

Conceptualising Poverty through the Lenses of Citizens: The Case of Ogun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Poverty is a global problem with different meanings. In eradicating the menace, governments in both developed and developing countries have come up with various alleviating programmes and strategies. For Nigeria and Ogun state in particular, varying poverty reduction programmes have been set up by successive governments. However, studies reveal that a considerable gap exists between the programme's objective and achievement. As noted by scholars, for there to be an effective policy in place, poverty perspective from the citizenry is crucial. Thus, the study using the qualitative research method and an in-depth interview analysed the meaning of poverty from the perspective of Ogun State citizens. Findings reveal from the study that citizens within the state perceive poverty from the absolute part of it. On this basis, the paper suggests that poverty reduction programmes to be set up in the state should focus on tackling deprivation of basic needs, particularly in the area of unemployment, skills acquisition and empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in activities of their choice and have the living conditions/amenities, which are customary or at least widely encouraged in the societies they belong..." (Townsend 1979: 31)

This deposition by Townsend depicts that poverty means different things to different people. According to a study carried out by the World Bank in 1998, an interesting definition of poverty was provided by a Nigerian farmer who equated poverty to heat, "One cannot see it, one can only feel it, so to know poverty, you have to go through it". In the same vein, Aboyade (1975) likened poverty to an elephant, which is more easily recognised than defined. Hence, poverty varies according to people's view and perception.

Scholars engaged in discussing, investigating and analysing poverty are faced with an increasingly broad and multidisciplinary body of literature from economists, philosophers, statisticians and sociologists, each of which makes use of conceptual categories and tools belonging to his or her particular field. Also, in the field of research, poverty had come to mean different things depending on the approaches, which at times may lead to overlapping or conflicting notions regard-

ing poverty. Ajakaye and Adeyeye (2001) gave an historical background of poverty changing perspectives from a focus on income indicators in the 1960s to inclusion of non-monetary indicators in the 1990s and beyond. For instance, Thornton et al. (2006) linked poverty to climate vulnerability, namely, the creation of barren lands for profitable activities for human owing to the changes in climatic conditions. Chiappero-Martinetti and Moroni (2007) linked poverty to deprivation of basic human needs. Barrientos and Hulme (2016) referred poverty to be the absence of social protection and presence of gender issues (Shah 2016).

Poverty's multifaceted and multidimensional nature has made tackling poverty difficult despite efforts being intensified globally through reforms and interventions such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to tackle poverty and improve living standards. A nation's development is categorised based on the indices they have on their poverty scale (Danaan 2018).

In a report by the World Poverty Clock, Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world with 91.8 million Nigerians in abject poverty (Kazeem 2018; Sattar 2019). This is a paradox in that poverty is in the midst of a country that is endowed with natural, human and mineral resources (Omoyibo 2013; Ibietan et al. 2014). At the focal point of study, a study by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2012 reveals that 62.3 percent of Ogun State

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citizens lives in absolute poverty and 69.0 per cent in relative poverty. This statistics raises daunting questions to the overarching goal of poverty reduction policies such as Operation Feed The Nation, Green Revolution, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Family Support Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme, and Millennium Development Goals now Sustainable Development Goals amongst others that had been set up to tackle poverty within the state and has not yielded positive results (Oshewolo 2011; Danaan 2018; Orokpo et al. 2018). Many reasons had been given for the abysmal performance of poverty alleviation initiatives such as policy inconsistencies and discontinuity, poor targeting mechanism, mismanagement of funds, and lack of accountability (Aigbokhan 2008; Inam 2015; Dauda 2017; Durokifa 2017). For instance, Ugoh and Ukpere (2009) in their study traced the rise of poverty in Nigeria despite the implementation of numerous poverty alleviation programmes to poor policy formulation on the part of the government by failing to target the appropriate people. However, as noted by Durokifa (2017), poverty eradication is better known and measured based on what is said and seen in the lives of the citizenry.

In light of this, this paper using qualitative research methodology would be assessing poverty from the view of Ogun State citizens in Nigeria. This paper would contribute to the wide based knowledge of poverty in literature and also lessen the complexities of the phenomenon of poverty in Nigeria with focus on Ogun State. It will also assist in the articulation of government policies and programmes to address the poverty situation in Nigeria and Ogun State in particular.

Concept of Poverty

There is no consensus as to a standard definition of poverty despite enormous literatures on it. Its definition varies according to the scholar's views and perceptions. According to Smith, a man is rich or poor according to the degree to which he can afford to live a comfortable life and enjoy the common necessities of life (Chandrasekaran 2013) whilst Kakwenda (2003), defines poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, which is influenced by various factors like health, cloth, shelter and means of income. Chaundhary et al. (2009) analysed poverty as lack of means in relation to

needs (absolute poverty) or lack of means in relation to the means of others (relative poverty). The World Bank (2001) describes poverty as a pronounced deprivation of wellbeing related to lack of material, income, consumption, healthcare facilities, lack of quality education, exposure to risk, denial of freedom to be heard and powerlessness. Bradshaw (2006) asserts that poverty is the lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare and safety.

The World Bank (2001) definition correlates with Bradshaw's (2006) definition of poverty in terms of necessities but went further to emphasise exposure to risk, denial of freedom to be heard and powerlessness. This indicates a psychological dimension to poverty. The United Nations in 1998 attempted to present a comprehensive definition, which describes poverty as: *"Denial of choice and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It is the lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. It entails not having a school to go to, a land to farm or a job to earn one's living and not having access to credit facilities. It is living in an unsafe environment without access to clean water and sanitation. Poverty is insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities"* (Ucha 2010:46).

This definition agrees with the perception of poverty by Aku et al.'s (1997) perception of poverty as a form of deprivation in any or all of the five different aspects:

- ♦ Personal and physical deprivation experienced from health, nutrition, literacy, clothing, educational disability and lack of self-confidence.
- ♦ Economic deprivation on account of lack of access to property, income and assets.
- ♦ Social deprivation due to denial from full participation in social, political and economic activities.
- ♦ Cultural deprivation in terms of lack of access to values, beliefs, customs, information and attitude, which deprives people the control of their future.
- ♦ Political deprivation in terms of lack of a political voice to partake in decision-making that affects their lives.

The above conceptualisation of poverty implies that poverty goes beyond the lack of income or material things such as clothes, shelter

or technologies but reaches to include denial of land, credit and services, freedom of expression, vulnerability, insecurities, deprivation to quality life, exclusion from decision-making process and powerlessness. In addition, it entails an individual's state of mind or self-perception or belief in the society. For instance in 1997, a Kenyan man in an interview stated thus:

"Don't ask me what poverty is. Look at my house, and you can count the number of holes. Look at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty" (Narayan et al. 2000: 30).

Similarly, poverty can be tagged as a humiliating circumstance, a sense of dependency and helplessness. In 1995, a Ghanaian, as reported by Narayan et al. (2000: 39) described poverty to mean lack of voice and power. According to him, "It is when you know good but cannot do good". In the same vein, an elderly man in Uganda explained, "The forces of poverty and impoverishment are so powerful today. The government and the churches can only curtail them. So one now feels helpless. It is the feeling of helplessness that is so painful, more painful than poverty" (Narayan et al. 2000).

Categories of Poverty

According to Carr (2008), there are broad explanations for the concept of poverty and this becomes even more complex when the indices used to measure or define poverty become too many. The introduction of too many measurement indicators makes it difficult to pinpoint the regular poverty situations faced in different countries of the world. In the opinion of OECD (2001) this inconsistency makes it difficult in identifying who is really poor. Hence, poverty is distinguished in various ways depending on distinctive economic indicators such as income, assets and resources (Aliyu 2003).

According to Hettne (2002: 2), there are five major classifications of poverty:

- ♦ **Absolute Poverty:** This is sometimes referred to as extreme poverty (Chandrasekaran 2013). It is the severe deprivation of basic human needs such as clothing, feeding, safe drinking water, good and effective sanitation facilities, health, shelter, in-

formation and is related to access to income as well as social services. Aliyu (2003) explained absolute poverty to be the condition where an individual or group of people are unable to satisfy their basic requirements for human survival due to meagre income or lack of access to health, housing, medical care facilities, etc. Absolute poverty depicts a situation in which people barely exist because basic human needs are lacking (Omoyibo 2013).

- ♦ **Relative Poverty:** It is an indispensable fact that what is seen as poverty in one country or community can be seen as the height of wellbeing in another. This therefore infers that poverty can be seen in relative terms. Galbraith (1958: 323) conceptualising relative poverty stated that people are poor when their income is adequate for survival and falls below that of the community. According to Galbraith, such category of poor people are degraded and humiliated in the literal sense because they live outside the grades or categories, which the community regards as respectable. Likewise, Aliyu (2003) views relative poverty to be a situation where an individual or group of people has access to income and basic needs, which is generally low in comparison to the generality of the community or populace. Aboyade (1975) holds that people are "poverty stricken when their income though adequate for survival, falls radically behind that of the community, they cannot have what the larger community deems fit as necessary and they cannot wholly escape the scorn of the larger community. They are degraded, for in the literal sense they live below the grades or categories, which the community regards as acceptable".
- ♦ **Chronic Poverty:** This means that poverty is persistent or on a long term. According to Uccelli (1997), chronic poverty is characterised by deep-rooted, impoverished conditions, which are the consequence of multiple deprivations over time. Its causes are more permanent and depend on factors such as lack of skills for gainful employment or vocational disability, poor health, limited productive resources, pervasive cultural and socioeconomic factors (Hettne 2002).

- ♦ **Conjectural Transitory or Transient Poverty:** Unlike the chronic poverty, this is poverty on a short term. Alternatively, it shows itself in fluctuation in wellbeing, which results in frequent declines in the living standard (Mbuli 2008). Transient poverty can be caused by natural disasters or man-made disasters such as wars and environmental degradation or structural changes induced by policy reform, which result in loss of employment.
- ♦ **Spatial or Location Poverty:** Hettne (2002) refers to spatial poverty that depends on geographical or regional spread. It involves urban squalor characterised by the existence of ghettos and slums in metropolitan cities, environmental degradation, inadequate welfare services, low per capita income, overcrowded accommodation, and rural poverty characterised by poor conditions of living.

Poverty can also be examined from three wide-ranging perspectives of income, basic needs and capability perspectives.

Income Perspective: This perspective is most commonly used and recognised. This simply means when a person income level is below the poverty line, and is defined as living on less than USD 1 a day.

Basic Needs Perspective: This simply views poverty as deprivation of material requirements and opportunities in living a tolerable life for the fulfilment of basic human needs. These requirements could be food, shelter, employment and education.

Capability Perspective: Different from income and basic needs perspective, capability perspective goes beyond income or material lack to include human capabilities. Capability perspective sees poverty as the absence of some 'basic capabilities' needed to be in place. Basic capabilities in this context are the ability to satisfy certain essential 'functioning' to adequate levels (Sen 1993: 41). Functioning here refers to what a person can do or be, such as freedom to participate within a community, being well-nourished, adequately clothed and sheltered, healthy living, and so on (Mbuli 2008: 23-24; Okoli 2009: 2; Raheem et al. 2014: 56).

Poverty Dimension in Nigeria

The high poverty rate of Nigeria is paradoxical when one considers its abundant natural and human resources (Chukwuemeka 2009). Despite its endowment with huge deposits of oil, gas and solid minerals as well as large pool of human capital, the country has been unable to develop its economy to meet the basic needs of its citizen (Ibietan et al. 2014: 1-2). Nigeria, which was one of the richest 50 countries in the early 1970s, has retrogressed to become one of the poorest countries in the world (Chukwuemeka 2009; Okon 2012: 32; Kazeem 2018; Toromade 2018). The increasing rate of poverty at both the regional and national level has led to heightened dependency rate, marginalisation, income inequality, ill health, unsafe and degraded environment and burgeoning population (Ijaiya et al. 2011: 148). Majority of the Nigerian population live under extreme poverty situations epitomised in insufficient income to cover minimum standard of foods, water, shelter, medical care and schooling (OXFAM 2003; Toromade 2018).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank reports on poverty in Nigeria, the population of the poor, which was 36.1 million in 1985 and 34.7 million in 1992 jumped to 55.8 million in 1997 (Aluko 2003). Statistics from the NBS and OXFAM show that the poverty rate in Nigeria in 1960 was 15.0 percent but increased to 27.2 percent in 1980 then galloped to 42.7 percent in 2007 and further escalated to 65.6 percent in 2010, which approximately equals to 112.5 million people living in absolute poverty in 2010 (NBS 2012; UNDP 2009). In 2014, the World Bank President Jim Yong Kim cited Nigeria as one of the five poorest countries in the world. Characterised by high number of the poor with Nigeria ranking 'third', alongside India 'first', and China 'second' in the world poverty index (Omoh 2014). According to the 2015 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, over sixty-two percent of Nigeria's population lives in extreme poverty with majority situated in the northern part of the country (UNDP 2015) (see Table 1). In 2018, the statistics had skyrocketed earning Nigeria the rank of the poorest in the world with India ranking 'second' (Kazeem 2018; Toromade 2018).

Table 1: 2010 Nigeria poverty rates

<i>States</i>	<i>Absolute poverty (%)</i>	<i>Relative poverty (%)</i>	<i>Dollar per day based on PPP (%)</i>
Abia	57.4	63.4	57.8
Adamawa	74.2	80.7	74.3
Akwa Ibom	53.7	62.8	53.8
Anambra	56.8	68.0	57.4
Bauchi	73.0	83.7	73.1
Bayelsa	47.0	57.9	47.0
Benue	67.1	74.1	67.2
Borno	55.1	61.1	55.1
Cross River	52.9	59.7	52.9
Delta	63.3	70.1	63.6
Ebonyi	73.6	80.4	73.6
Edo	65.6	72.5	66.6
Ekiti	52.4	59.1	52.6
Enugu	62.5	72.1	63.4
Gombe	74.2	79.8	74.2
Imo	50.5	57.3	50.7
Jigawa	74.1	79.0	74.2
Kaduna	61.5	73.0	61.8
Kano	65.6	72.3	66.0
Katsina	74.5	82.0	74.8
Kebbi	72.0	80.5	72.5
Kogi	67.1	73.5	67.3
Kwara	61.8	74.3	62.0
Lagos	48.6	59.2	49.3
Nassarawa	60.4	71.7	60.4
Niger	33.8	43.6	33.9
Ogun	62.3	69.0	62.5
Ondo	45.7	57.0	46.1
Osun	37.9	47.5	38.1
Oyo	51.8	60.7	51.8
Plateau	74.1	79.7	74.7
Rivers	50.4	58.6	50.6
Sokoto	81.2	86.4	81.9
Taraba	68.9	76.3	68.9
Yobe	73.8	79.6	74.1
Zamfara	70.8	80.2	71.3
FCT Abuja	55.6	59.9	55.6

Source: NBS 2012

The rise in poverty statistics contradicts the various poverty alleviation programmes set up such as Poverty alleviation programmes set up include but not limited to: Operation Feed the Nation [OFN], People Bank of Nigeria [PBN], Poverty Alleviation Programme [PAP], National Poverty Eradication Programme [NAPEP], Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure [DIFRRI], National Economic and Empowerment Strategy [NEEDS], National Directorate of Employment etc. (Oshewolo 2011; Abass 2013; Ibieta et al. 2014; Orokpo et al. 2018). Studies (Ugoh

and Ukpere 2009; Ijaiya et al. 2011; Oshewolo 2011; Abass 2013; Ibieta et al. 2014; Arisi-Nwugbala et al. 2016) have shown that a considerable gap exists between the target objective of alleviating or eradicating poverty and its achievement. Although, scholars (Oshewolo 2011; Abass 2013; Inam 2015; Dauda 2017) have attributed the causes of the failure of policies and programmes set up to corruption, implementation bottlenecks, poor targeting mechanism, policy inconsistencies and discontinuity, scholars like Orokpo et al. (2018) thought otherwise. According to Orokpo et al. (2018), for there to be an effective result in the poverty alleviation process, there is a need to identify the cause of poverty and pragmatically address them. Just as Alcock (1997: 36) said, *“Once we recognise that poverty exists, then we should know it has a cause (or causes), and if we can identify the cause, then that should give us a basis for developing a policy response to it.”* However, for the causes of poverty to be known, people’s perception of poverty is required for it to be a driving wheel to the policy or programme created for its reduction or eradication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study research design was employed, and qualitative research method used in order to describe, decode and come to terms with the way people feel regarding the subject. The case study helps to provide a nuanced perspective on the subject of investigation. It enables in-depth, multifaceted interrogation of the subject or issue in the society with the aim of proffering answers to the “how” and “why” questions being examined (Soy 2015). A case study design was opted for because it will help in arriving at a deeper insight of what poverty is from the citizens’ view.

In gaining an in-depth knowledge on what poverty is, the researcher used interviews as the research instrument. 16 respondents were randomly selected for questioning. The length of the interview varied per participant. However, the maximum time spent with any participant was an hour. The participants cut across skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower. It also involved the educationally advantaged and disadvantaged.

OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

The recorded interviews were carefully transcribed ensuring that statements of the inter-

viewees were captured without any alteration or embellishment. After the transcription, the researcher carefully read the transcript over again, and thereafter, the data was grouped into the theme that formed the basis for analysis and interpretation. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the respondents, the Roman figure IV followed by a number, was used to represent each participant.

The theme included some direct quotations or extracts from the interview transcript.

Meaning of Poverty

Poverty as reflected is multidimensional laden with different meanings. As stated by Hettne (2002), there are five major classifications of poverty.

Absolute Poverty: This is commonly referred to as extreme poverty. This is when people cannot meet up with the basic requirements for human survival due to low income or lack of access to quality education, good healthcare, and feeding, housing, safe drinking water.

Relative Poverty: This is when the poor's income is adequate for survival but it is less in comparison to the minimum wage of the community. As emphasised by Galbraith (1958), people are tagged as relative poor because they live below the categories of what the community regard as respectable.

Chronic Poverty: It is characterised by deep-rooted and impoverished conditions, which are the consequence of multiple deprivations over time such as lack of skills for gainful employment or vocational disability. They as well could be caused by pervasive cultural or socioeconomic factors.

Conjectural Transitory Poverty: Unlike chronic, it is short term. Transient poverty can be caused by natural or man-made disasters such as wars, pandemic or environmental disintegration induced by policy reform, which results in loss of jobs.

Spatial Poverty: This refers to poverty that depends on geographical spread.

As emphasised by Raheem et al. (2014) and corroborated by Durokifa (2017), knowing the perspectives of the people on what poverty means and the causes of poverty in a state will help shape the way and manner in which policies regarding poverty reduction is formulated and

implemented. As posited by Robb (1999), influencing poverty policy from the poor's perspective will strengthen poverty reduction and bring about a credible result.

Thus, for the study, participants were asked to describe in their own words and opinion what poverty means to them. A critical analysis of the definitions provided by participants' shows that majority of the participants view poverty from the absolute and chronic poverty classification. Poverty in this manner was itemised to be lack of income, lack of jobs or skills for gainful employment, lack of food, lack of clothing, lack to shelter and limited access to health facilities.

The participated stated as follows.

IV 1: "...there is poverty because there is no employment. See the unemployment out there. It is instead bringing more crime and the government is not helping..."

IV 2: "...poverty is when a person struggles or finds it difficult to provide, education, good health and other essential needs like shelter and clothing for the family..."

IV 4: "...I know I am poor because I cannot afford a good medical care for myself neither can I afford luxuries of life..."

IV7: "Don't ask me my opinion on what poverty is. I cannot even afford three square meals a day because I have no good job and yet I have a family depending on me."

IV10: "I am a graduate, yet I have not been working for 3 years. How can I cater for my aged parents and siblings? I don't need anyone to tell me. I myself know am poor."

The concept of poverty from the perspective of Ogun state citizens is restricted to the lack or deprivation of basic needs such as jobs, vocational skills, housing, clothing, feeding, etc. Although the study shows elements of absolute and chronic poverty within the state, it could all be classified as absolute poverty. This is evidenced in the study by Mood and Jonsson (2016) who stressed that chronic poverty takes the results to absolute poverty and vice versa. Therefore, with the impact of the two classifications of poverty against each other, poverty in Ogun state can be categorised to be the deprivation of needs. This finding corroborates the study conducted by Narayan et al. (2000) in 23 countries and the World Bank (1997) in 50 countries to ascertain the concept of poverty through participatory

assessment where it was discovered that most countries' citizens, see poverty from the absolute point of view. Thus, poverty reduction policies that should be set up within the state should be ones that focus on meeting basic needs. For instance, the area of deprivation gathered from respondents include unemployment and skill empowerment, as this would provide income in meeting the basic needs of life such as quality education, good healthcare, etc.

CONCLUSION

Defining poverty from the perspective of citizens is the starting point of an achievable approach towards its reduction. It suffices to say that poverty alleviation programmes adopted in Nigeria were not rightly targeted at the poor. Thus, poverty alleviation programmes have not achieved its maximum result. For Ogun State, what is tagged as poverty according to the findings of the study has to do with deprivation of basic needs such as employment, clothing, shelter, security, good healthcare and an enabling environment. On this ground, poverty reduction strategies to be implemented in the state should focus on the provision of basic needs for the sustenance of the citizens.

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