

## POVERTY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE FRAMEWORK OF EXPECTATIONS IS SHAKY

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### Abstract

Poverty occasioned by high rates of unemployment, monumental corruption, uneven distribution of national resources resulting in inequalities in wealth and power, limited access to education etc, has taken its toll on youth development in Nigeria. As a result the country cannot beat its chest and say it has developed youths capable of driving national development. The situation of Nigerian youths at the moment explains the high levels of insecurity, crime, and varying forms of violence across the country. The paper examines how the high level of poverty in the land undermines adequate youth development to the extent that today the framework of expectation could be said to be shaky. The paper suggests that unless governments in Nigeria retrace their steps and begin to give youth development the pride of place it deserves in the country's development agenda, the future of the nation may be hanging on the balance. They can do this by paying more attention to youth development through massive job creation, skills acquisition programmes, provision of short term loans to finance Small and Medium Scale enterprises and adequate funding of the education sector.

**Key Words:** Poverty, Youth Development, National Development, Unemployment, Corruption.

### INTRODUCTION

Youth development is seen as a process that prepares young people for the challenges of adolescence and adulthood so as to be able to achieve their full potentials. Youth development is therefore expected to be among the major priorities of every government with the idea that the future of any nation rests on her youths. Potentially, the youths are the greatest investments to any country's sustainable development and future. In the context of Nigeria's historical experience, youths have made valuable contributions to the struggle for liberation and national development (Chukwuezi, 2009). For instance, it was a youth, Anthony Enahoro, who first moved the motion for self-government in Nigeria. The Nigerian youths have also made numerous giant strides in sports, especially youth football. They can constitute a reservoir of energy and dynamism for any national struggle or campaign if they are correctly guided, mobilized and fully integrated into the social fabrics of the nation. They may also constitute a threat to national survival and stability if they are allowed to drift, are unemployed, not disciplined and morally bankrupt. No nation aspiring for major national greatness can afford to ignore the

youths and allow them to constitute a major social problem (Chukwuezi, 2009). Unfortunately, in Nigeria it is difficult for any government to make any bold claim that it has done so well in terms of helping the youths realize their potentials. Onuoha (2010) is of the opinion and rightly so that the rate of a country's development is directly related to the extent to which the enormous potentials of its youths are harnessed and utilized by political leadership to promote and sustain economic growth and development.

The growth in the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has not translated to reduction in the number of citizens living below poverty line (Chukwuezi, 2009). Indeed, USAID (2006) report has it that 55 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than one dollar per day, one of the highest poverty rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. With an annual population growth of about 2.5 percent, the GDP growth rate is grossly insufficient to alleviate poverty; one of Nigeria's pressing problems. Worst still, is the realization that Nigeria's oil and gas wealth has done little to alleviate poverty due to resource mismanagement and over reliance on oil. The economy's reliance on oil for export earnings and government revenue has hurt the poor much more

than the rich (USAID, 2006). Consequent upon this is the fact that poverty has become more than before a serious social problem and tops the country's list of priorities. With little or no government and private sector paid employment, a large proportion of the people, particularly the youths face massive unemployment and a bleak future.

The World Bank President Jim Yong Kim at the IMF/World Bank spring meeting held in April, 2014 restated that Nigeria is one of the top five countries that have the highest number of poor people. Nigeria, he said ranked third in the world while India ranked number one with 33 percent of the world poor. China is ranked second with 13 percent of the world's poor, followed by Nigeria where 7 percent of the world's poor live in. He said that Bangladesh has 6 percent share of the world's poor while the Democratic Republic of Congo has 5 percent. Jim Yong Kim said these five countries are home to 760 million of the world poor (Omoh, 2014). Poverty incidence and unemployment are simultaneously at all time high levels. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), poverty incidence grew to 69 percent in 2010 and projected to be 71 percent in 2011, with unemployment at 24 percent. This is the worst record in Nigeria's history, and the paradox is that this happened during the unprecedented oil boom. This is the only government in Nigeria's history where rapidly increasing expenditure was associated with increasing poverty (Soludo, 2015). The Director-General of NBS stated in his written press conference address in 2011 that about 112 million Nigerians were living in poverty. Presently, the Naira exchange rate to the dollar is 210 Naira at the parallel market.

Poverty has continued to pose a great threat to youth development in Nigeria because many of the youths appear to be trapped in poverty in spite of all government's claims about alleviating poverty. In the light of the very ugly pictures painted about the poverty situation in Nigeria, it doesn't look like there is light at the end of the tunnel for Nigerian youths who are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow. The country's leadership over the years has clearly shown that it lacks the capacity to develop youths who can confidently drive national development. This paper therefore examines the impact of widespread poverty on youth development in Nigeria so as to proffer possible solutions to the problem.

### Clarification of Concepts

Despite its being one of the most prevalent social

phenomena in human history, poverty issues still generate endless controversy in intellectual circles. Except perhaps its ubiquity there are as many views on every aspect of poverty as there are people expressing such views. Yet everybody seems to know what poverty is and can identify those assumed to be poor in a particular society. This is because it is very convenient to accept simplistic explanations of a phenomenon especially if the radical perspective tends to point accusing fingers at some people (Anikpo, 1984).

Existing definitions of poverty suffer a common deficiency of being static (ahistorical) or merely descriptive, usually based on the absence of some identified consumption needs or values such as food, money, clothes, ideas or attitudes. They are therefore usually not dynamic (historical) and analytical. Poverty as a social phenomenon is the outcome of an interplay between socio-economic, political, and even religious forces. No useful definition of poverty can be formulated without the interplay of these social forces. Considerations of this nature belong to the political economy paradigm which roots its interpretations on the fundamental processes of production and distribution from which structural configurations of social, economic and political relationships emanate. The dynamic nature of these processes and relationships exposes the phenomenon also as a dynamic process rather than a static structure (Anikpo, 1984).

More importantly, poverty is a relational concept in the sense that we cannot meaningfully talk about the poor except in the context of the rich. Poverty and wealth exist in a dyadic relationship in which one means nothing without the other. Somebody or a group is considered poor because some other persons or groups are considered rich. The two categories emerged simultaneously in history through the processes and relationships associated with the production and distribution of material resources in human society (Anikpo, 1984).

Poverty is therefore the inevitable outcome of class domination in the production and distribution process and the monopoly of the machinery of decision-making through a coercive state apparatus. Thus, irrespective of how it is manifested in persons, peoples or places, poverty is the historical process of individuals or groups being forcefully eliminated from control of the decision-making machinery that determines the production and distribution of resources in society. It manifests in various forms such as hunger or lack of money, clothes, shelter, good

health, or poor education. In a national context, poverty becomes a euphemism for underdevelopment (Anikpo, 1984).

According to Adejumbi (2006), the notion of poverty has undergone three phases in its conception. The first was when poverty was viewed largely in economic terms. Poverty was related to the income level accruable to individuals and households for daily subsistence. The World Bank's measurement indicator of poverty scaled \$1 a day per person adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) as the absolute poverty line. Any individual who falls below this level is considered to be living in a condition of absolute poverty. The main critique of this conception of poverty is that poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to income level alone. Access to basic social services of education, health, and water supply improves human condition and the living standards of the people, which are not captured in the income matrix (Adejumbi, 2006).

Thus, non-income indicators of poverty were developed. As a result, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) evolved the Human Development Index (1993) and later the Human Poverty Index (1997) which encompasses these social dimensions of poverty. The UNDP views poverty as a result of a process, and not a state or event. The notion of poverty as conceptualized above only views the political process as one of the causal elements of poverty and not its manifestation (Adejumbi, 2006). The third phase in the conception of poverty is that which views poverty from a political economy perspective encompassing economic, social and political dimensions. It reflects the logic of human deprivation, which limits human capacity to function adequately including his/her freedom (Adejumbi, 2006).

Poverty is characterized by the unavailability of income and non-income resources and a denial of voice and power in the political process. In an elaborate study conducted by the World Bank on poverty in the year 2000, the conclusion is that there is need to expand the conventional views on poverty, which focus on income, expenditure, education and health to include measures of voice and empowerment (Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, Koche-Schulte, 2000). The importance of this conceptualization is that the voice and power of the poor in the political process and governance structure of society is no longer treated as a cause of poverty but also its manifestation. This is because when people are poor they are also powerless (Adejumbi, 2006).

Youth development refers to the process of growing up and developing one's capacities in positive ways. This typically takes place in the context of the family, the peer group, the school, and the neighbourhood or community. It has to do with the natural unfolding of the potential inherent in children and youth in relation to the challenges of their physical and social environment. Youth development encourages individuals to actively shape their own development through their choices and perceptions. Throughout, they gain the competencies to earn a living, to nurture self and others, to engage in civic activities, and to participate in social relations and cultural activities. Youth development prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.

According to Hamilton, Hamilton and Pitman (2004), the term youth development is used in at least three different ways, referring to a natural process of development, principles, and practices. All three are important, and they are logically related. Youth development has traditionally and is still most widely used to mean a natural process which is the growing capacity of a young person to understand and act on the environment. In this usage, it is identical to child or adolescent development. Human development is the natural unfolding of the potential inherent in the human organism in relation to the challenges and support of the physical and social environment. Optimal development in youth enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life, as youth and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, to engage in civic activities. Both heredity and environment influence the natural unfolding. People can actively shape their own development through the choices they make and interpretations they place on their experiences (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pitman, 2004).

In the 1990s, the term youth development came to be applied to a set of principles, a philosophy or approach emphasizing active support for the growing capacity of young people by individuals, organizations, and institutions especially at the community level. The youth development approach is rooted in a commitment to enabling all young people to thrive. This simple statement combines two principles: universality or inclusiveness (all youth) and a positive orientation building on strengths (thriving). Youth development arose as a counter-balance to the emphasis in problem prevention and treatment programmes on categorizing youths according to

their deficits and trying to remedy them (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pitman, 2004).

The third use of the term youth development is to describe a range of practices in programmes, organizations, and initiatives. Youth development in this sense refers to the application of the principles to a planned set of practices, or activities that foster the development process in young people. The distinction between principles and practices is especially useful when considering the various settings or contexts in which young people spend time. Development takes place in families, neighbourhoods, youth organizations, faith-based organization, schools, and a multitude of other places, including cyberspace. Although the specific practices that adults use to create and sustain such opportunities differ across settings, the principles are consistent (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pitman, 2004).

### **An Evaluation of the Factors Responsible for High Rate of Poverty in Nigeria**

The very high incidence of poverty in Nigeria has been attributed to a number of factors and it is imperative that some of these factors are reviewed here. Since independence, it has been very difficult for Nigeria to produce the type of leadership that could effectively and efficiently use the abundant human and material resources the country is endowed with to drive national development. It is very unfortunate that we live in a country where leadership is not for service to the people but for selfish interest and personal aggrandizement. Leadership in Nigeria, especially in government is seen as the easiest and shortest route to becoming wealthy and so people aspire for positions of leadership so as to appropriate more than their fair share of the common wealth.

This explains why in Nigeria today what we have in positions of authority is army of occupation rather than visionary leaders. As a result of this scenario, a very small percentage of the population has cornered the commonwealth that should go round to everybody living the majority of the people to wallow in abject poverty. The persistence and pervasiveness of poverty in several countries has been linked to the lack of popular participation in governance and decision-making as well as weak institutional base. This has led among other things to poor accountability, transparency in resource allocation, weak programmes implementation and monitoring. Ultimately, developmental programmes are rendered ineffective, poverty reduction initiatives

are therefore ineffective and resources are wasted (Olowa, 2012).

Corruption has also virtually become an accepted way of life in Nigeria. The resources of the nation are misappropriated on a daily basis by the leaders, who only put the interest of their family and friends at heart while ignoring the masses (Ucha, 2010). Corruption has eaten so deep into the government and the economy that everyone seems to be blinded by it to the extent that it has virtually become a way of life in Nigeria. Government's is generated mostly from the sale of crude oil, but this income instead of being used for developmental purposes, is often shared among the political office holders and their families leaving the majority of the people to wallow in poverty (Ucha, 2010). Political leaders practically ignore the affairs and wellbeing of the people who elected them into office. It is clear that corruption in Nigeria has increased poverty and inequality as well as contributed to high crime rates.

Moreover, there was an increase in income disparity after the economic growth which the country experienced between 1965- 1975, and this income inequality has increased the dimension of poverty in Nigeria (Oluwatayo, 2008). The income inequality between the people in the rural and urban areas in Nigeria is remarkably high as those who live in the rural areas base all their income on Agriculture which Government's revenue is generated mostly taken over the economy. They do not invest their money to acquire skills as people in the urban areas would and this makes them more vulnerable to poverty and leads to some social and economic problems such as violence corruption and so on (Oluwatayo, 2008). A more equal distribution of Nigeria's income would go a long way in reducing the rate of poverty, but since it is typically the rich people who hold political offices or are related to those holding political offices, income remains concentrated among the rich ( Ucha, 2010). The level of inequality in Nigeria is completely unacceptable and I doubt if there is any other country in this whole wide world that still has this level of inequality. The resources of the nation are in the hands of a very small percentage of the population while the greater proportion of the population lives in poverty with the majority being the youths. This situation is very worrisome because it does not give the youths the opportunity to fully realize their full potentials.

Furthermore, the system of education we have in Nigeria today has not helped matters because it does not equip the youths with the type of skills that

can easily enable them to eke out a living in difficult situations such as ours. The so much emphasis that has been placed on the acquisition of certificates instead of knowledge and skills is contributing to the poor quality of graduates we are seeing today. This is because people now try to acquire certificates by all means without having the requisite knowledge and skills to back up the certificates. The inadequate funding of the education sector in Nigeria is also a thorny issue that has adversely affected the educational system. It wouldn't be out of place to regard the education system in the country as a failure compared to other countries in the world. It is an undisputable fact that education can play a major role in reducing poverty. The World Bank has made it clear that education is central to development. This is because it promotes economic growth, national productivity and innovation, and values of democracy and social cohesion (Ucha, 2010).

More so in Nigeria, the population with no education accounts for most of the poor. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to education". This right unfortunately has been denied to many Nigerians and as a result they have become invisible in society. This deprivation of education applies more to females than males, because they are considered the inferior sex. Educating them is therefore seen as unnecessary as they are expected to marry as early as possible (Ucha, 2010). This scenario is more prevalent in the northern part of the country.

Unemployment is a major factor contributing to poverty in Nigeria. There is a correlation between unemployment and poverty. When people are unemployed, their source of livelihood depletes overtime. The cost of living becomes high and the standard of living goes down (Ucha, 2010). There are many people in Nigeria who lack the opportunity of being employed. The fact that one is educated does not even guarantee employment. Many graduates in Nigeria roam the streets without anything reasonable to do for a living. Employment is also not based on merit but depends on how connected one is to the people in the corridors of power. This leaves many highly qualified people in poverty as seemingly no one cares to know what they are capable of achieving. These people miss out on the income they would have gotten if they were to be employed. The number of quality jobs is also quite few considering the number of people looking for job (Ucha, 2010).

According to Sanusi (2013), bad governance and its attendant misplaced priorities, corruption and huge

debt burden are responsible for continuous poverty in Nigeria. Speaking during a conference on "Effective Strategies for Reducing Poverty and Scaling Up Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria" organized by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), he also gave the non-competitiveness of Nigerian goods in the international markets, few economic opportunities, conflict and violence, huge debt burden, low productivity, high rate of population growth, and suboptimal human capital as part of the poverty problem in Nigeria.

Nigeria which was one of the 50 richest countries globally in the 1970s is now one of the poorest countries in the world. Nigeria's immense wealth is a contradiction of the poverty level because the country has no business in being one of the poorest countries in the world. Poverty in Nigeria is mostly in the rural and semi-urban areas which is a result of poor linkages to the urban sector, lack of access to productive input, environmental degradation, slow agricultural growth, high population, and poor infrastructural facilities (Sanusi, 2013). Lack of proper education could also lead to poverty and households where the head had no education were poorer than households where the head had at least a secondary school education.

### **Poverty and Youth Development in Nigeria: A Theoretical review**

Youth development and empowerment are vital stages in life for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and live better, and possibly have a more fulfilling life. The human capital formed in the youth is thus an important determinant of long term growth that a nation can invest on. Hence, making sure that the youths are well prepared for the future is enormously important to the course of poverty reduction and growth (Odeh and Okoye, 2014). The Nigerian governments over the years had strived to provide youth development and empowerment programmes to develop and empower the Nigerian youths to enable them contribute to the development of the nation and take over the leadership of the country. However, the results have remained terribly unimpressive (Odeh and Okoye, 2014). Young people all over the world are vital and important segment of the society in which they live. A disciplined, focused, and law-abiding youth can create a bright future for any nation. Conversely, a lawless, indulgent, and violent youth is a great threat to the nation's peace and security.



Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes the poor. A greater proportion of the Nigerian population live in poverty and this includes an army of youths in the urban centres in Nigeria who struggle to eke out a living by hawking all kinds of wares along the roads. The sales per day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above the poverty line (Zakari, 2006). The high rate of poverty in Nigeria has adversely affected youth development. Poverty denies the youths the opportunity to acquire certain skills, knowledge, and values they require to become useful members of society and contribute meaningfully to national development (Obiagwu, 1997; Agbai, 2000). Poverty-stricken people are prone to political enslavement and economic exploitation. This is mainly because poverty kills the spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice and deprives people the opportunity to develop and build on their potentials

Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skills that young people acquire help to determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. It is surprising however to realize that between the year 2000 and 2004, about 30 per cent of Nigerian youths between ages 10 and 24 were not enrolled in secondary school and the reason may not be far from the prohibitive cost of acquiring education (Population Reference bureau, 2006). The aftereffect of this deplorable situation is that millions of young Nigerians continuously roam the streets without any hope of a better day. Those who manage to complete secondary school have no opportunities for tertiary education. Having been denied the chance to reach their potentials, they are disoriented and readily available for antisocial actions. Worse still, some who struggle to enroll in different educational institutions drop out due to lack of basic learning facilities which is attributable to inadequate funding of the education sector in Nigeria (Onyekpe, 2007).

Poverty has become a very serious issue in Nigeria and as a result many young Nigerians are engaged in daily struggle for survival without any genuine assistance from government, no wonder Nigeria has been consistently rated as one the poorest countries in the world in spite of her abundant human and material resources. The Nigerian youths are not happy with their poor economic condition as this inhibits their potentials and creates in them attitudes and behavior that are inimical to social development (Koinyan, 1991; Ezeanyika, 2004). Poverty aside

from undermining the proper development of the youths also leads to low self-esteem, lack of motivation, inferiority complex, dependency, poor psycho-physical fitness and so forth (Ejiogun, 1997).

The Marxist Political Economy Perspective forms the theoretical thrust of this paper. This is because this perspective provides a more penetrating insight into the issue of poverty and the underdevelopment it engenders by focusing on the structural deficiencies in society that give impetus to the emergence of the phenomenon of poverty. It is essentially a view of society as a product of conflicts rooted mainly in the class inequalities and exploitative relationship between the powerful rich and the powerless poor (Anikpo, 1996). One can think of the Marxist Political Economy as the study of social relations, particularly power relations, which mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources in society. It concentrates on a specific set of social relations organized around power or the ability to control other people, processes, and things, even in who are in the corridors of power between commodities, prices, supply and demand; it is first and foremost about people and the social relationship between them; about the owners of wealth and how they use it to exploit others; about what is produced and how.

The Marxist Political economy adequately captures the situation in Nigeria where the repressive character of the state and the rigid class structure that is reinforced at every point in time has ensured that a very large proportion of the Nigerian population (mostly youths) today live in abject poverty and a life of helplessness and hopelessness. The recklessness of the political elite in Nigeria has grossly undermined the processes of development to the extent that the country is today at what may be regarded as development cross-roads. From the economy to the education sector, power sector, infrastructural development, youth development, poverty reduction, provision of security, it has always been the same bad news of abysmal failure on the part of successive regimes in Nigeria. The resources of the nation have been appropriated by the minority who has in the corridors of power leaving the majority to live in poverty. This same people continue to recycle themselves in power and when they become too old and weak to continue, their children and cronies takeover from them, like this the vicious circle is maintained for the army of Nigerians who live in poverty. This level of poverty the power play in Nigeria has created makes it impossible for the youths who are suppose to be the framework of

expectations to be adequately developed to be able to face the challenges of tomorrow and fully realize their potentials so as to contribute meaningfully to national development.

### **Possible Solutions to the problem of Poverty in Nigeria**

The issue of poverty reduction in Nigeria needs to be given the urgent attention it deserves considering its negative consequences on socio economic and political development of the country. It is obvious that for the country to end poverty, it must be able to provide the necessary skills needed for each and every Nigerian to be economically productive, business capital, infrastructure capital, public institutional capital, as well as knowledge capital. To find a lasting solution to poverty in Nigeria, we need to formulate working strategies aimed at making key investments in people and in infrastructure. We must make plans, build systems, be jointly accountable as well as provide an effective financing apparatus. Before the systems are put in place, it is important to understand the plight of the over 70 million Nigerians living in abject poverty. People that have displayed bravery, fortitude and sense of responsibility by working hard with their available resources to see that they remove themselves and especially their children from the poverty trap. It is important we do so that it can be said that it was our generation that healed Nigeria from this vicious circle of poverty.

Nigeria's approach has been to pursue industrial development in the cities with the hope that the increased wealth and raw materials demand will trickle -down to the rural areas. Most of the poor people in Nigeria live in the rural areas and their continuous neglect has been responsible for Nigeria's poor rating in many of the national well-being indices such as maternal and infant mortality, access to ICT, access to pipe borne water and so forth. National policies should therefore be deliberately formulated and directed towards helping the poor majority in the rural areas. Focus should also be on building good linkage roads between rural areas and the cities so as to ensure access to local and international markets for rural dwellers. This will improve their incomes and raise their socioeconomic status. Increasing development efforts in the rural areas will help in reducing rural- urban migration, reduce overpopulation in the cities, reduce poverty in the villages and cities, and reduce crime. This is because improved infrastructure in the rural areas will encourage more people to return to the villages and since these communities are more closely knit and traditional, incentives to commit crime will be non-

existent.

More concerted efforts need to be made in the direction of genuinely fighting corruption which is actually the major factor inhibiting development efforts in Nigeria. Funds that should have been channeled to development programmes are continuously diverted into private pockets by individuals in positions of authority. The commonwealth needs to be evenly distributed amongst the populace so as to reduce the level of inequality, poverty, and crime. If corruption is reduced to the lowest level in Nigeria, it is very obvious that a lot more funds would be available for development programmes including adequate youth development.

Government should as a matter of urgency embark on massive job creation to ensure that the bulk of the Nigerian youths are gainfully employed or at least have something meaningfully that occupies most of their time. Looking at the army of unemployed youths that roam the streets, one begins to wonder what the future holds for them and the entire country at large.

### **CONCLUSION**

The issue of poverty in Nigeria has become a fundamental problem that has now constituted a major clog in the wheel of progress. It is a worrisome development that presently about 33 per cent of the Nigerian population lives below the national poverty line out of which the majority are youths. As a result of this situation it becomes difficult to imagine how the Nigerian youths could be confidently referred to as leaders of tomorrow. The very high rate of poverty if corruption is develop people who can spearhead national development and as a result the framework of expectations has become shaky.

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