFMO, 2013, Malaysia
Handbook on the Economic, Finance and Management Outlooks
ISBN: 978-969-9347-14-6

An Appraisal of the Strategies of Rural Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: Implications for Rural Development

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Abstract

The description of poverty varies over time and clime. However, evry society recognizes and describes it in relation to its socio-economic circumstances. As a universally recognized social problem, poverty has attracted many action packages across the globe. Nigeria, like many other countries, has enunciated and indeed, operated several policies aimed either directly or indirectly at eradicating or reducing poverty to its lowest level. Poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria span various spheres in the economy. However, the strategies aimed at mitigating rural poverty have been most prominent in Nigeria. Recognizing that the root of poverty is in the soil of the economy, most of the rural poverty alleviation strategies were aimed at improving the economy, especially in the area of agricultural production in the rural areas. This paper critically evaluates the rural poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria for the past two decades (1992-2012) alongside the objectives, performances and problems of these strategies. The paper also suggests pithy ways of avoiding noticeable pitfalls in these strategies.

1. Background Information

Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

1.1. Rural Poverty

Rural poverty simply refers to poverty found in rural areas. Rural poverty is a global phenomena, but like poverty in general, there are higher rates of rural poverty in developing countries than in developed countries. Eradicating rural poverty through effective policies and economic growth remains a challenge for the international community. Poverty remains a predominantly rural problem, with a majority of the world's poor located in rural areas. It is estimated that 76 percent of the developing world's poor live in rural areas, well above the overall population share living in rural

areas, which is only 58 percent. Disparities between rural and urban areas are on the rise, particularly in many developing and transitional countries. Globally, rural people and rural places tend to be disadvantaged relative to their urban counterparts and poverty rates increase as rural areas become more remote. Individuals living in rural areas tend to have less access to social services, exacerbating the effects of rural poverty.

Poverty can be divided into :

Absolute poverty or destitution which refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education. The World Bank anchored absolute poverty line as \$1 per day. This was revised in 1993, and through 2005, absolute poverty was \$1.08 a day for all countries. In 2005, after extensive studies of cost of living across the world, The World Bank raised the measure for global poverty line to reflect the observed higher cost of living. Now, the World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than US\$1.25 per day.

Moderate poverty as less than \$2 or \$5 a day (but note that a person or family with access to subsistence resources, e.g. subsistence farmers, may have a low cash income without a correspondingly low standard of living – they are not living "on" their cash income but using it as a top up).

Relative poverty, defined contextually as economic inequality in the location or society in which people live.

Poverty differences cut across gender, ethnicity, age, location (rural versus urban), and income source. In households, children and women often suffer more than men. In the community, minority ethnic or religious groups suffer more than majority groups, and the rural poor more than the urban poor; among the rural poor, landless wage workers suffer more than small landowners or tenants. In Sub-Saharan Africa, extreme poverty went up from 41 percent in 1981 to 46 percent in 2001, which combined with growing population increased the number of people living in extreme poverty from 231 million to 318 million.

World Bank data shows that the percentage of the population living in households with consumption or income per person below the poverty line has decreased in each region of the world since 1990, however, the figures of Sub-Saharan Africa remain the highest.

Region	\$1 per day			\$1.25 per day	
	1990	2002	2004	1981	2008
East Asia and Pacific	15.40%	12.33%	9.07%	77.2%	14.3%
Europe and Central Asia	3.60%	1.28%	0.95%	1.9%	0.5%
Latin America and the Caribbean	9.62%	9.08%	8.64%	11.9%	6.5%
Middle East and North Africa	2.08%	1.69%	1.47%	9.6%	2.7%
South Asia	35.04%	33.44%	30.84%	61.1%	36%
Sub-Saharan Africa	46.07%	42.63%	41.09%	51.5%	47.5%
World				52.2%	22.4%

The Nigerian Rural Poor

Nigeria's population in poverty

1980: 17.1 million

1985: 34.7 million

1992: 39.2 million

1996: 67.1 million

2004: 68.7 million

2010: 112.47 million

- **Source:** Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics

GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)	-1,180.0
Population, total	-158,423,182.0
Rural population	-79,528,437.4

Number of rural poor (million, approximate) -50,739

Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2011

As shown above, in Nigeria, about 80 million Nigerians live in the rural areas. Out of this, about fifty one million are caught up in the throes of poverty.

Poverty is, especially severe in rural areas, where social services and infrastructure are limited or non-existent. The great majority of those who live in rural areas are poor and depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 per cent of the country's food is produced by small-scale farmers cultivating tiny plots of land who depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems. Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops. The poorest groups eke out a subsistence living but often go short of food, particularly during the pre-harvest period.

A high proportion of rural people suffer from malnutrition and other diseases related to poor nutrition. Women and households headed by women are frequently the most chronically poor within rural communities. Women have lower social status than men and consequently less access to schooling and training, particularly in childcare and health practices. Yet women play significant roles in rural economic activities. (Fasoranti, 2009) Other vulnerable groups among rural poor people are young couples with children, the disabled, and old people with no relatives to support them.

1.2. Distribution of the Rural Poor in Nigeria

Rural poverty tends to be evenly distributed across the country, rather than concentrated in specific geographic areas. However, in some zones the poverty situation threatens to worsen considerably, such as in the northern area bordering the Niger, which is arid, marginal to agriculture, environmentally damaged and densely populated. The fishing communities living in the mangrove swamps and along the Atlantic coast are among the poorest in Nigeria. It is estimated that Sokoto state's poverty rate the highest at 86.4%. In the north-west and north-east of the country poverty rates were recorded at 77.7% and 76.3% respectively, compared to the south-west at 59.1%.

1.3. Causes/Origin of Rural Poverty

Chambers (2008:107) opines that poverty is as a result of the fact that the rural poor are "incapably improvident, lazy, fatalistic, ignorant and stupid". A cursory look at the peasantry in Nigeria proves the contrary. The average rural person in Nigeria is hand-working, struggling against the forces of nature and economic recession to provide subsistence often for the immediate and extended family. Improvidence (lack of savings for investment) is therefore often a result of the responsibilities that he has to shoulder; and fatalism (perceived inability to control the future) is a result of many hazardous experiences to which he has been exposed.

In Nigeria, it is apparent that rural poverty is product of urban-biased development policies which have put the rural areas in an unfavourable situation (Akinde, 2000). The reasons for rural poverty, Akinde (2000:2) contends, "has been traced to the exploitation of the rural population by the urban elites and middle-men and women and the neglect by the nation's economic planners".

Chambers (2008) argued that the rural poor are victims of exploitation by the local elites through three clusters which he described as:

- "Nets": The trapping and catching of resources and benefits meant for the rural areas by the local elites." Most government, parastatal and private sector programmes and campaigns are either designed intentionally for the elites or so designed and implemented that they are likely to be intercepted by them".
- "Robbery": The use of deception, blackmail and violence by the elite to rob the poor. This is made possible because "police, government officials and the larger land-owners and the traders have common understanding".
- "Bargaining and its absence": This applies to the prices paid on products from the rural areas(131-138).

In a summary, the rural poor in Nigeria is that average rural dweller that has little or often nothing to feed on, lives under very poor, unhygienic conditions, cannot afford the basic needs of life including clothing, shoes and medical care; whose children are always victims of incessant fees-drive from elementary to secondary schools levels. The poverty is further reflected on the children who often go to school in tattered dresses often without shoes with only exercise books but essentially

without necessary reading books. Being a victim of environmental circumstances, he is not fatalistic but hopeful, always working up to providence to burst the vicious circle, struggling to train the children who are hoped to be the possible potent outlet from the grips of poverty.

2. Conceptual Framework

Poverty is a contested and politically sensitive term. It is affected by place and time. Being a multidimensional concept, the definition of poverty is often dependent on the angle from where it is being viewed. Nwafor (2000) for example, defined poverty as the lack of certain combinations of food material required for daily activities or the minimum food basket". World Health Organization (WHO) sees poverty as "a state of low health status, lack of skill and occupation"; while the International Labour Organization (ILO 1995) defined poverty as "a spiritual state which is capable of influencing the physical disposition of an individual". The manifestation of poverty are diverse: These include starvation, adult and child malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality, illiteracy, poor health, over-crowded and poorly ventilated habitation, squalid conditions of environmental situation as well as voicelessness, powerlessness and vulnerability to events and circumstances which place lives and livelihoods in jeopardy.

Okunmadewa (1995) classified poverty into chronic, transitory, borderline and poorest (absolute) states. The "chronic poor" he contended, are those who remain poor over a long period of time as a result of deep-rooted structural problems notably lack of access to basic education, health and nutrition. The "transitory poor" are those who find themselves in poverty for brief spells as a result of temporary shock such as the Nigerian structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), war or loss of a job. They soon return to the labour market and find employment as a result of their generally high skill levels. The "Borderline poor" are vulnerable to shocks and are frequently below the poverty live. Such are the farmers in draught-prone areas or factory casual workers whose demand rely on sectoral economic fortune; while the "poorest poor" are those infirmed or disable who contribute little or no benefit to the economy. They are often outside the labour force.

In whichever way it is viewed, poverty is inability to provide for basic sustenance to the extent of protecting human dignity which includes food, clothing and shelter, portable water, healthcare, basic education, public transport and work. At a milder level, it is simply the inability of certain sections of the society to satisfy their basic and other needs. It is a condition of want in one situation as compared with another.

Poverty has also been categorized as "income poverty and human poverty" (UNDP, 2000). While income poverty is viewed as lack of income to satisfy essential non-food needs, human poverty is viewed as relating to lack of basic human capabilities, illiteracy, malnutrition, short life-span, poor material, health and illness from preventable diseases etc.

Poverty has also been viewed at micro and macro levels (Job; 1998). At micro levels, poverty is a condition of individuals and families while at macro levels, it is considered as the condition of a population within communities, regions countries etc. Job (1998) suggests that, in spite of the difficult definitional problems of poverty, it is quite necessary that poverty be measured in concrete terms.

The World Bank (1990) gave the following reasons why poverty should be measured.

- ❖ To gauge the magnitude of a country's poverty problem.
- ❖ To provide a statistical basis for analyzing the nature and characteristics of poverty and the systematically monitoring trend in its incidence.
- ❖ To influence the design of policies and programmes, whether they are deliberately in place to address poverty problems or they have significant consequences for the poor if unintended.

Poverty indicators are always severe on the poor people e.g. short-life expectancy due to mal-nutrition and severe starvation, sicknesses, health and mental defects, less education and less opportunity for development and therefore less protection from hazards and dangers.

3. Policies for Rural Poverty Alleviation

It has been proposed by Todaro and Smith (2003: 225 -) that “policies focused towards reducing poverty levels need not lead to a slower rate of growth for the following reasons;

“First, widespread poverty creates conditions in which the poor have no access to credit, are unable to finance their children’s education and in absence of physical or monetary investment opportunities, have many children as a source of old age financial security”

“Second... the rich in contemporary poor countries are generally not noted for their frugality or for their desire to save and invest substantial proportions of their incomes in their local economy”.

“Third, the low incomes and low levels of living for the poor, which are manifested in poor health, nutrition and education, can lower economics productivity and thereby lead directly and indirectly to slower growing economy. Strategies to raise the incomes and levels of living of the poor would therefore contribute not only to their material well-being, but also to the productivity and income of the economy as a whole”.” Fourth, raising the income levels of the poor will stimulate overall increase in the demand for locally produced necessity products, Rising demand for local goods provides a greater stimulus to local production, local employment and local investment.....”

“Fifth and finally, a reduction of mass poverty can stimulate healthy economic expansion by acting as a powerful material and psychological incentive to widespread public participation in the development process---“.

It is therefore an agreed fact that “with appropriate policies, the poor can participate in growth and contribute to it and when they do, rapid declines in poverty are consistent with sustained growth” (World Bank 1990).

4. The Nigerian Experience

In the first decade after independence, Nigeria’s policy on poverty alleviation was not well defined or specific because the issue of poverty then, was not much of a problem. However, in 1970’s natural resources endowment were seen to be crucial hence the 1970-74 Development plan, stated that Nigeria should become, “a just and egalitarian Society” and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. During this period Agriculture and rural development were stressed. The fourth National Development plan emphasized an increase in the real income of the average citizen and more even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups among others as a way of dealing with poverty. Certain programmes were initiated either wholly by the government or in collaboration with international agencies, which had a far-reaching effect on poverty alleviation. Among these programmes were:

- ❖ River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA)
- ❖ Agricultural Credit Guarantee Schemed (ACGS)
- ❖ Rural Electrification Scheme (RES) and
- ❖ Rural Banking Scheme (RBS).
- ❖ Agricultural Development Programme (ADP).

These programmes were designed to cater for poverty related objectives like employment generation and to arrest rural urban drift by offering improved rural infrastructures. Some of these programmes indeed brought about improvement in the agricultural sector; however, they gradually experienced decline in their activities due to policy changes including cut -down budget allocation and lack of effective and honest management (Ogwumike, 2000).

The rural Banking Scheme was introduced in 1977). Through this scheme the central Bank mandated all the commercial banks to open rural branches and give 30% of their credit to the residents in rural areas. This was expected to enhance rural development by raising the level of productive employment and income generation activities as well as consumption levels in rural areas. But a lot of savings mobilized in rural areas were diverted to urban areas in form of credit.

The leakages associated with similar programmes aimed at the “poor” peasant farmers such as fertilizer and other subsidized inputs along with some other factors contributed in making most of these programmes ineffective as poverty alleviation measures (Ravallion et al, 1989). Hence it could be pointed out that, the various development objectives from the first to the fourth plan, persistently

shield away from explicit recognition of poverty of the people as a major aspect of development problems in Nigeria. The fourth Development plan, which emphasized on the distribution of income, power and opportunities really focused on interpersonal inequality since it relates to income of the paid employee in the public or organized private sector. The aspiration of the self-employed urban and rural dwellers have been placed on the inter-spatial distribution of social amenities, which they may not have the actual capacity to utilize. In due course, due to policy error the nation became heavily indebted. As a result of the heavy indebtedness, the structural adjustment programme was introduced. It was hoped that this would enable the economies to recover and debts to be repaid. Markets were to be freed. In an attempt to pursue the growth objective. It was emphasized in the 1986 budget that, "the rural development policy will move away from past narrow sectorial pre-occupation with the generation of food and fibre surpluses to overall formulation of the nation/rural development strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural poverty and enhancement of the quality of rural life. In an attempt to achieve these objectives, Directorate of food road and rural infrastructure (DFFRI) was established.

DFFRI, no doubt provided the necessary basic infrastructure that can stimulate the growth of agro-allied small-scale enterprises in rural areas. It also influenced the growth of agricultural production between 1987 and 1992 (Ogwumike, 1995). However, DFFRI could not sustain the tempo with which it started hence it became defaulted. Also, during these periods, production economists and agricultural scientists focused attention on food production and within food production on food grains as a way of reducing poverty and enhancing development (Adedewe, 1999). So seed breeders concentrated on yield to the neglect of other activities. According to Adedewe (1999), it is only common sense that enough food has to be produced to meet human requirement but making production a single objectives has 3 defects:-

The first was the supposition that, producing more food would prevent hunger and famine. However much evidence indicates that famines are more weakly linked with food availability than had been supposed and that producing more food will not prevent famine unless poor people can obtain the food. What matters is not how much food is produced but who produces it, where it is produced and who can afford it once it has been produced.

The second defect of production thinking has been the pre-occupation with yield per hectare and the implicit assumption that this is all or most of what matters to farmers. However farmers have many criteria, of which yield is one. Studies shows that farmers do prefer and planted varieties which give less than the highest yield (Fasoranti, 1989)

The third defect, is treating estimated grain production as total food. Production grains, especially maize, rice and wheat have often been accorded primacy to the neglect of other major sources of calories such as cassava, yam, potatoes etc and tree foods such as mangoes (Hooger Brugge et al, 1993). The basic needs approach thought that employment and job creation are solutions to poverty alleviation.

In 1976 the International Labour Office (ILO) conference launched Basic Needs on world employment. The Basic Needs Approach implies that each person available for and willing to work should have an adequately remunerated job (ILO 1976). The Nigerian constitution of 1978 included a statement that the state, "shall direct its policy toward ensuring that a reasonable national living wage would be provided for all citizens".

The problems of the poor were seen as lack of employment and solutions were seen in providing jobs with wages and salaries in work places. However Adedewe (1999) emphasized that, the raw reality for the majority of the very poor in the world, is not one of job in the industrial sense, it is a reality of diverse livelihoods with multiple activities by different family members at different times exploiting varied and changing resources and opportunities.

Having realized this, the focus changed to creating employment through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). NDE has four main programmes that not only enhance productivity and income earning potentials of the youth and other beneficiaries. These programmes include the vocational skill Development programme(VSD) the special public works programme (SPW), the Small Scale Enterprises programme (SSE) and the Agricultural Employment programme. According to CBN (1996) report, NDE has achieved tremendous progress in respect of its various programmes. But despite this success majority of the rural populace are not reached and especially women. Poverty among women is still predominant. Because of the limited skill and few formal

employment opportunities in Nigeria, Majority of the women turn to self employment as a means if supporting themselves and their families. Yet, most of these activities do not yield sufficient income to raise them out of poverty. They lack the technology and managerial skill and access to credit and markets necessary to expand or even improve their productivity. This lead to the introduction of the Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW) and family support programme (FSP) to cater for the women. The BLRW and FSP organized women into co-operative societies to increase their access to credit and enhance their productivity and income opportunities.

According to the Central Bank of Nigeria(1994) report, these programmes achieved success in various communities in Nigeria. But, they were hijacked by the elites. The real poor did not benefit from the programme. In addition, the programmes were short lived. Several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) rose to the challenge and operated to alleviate poverty among the rural folk. According to Dosunmu (1997), one of the major problems of the NGOs is lack of credit, or low volume of credit.

The current democratic experiment has attempted in a renovation of previous rural poverty alleviation efforts. With renewed vigour, the government has introduced at the national level, National Economic Empowerment and Development Scheme (NEEDS) and at the state levels, State Economic Empowerment and Development Scheme (SEED) with an agency for poverty alleviation (Agency for Poverty Alleviation – APA). The aims and objectives of these attempts are not noble. Indeed, with respect to these programmes, it has been said “If the policies and paradigms generating underdevelopment are similar or identical, the consequences of successive renovations of the essence of the paradigm are predictable” (Olorode, 2005).

4.1. The United Nations Millennium Development Village Approach

Upon the commissioning of the Millennium Development Goals, the U. N resolved to establish Millennium Development Villages in some African Countries including Nigeria

Locations for the African Millennium Villages Initiative:

Country	State/Province/District	Village
Ghana	Amansi, West District	Bonsaaso
Kenya	Garissa	Dertu
Malawi	Zomba District	Mwandama
Mali	Segou Region	Tiby
Nigeria	Ondo State	Ikaram
Nigeria	Kaduna State	Pampaída
Senegal	Louga Region	Potou
Tanzania	Uyui District	Mbola
Uganda	Isingiro District	Ruhiira

5. Critical Appraisal

- These programmes were designed to cater for poverty related objectives like employment generation and to arrest rural urban drift by offering improved rural infrastructures. Some of these programmes indeed brought about improvement in the agricultural sector; however, they gradually experienced decline in their activities due to policy changes including cut -down budget allocation and lack of effective and honest management .
- One can rightfully argue that the aims and objectives of many of these attempts are not noble. Indeed, with respect to these programmes, it has been said “If the policies and paradigms generating underdevelopment are similar or identical, the consequences of successive renovations of the essence of the paradigm are predictable” (Olorode, 2005).
- A major flaw in all the programmes is that the peasantry was completely excluded in the processes of policy formulation and execution of these programmes. Indeed, they were just to receive whatever every successive government brings. In effect, the rural poor benefits little from these national and state policies and in many instances, they are only marginally influenced and in others, never at all.

- One has always wondered “Whose interest is a rural development programme or poverty alleviation strategy genuinely intended to serve?”. The Imperialist’s represented by the World Bank? The pretending political class who would always call back on the rural people for their votes?; or the unsuspecting, helpless rural populace?. It is Paradoxical that in launching the programmes meant for the rural poor and poorest, he dares not show his poverty riddled face !
- It is a well know fact in Nigeria by anyone who cares to find out that the rural poverty alleviation programmes and policies were received programmes (from the IMF and the World Bank) “whose purposes were sheer gimmicks and in social engineering and con-manship”.(Olorode, 2005) Regrettably, the consequences of all of these are always the same: the enhancement of the pockets of party loyalists or favoured individuals.
- Finally, corruption at all levels and fraudulence of the elites who were ipso-facto expected to be the conveyor belt for rural poverty alleviation is a bane of rural development.

6. Recipe for Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas in Nigeria

Poverty is a social problem and its solution should be sought in the social realm (Fasoranti, 2003). The policy makers in Nigeria need to put the wishes of the rural people first, in designing a programme that will affect them. This would involve creating common ground between government perception of rural needs and the rural dwellers perception of their own needs. This will provide moral foundation for next stages and form concrete bedrock for government policy.

Furthermore, there should be a redefinition of rural development to involve “a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural woman and man to gain for themselves and their children, more of what they want and need” (Chambers 1988; 147).

The issue of rural poverty cannot be faced in piecemeal and adhoc manner the way it is being handled by the Nigerian successive governments. Sloganeering, incessant overthrow of programmes of immediate past governments and lack of genuine commitment of the political class to rural poverty eradication are issues that need to be contended and seriously addressed.

7. Conclusion

Rural poverty is endemic. It is a tightly integrated phenomenon rural area. Accordingly, its remedial action must be integrated. The breaking of accommodation and the provision of the several escapes from the culture of poverty, to achieve any meaningful result in Nigeria needs real energy, commitment, doggedness, persistence and endurance.

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