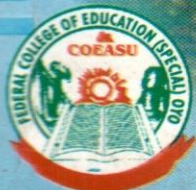


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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION AND ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By

Ajayi, A. O. & Ogunbunmi, O. A.

History Department, School of Arts and Social Sciences,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo, Oyo State

Abstract

As a result of the prevalent pervasive and virulent nature of poverty in Nigeria which makes the country ranks as one of poorest countries despite abundance of human made and natural resources, effort have been made by successive Nigerian government and NGOs to tackle the problem of poverty. This work therefore, historically analyses the multi-dimensional functioning of non-governmental organisation towards eradication of poverty in Nigerians. The paper shows various philanthropic efforts embarked upon towards curbing the social phenomenon, various definitions of poverty as propounded by different scholars were given intense paper history and typology of NGOs, level of poverty in Nigeria, achievement of NGOs and recommendations were provided.

Introduction

Poverty is endemic in Nigerian nation and manifest in all its ramifications. Successive governments since independence have tried to formulate and implement policies towards poverty alleviation. Yet, these efforts have not culminated or result in wiping out in Nigeria, rather it is becoming more and more pervasive.

Poverty is a plague afflicting people all over the word it is considered one of symptoms or manifestations of under

development especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Poverty is a vicious circle which keeps the poor in a state of destitution, bereaved disillusionment. Poverty affects many aspects of human conditions hence there has been no universal consensus on the definition of poverty. poverty is pervasive and is multi-dimensional in nature. Most Nigerians cannot eat three square meals; they live in a condition in which they are below a specified minimum income level and are unable to provide or satisfy the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living.

The poor experience inadequate level of consumption (Aluko, 1975:10). Poverty can also be regarded as a state in which an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her needs for food, clothing and shelter. He is unable to meet most social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment skill, assets, and self-esteem and has limited access to social economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities.

Conceptual Clarification of Poverty

Definition of poverty varies as many scholars and authors perceive it. This means that there is no acceptable definition of poverty. What we have is various description of poverty. We shall attempt some of them here. Given its multi-dimensional nature, poverty has been perceived using different criteria. Poverty may be seen as a reflection of glaring defects in the economy as evident in mass penury, pauperization of the working and professional class including artisans, mass unemployment and poor welfare service.

It denote absence or lack of basic necessities of life including material wealth, common place, regular flow of wages and income and inability to sustain oneself on existing resources available. In such a state the means of achieving minimum substance health education and comfort are absent. Sometimes

attention is drawn to the relative nature of poverty and a clear distinction is drawn between the poor and non-poor.

According to the World Bank Development Report (1990) poverty is defined as "inability of certain persons to attain a minimum standard of living. Sam Aluko (1975:10) defines poverty as "lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing and shelter". Such lack of resources to meet the basic needs incapacitates the individual in protecting himself against social, economic and political deprivation.

Based on these concept Anyanwu (1997:8) categorized the following as poor, especially within the Nigerian context:

- Household of individual below the poverty line and whose incomes are insufficient to provide for the basic needs.
- Household or individual lacking access to basic service, political contract and other forms of support.
- People in isolated rural area who lack essential infrastructure.
- Female headed household whose nutrition needs are not being adequately.
- Persons who have lost their jobs and who are unable to find gainful employment as a result of economic reforms like the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and those who are in danger of becoming the "new poor".

Aboyade (1987:78) held the view that there seem to be a general agreement that poverty is a different concept to handle and that it is more easily recognized than defined. Though it is difficult to be specific about the minimum level of the well-being for the state of poverty the poor in any given society usually stand out sufficiently in terms of severe material deprivation for their in wretched conditions to be immediately recognized. He stated that people are poverty stricken when their incomes even if adequate for survival, fall radically behind that of the community average. Poverty has income and non-income dimension, it also represents a general condition of deprivation manifesting in social inferiority, powerlessness, isolation and degradation.

Poverty may also be transitory or temporary and therefore reversible if it is caused by natural or man made disasters such as flood, drought, war, environmental degradation or even failure of public policy.

The perception of poverty has therefore broadened the focus beyond the inability of households to provide food for its members to include inability to access other basic social amenities which impact positively on family welfare.

A synthesis of opinions above reveals that poverty can only be described as lack of access to basic necessities of life housing, food, health facilities and other social amenities which make life more meaningful and worth living.

Many reasons have been advanced for causes of poverty. Some of these are highlighted below:

i. The Stage of Economic and Social Development

This is little doubt that a situation of economic underdevelopment can be hindrance to the capacity of a nation to formulate and implement programmes and therefore accentuate poverty (Aluko, 1975).

ii. Low Productivity causes poverty

Since the consuming unit is unable to earn enough income which will enable it to maintain adequate/decent living standard, low productivity may be due to obsolescent of human skill or unacquired skill resulting from low education, poor health and physical incapacity.

iii. Physical or Environmental Degradation

A classic case of this cause of poverty is readily seen in countries like Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia in Africa. Misuse of over use of land which result in deforestation, soil encroachment and excessive shifting cultivation system in agriculture are destructive of endowed land resources leaving the population of the poor as well as deepening the incidence of

poverty. It is the same effect that oil spillage produced from mindless exploitation of crude oil.

iv. Structural shift in the economy

Inadequate micro-economic management policies usually result in an unwholesome shift in economic activity. Nigeria is a good example with five principle export commodities namely cocoa, palm produce, rubber, groundnuts and cotton before the advent of crude oil.

The country's structural shift occurred when undue concentration was given crude oil to the neglect of agriculture which provided job for the rural populace. In the process, the economy became a mono-culture, while mass poverty became the lot of the rural sector with the consequent rural-urban drift which also swelled the number of the urban poor.

v. Inadequate commitment to programme implementation

Much of the polices and programme in the development plans of the 1970s and 1980s in Nigeria for example were not faithfully implemented even when the country did not suffer for fund. This failure contributed to deepening poverty.

Also the failure to adequately implement the structural adjustment programme especially after 1980s worsened the lot of the poor as this led to continued workers retirement and general economic hardship. Also worthy of mention here is the usual pattern of lack of commitment of policy by each successive government, however beneficial the polices of the preceding government may be, all these result in economic instability and are unhelpful to poverty alleviation.

Non-Governmental Organisation

Meaning and Essence of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

In clarifying the concept of non-governmental organisations and collectives with different objectives, those that

are regarded as non-government organisation are specialized groups with specific functions in the society. Again, the term non-governmental organisation means different things to different people and is different from governmental organisation.

Government organisation comprise organisation that are wholly owned and controlled by the state usually such organisational re concerned with performing certain functions spell out by government. One peculiar feature of such organisations are their bureaucratic nature. That is the tendency to adhere strictly to laid down rules. Most often governmental organisations are channels for fundamental socio-political and economic transformation.

On the contrary, non-government organisations are those that owe their existence, ownership and control to individuals, bodies and institution outside the government circles. They are private organisations which function primarily to provide philanthropic non commercial services to the population (Olanrewaju, 1997). Generally speaking most NGOs had their roots in foundation of endowment which were established for the advancement of certain studies, philosophies or ideal. That is to say that most NGOs were founded primarily for the purpose of propagating specific philosophies associated with their founders.

In many developing countries, the activities of non-government organisation are largely noticeable in the area of human rights, environments, health care delivery, community activities, refuges/relief activities as well as post war reconstruction usually the pursuit of such objectives as defined by the founder is determined by the limit imposed by the political authorities. For instance; in many countries of the world some non-government organisation were established and funded to monitor, educate, encourage and enforce the obligation of fundamental human rights.

History and Typology of Non-government Organisation

Our discussion on the history of non-government organisation in Nigeria will concentrate on three periods namely, the colonial period, post independence era and post colonial period.

The emergency of non-government organisation in Nigeria dates back to the period of colonial rule. With colonialism came several organisation and groups which had their roots in Britain. Prominent non-government organisation that were active during this period included foundation and organisations that provided social and welfare services for the colonized people. They also include some religious organisation which engaged in evangelical activities in the country. These later groups were associated with the establishment of several educational institutions, health centres and other social services across the country. They were also responsible for the establishment of psychiatry homes, leprosarium and juvenile centres.

It needs to be stressed that during this earliest period, NGOs were concerned purely with humanitarian and evangelical activities.

Post-independence era (1960-1966) with the attainment of Nigeria independence in 1960, NGOs maintained their hold on the democratic struggle in the country. However, this period witnessed a rapid expansion in the activities of these organisations. Also the period saw the emergence of Human Rights and Pro-democracy NGOs i.e. organisations that function primarily to protect and safeguard citizens' rights including their right to political freedom. The rise of these organisations was due to certain developments that characterized the period. This include among others increasing complexity of political structures, institutions and activities in Nigeria. For instance, from only three regions in 1960, the country was divided into twelve states in 1967, nineteen in 1976, twenty-one in 1987, thirty in 1991 and thirty-six in 1996. The implication of this is increased in the tempo of political and administrative activities in the country (Anyanwu, 1997).

Incidence/Level of Poverty in Nigeria

Periodic assessment and analysis of poverty have become imperative in order to understand the nature and changing circumstances for the poor, with particular focus on how they are creating and coping with this squalid environment. This survey of the incidence of poverty in Nigeria, was their fore designed to assess the economic and living conditions of the poor in order to understand and identify major problem areas, the fundamental structural characteristic and dimensions of poverty, the causative factors and effects and the distribution of poverty in the country with a view to defining as specifying the viable options as policy interventions for poverty alleviation.

According to a report of nationwide survey of households conducted in 1997 covering 109 local government areas in 36 states and federal capital territory, Abuja, poverty is endemic and prevalent in very part of the country. The survey outcome is disheartening. The results showed that the incidence of poverty has increased to 60.2 percent in 1997 from the respective levels of 34.1 and 43.0 percents in 1992/1993 and 1995. This represents a significant increase in the number of household that lived below the poverty line with adverse implication on the household standard of living accessibility to basic socio-economic infrastructure facilities. The average household income increased in nominal term in 1997 but declined in real term as a result of high and persistent price inflation (CBN, 1997).

Poverty is more predominant in the rural than urban areas reflecting the disparities in income distribution and degree of deprivation of basic amenities. There is also significant amount of geographical disparity in poverty level. For instance, the south east exhibited the highest incidence of poverty while the north belt reflected the lowest. The majority of the households covered in survey were either self-employed informal economic activities as in subsistence farming which characterized by low productivity and income, hence, their deprivation as lack of access to basic socio-economic service. A large number of the households

especially in the areas where illiterates is major index of poverty (CBN, 1997).

The average household size increased from 5.0 in 1992/93 to 7 in 1997 and 10 in 2002. Thus putting further pressure on available facilities resulting in a deteriorating living condition including environmental condition for the household.

A higher percentage of the households fell within the active working life (15-65 years) which provides a greater scope for the country to benefit from improved educational facilities and skills and the provision of greater job opportunities. The foods intake of the surveyed households of indicated and extreme poverty situation as high calories food items such as gaari dominated this nutritional types of which a large number of households devoted 70-100% of their earned income in addition to the food supplements from their farms.

With respect to access to basic infrastructure facilities such as energy, portable water, health, housing and transport the rural area were at a greater disadvantage than the urban ones. The rural long distance, they have to traverse and the inability to afford the charge for them.

The Contribution of NGOs to Poverty Alleviation

NGOs have identified 220,000 centres that can be used for skills acquisition under the Capacity Acquisition Programme and 12,000 companies that can be used under mandatory attachment programme. It collects the number of unemployment grandaunt and persons so that Nigeria could be regarded as a poor nation so that IMF and World Bank could give Nigeria debt forgiveness.

NGOs have trained 140,000 unemployment youth in over 90 different trades throughout the country between 1989 – 2003 (World Bank/CBN, 2004).

In Nigeria, the problem of poverty has for a fairly long time being matter of concern to the government of Nigeria, international agencies like IMF, World Bank and NGOs initial attention was focused in rural development and town and country planning as

practical means of dealing with the problem. Thus, the second and fourth National Developmental Plan documents contain both direct and indirect alluring to as well as objectives of policies and programme aimed at minimizing the causes and level of poverty (Akinyanju, 1979).

The government programmes almost at alleviating the socio-economic status of the people and consequently eradicating poverty in the country include the following: the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Better Life for Rural Women/Family Support Programmes (BLP/FSP), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Direct Establishment and Promotion of Rural Finance Institute (RFI), Petroleum (Special Trust Fund (PTF), Mass Transit Programme (MTP), Guinea Worm Eradication Programme (GWEP) and National Immunization Programme (NIP) as well as National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP).

African Refugees Foundation (AREF) is another NGO body that is primarily concerned with displaced persons who are victims of natural disasters, as civil strife's like mass. The AREF is founded by Ambassador Olusegun Olusola primarily to reduce and alleviate problems associated with dislocation and displacement.

They provide educational and vocational services to resettles displaced persons and engages them in vocational studies through which they acquire skill such works as carpentry and foundry and wedding (Seniyi, 1994).

They have also concluded the establishment of 147 youth information centre (14 per state) the establishment of 47 trade development centre in 15 states in collaboration with UNDP (World Bank Conference, 2003).

There is also Women in Nigeria (WIN) which aims at alleviating poverty among women. The objectives include to encourage women in Nigeria to fight for their rights (economically).

political), to improve their standard of living via promotion and formation of self-help rural development organisation.

It should however be mentioned that the poverty alleviation drives of the non-governmental organisations are laudable and have helped considerably to reduce poverty.

Conclusion

In spite of the efforts of the NGOs economic policies which bring more hardship and accentuate poverty have rendered the efforts and achievement ineffective and meaningless. The government economic polices like Economic Emergence (Shagari), Structural Adjustment Programme (Babangida) and Deregulation Policy (Obasanjo) have caused inflation, erosion of middle class wide the gap between the poor and the rich and have increased the number of the poor in Nigeria. The huge amount of money and human and materials resources deployed to alleviate poverty in Nigeria have almost become a waste. This is because instead of noticing reduction in poverty level in Nigeria what we generally observed and supported statistically by World Bank and IMF is poverty. This is why Nigeria is conserved by World Bank as one of the third poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 1993).

The need to eradicate or alleviate poverty in an economy characterized by rapid population growth, low economic constitute a major challenge facing the economy in the 21st millennium. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a vigorous effort and strong commitment to alleviate poverty in the country if the situation is not to deteriorate beyond redemption.

The NGOs efforts are just some out of humanitarian concern their effort can only marginally reduce incidence causes and actuation of poverty. Therefore, there is a limit to the poverty alleviation efforts more so when the causes or root cause of poverty continue to grow by the day.

Recommendations

Based on the identified problem militating against sustained poverty alleviation programme the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Restructure the economy from import dependent through aggressive export orientation and innovative diversification of its export base beyond mineral resources.
- (2) Ensure good economic management which should embrace appropriate exchange rate policies and a further opening up to the economy through privatization. Strengthening the existing poverty alleviation institutions and organisations both governmental and non-governmental for effective performance.

Government ensure macro-economic stability and growth development which is the first practical means of reaching the poor size without growth, they can be no expansion which creates employment and increase income for distribution.

Government should rehabilitate and expand infrastructure (facilities) formulate policies which are directly focused on the poor such as:

- a. Evolving a scheme that would increase their productivity and thorough for instance increased supply of critically needed inputs and
- b. Lay increased emphasis on making basic socio-economic infrastructure (education and health services, roads, portable water and electricity) available to the poor at affordable cost.

Poverty Alleviation Agencies should be encouraged in providing enabling environment for their operatives. Government should also give them guards for their role in alleviating poverty in Nigeria.

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