

Dynamics of Urban and Rural Childhood Poverty: Need for Coping Strategies

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KEYWORDS Children. Food Insecurity. Social Insecurity. Societal Menace. Alleviation

ABSTRACT The study focused on revealing the causes of childhood poverty and how they can come out of impoverishment. The study determined that a child from a poor family might not really be poor because she/he might still have access to what she/he needs. However, a poor child will also be both socially and food insecure in an affluent household if he/she is deprived of access to basic needs. Some of the poor children are forced to go into destitution, child abuse, child labour, street trading, begging on the streets, stealing and other form of juvenile delinquent acts. These children are less educated due to lack of access to educational institution. For this children to be able at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for active and healthy life there is the need for policy to drastically focus on them.

INTRODUCTION

What happens to a child when he/she is young will determine what she/he will be in future. Children in Nigeria often face many problems such as poor health, lack of access to quality education, food and social insecurity and lack care. Childhood poverty is a consequence of background which could be poor or rich. Many children are poor not because they are from poor background but because of lack of access to things that constantly trap them into poverty.

About 600 million children worldwide are growing up in absolute poverty. And over ten million children under five years of age die every year (Insights Development Research 2005). In any case nearly one billion children will be growing up with psychological and impaired mental development by 2020 if adequate measures are not taken to alleviate them from poverty. Childhood poverty has significant and long implication to the proper development and growth. Often the age of mental groundwork (perception, emotions, desires and feelings) is laid by the age of five for how he will essentially be by 20-30 years later. By about ten our capacity for basic learning has been determined. By the age of 15 the body size, reproductive potential and general health have been greatly influenced by what has happened in the lives thus far. Stunting in children becomes impossible to be reversed. Children cannot recover from preventable disability due to poverty. Nor can they fully

reclaim the first 15 years of growth and development later on life. Since everything from intellectual to employment potential is laid down in these formative years, investing in child well-being is not only a social and moral imperative but also a logical and economically sound investment strategy (Insights Development Research 2003). Therefore, tackling childhood poverty and its transmission over generations and over a life-course is the way to addressing chronic child and even adult poverty.

POVERTY AS A CONCEPT

The concept of poverty has evolved in the history of economic thoughts, witnessing different stages of transition since the 18th century (Aho et al. 1998). However the second transition in the evolution of the concept of poverty began at the end of the colonial period with new awareness of the problem of poverty as it afflicts developing countries. The post-colonial period has been characterized by a deliberate transfer from the North to the South of the anti-poverty policies development in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Poverty has been traditionally understood to mean a lack of access to resources, productive assets and income resulting in a state of material deprivation (Baulch 1996). Emphasizing deficiency in private consumption, poverty has been defined as private consumption per person falling below a particular level. The level may be set by the food energy

method (FEM) or the purchasing power parity method (PPP). In any case whether the level is determined by FEM or PPP methods, the underlying definition of poverty is a shortfall in private consumption. As the consumption/income approach to defining poverty has come under increased criticism, it has been suggested that in the analysis of poverty, common property resources and state-provision of commodities should be taken into account. The concept of poverty also should be broadened to include lack of dignity and autonomy (Baulch 1996) emphasized that the inclusion of the latter in the concept of poverty draws from the insight that being non-poor implies a “freedom from the necessity to perform activities that are regarded as subservient and their ability to choose self-fulfilling and rewarding life styles. It is the inability of one to reach a minimal standard of living, which involves private consumption of food, clothing and shelter (World Bank 1990), but also access to other basic needs of health, education (Idaghu 2002), clean and potable water and social security. Poverty simply means the state of not having or not being able to get the necessities of life (Akinbola 2002), which could imply having less income and material possession (Iyayi 2002) to meet the necessities of life. Following the increasingly multidimensional conceptualizations, poverty is viewed as a process, rather than as a static concept. For instance the poor instead of being viewed as a passive victims of society in need of assistance, rather viewed as agents who struggle to cope with poverty with whatever assets they may possess. The emphasis is on the assets they own and resources they can access rather than what they lack. Moreover, research that focuses on the coping mechanisms of the poor, the concept of assets has been extended to include social capital and house relations. A child that is poor will lack access to the basic needs of life; often no food, no clothing and living in poor housing environment. The emphasis should really be on assets they have access to in their homes and can always use. Therefore, determining the aspect of poverty in which the child is classified and the causes will help to develop a better strategy for alleviating this condition.

Dimensions of Poverty

Research has shown that poverty has many dimensions beyond income and consumption

(World Bank 1999). However, policy discourse has focused primarily on income and consumption measures of poverty has been underemphasized in policy debates. The question of whether poverty is absolute or relative lies with the fact that poverty lines vary between climates, cultures, social and economic environments (Stroom 1999). It is also varied based on age. In any case relative poverty deprivation is the deprivation that arises from comparing some ones level of living with that of a reference group with higher income. While absolute poverty can result from higher average income but still living below a certain minimum quality of life. This is why it is vital to study childhood poverty because a child in an affluence family might be suffering. These feelings might in turn derive from a sense of lack of participation in community life or self-respect. Another dimension of poverty is seasonality, which highlights great differences in poverty, vulnerability and coping strategy throughout the year (World Bank 1999). This is often characterized with hardships during lean period before harvest time. Structural poverty dimension is seen as a period of deficiency, which persists over time but cannot be wiped out without long-term comprehensive long-run expansion of the economy and change in production (Idaghu 2002). How then do we think a child in such families will be? The situation in the family at that season may or may not affect her/him. Gender dimension of poverty, distinguishes different kinds of female-headed households. “Women without support” as opposed to female-headed households have been identified as poorer group (World Bank 1999). Vulnerable groups are often not identified in household surveys neither is the fact that their access to productive resources might be constrained by political, cultural and social factors. This may involve adolescents going into prostitution and child-headed household which is becoming popular. Social exclusion and ethnicity is another dimension of poverty. In this context some men often are unemployed or underemployed; they feel excluded from the limited opportunity for employment. Often the pensioners are ranked as poor not because of least income but because they are isolated and socially excluded. Illegal activities, crime, human trafficking, child labour and violence also, have some relationship with poverty, as prostitution, crime and violence are the major concern of the poor. Lastly on the issue of dimension of poverty,

destitution has distinct economic, social and political problems. Destitute people have lost control over any assets they may have had and income from their own labour. Rather than being passively, socially excluded, destitutes are socially expelled. This study is focused on poverty as it relates to children, the aspects of poverty that affects them and the effect of where they live as cause of their being poor.

Disparity in Rural-Urban Poverty

Most urban and rural places are usually very distinct. The level of poverty differs systematically and substantially between rural and urban places. In most cases there is a distinction between rural and urban poverty in term of physical or socio-economic environment. The rural poor are more dependent on agriculture. The issue that poverty is importantly related to interaction, equilibrium or imbalances between rural and urban-people or group. For example: consumer or producer; impacts of decision by government; land, water or other physical factors is still controversial but the imbalance of the evidence seems to be more strongly favourable especially in Nigeria (Meludu and Adekoya 2005). In the urban areas the poor are heavily concentrated in remote and unreliable places. Within towns, there is much quantitative geographical work on the location of office, transport cost. In any case not much has been done on the distribution of poverty incidence or severity among towns of different sizes or types. However, Meludu and Adekoya (2005) determined the forces behind poverty and suggested policy focuses that will make the poor to aspire for better and secured living standard. Their research population was targeted at the adult. This is why a study like this on childhood poverty is significant for policy formulation.

Family Size, Assets and Effect on Poverty Status

Typically large family size has significant relationship with much greater risk of poverty (Maxwell 1996; Maxwell et al. 1999). For example in the poorest quintile of household in rural Thailand, 42.2 percent had 9 members as against 12.2 percent in the richest quintile. There is growing evidence that "large households" tend to be "poor households" in Africa. There is a "family size of paradox" or "demographic paradox

of poverty" which maintains that small households are less likely to be poor than large households. Also households with lower status or few assets (especially land) are likely to be poor than others (Lipton 1999) especially in agrarian household society (Okumadewa 2002). Yet higher status, higher-caste, non-immigrant, better job-holding, male-headed and or more abundantly assets-holding households tend to be larger than others. Since all these effects are probability, there is of course only an oddity, not a contradiction among them. However, today's demographic paradox of poverty: poor households tend to be bigger, households with land status or assets tend to be less poor, yet landed households tend to be bigger and not smaller. In any case it is land or assets per person or per adult-equivalent not per household that one would expect to be associated with risk of poverty. Invariably, families that are poor are also food insecure. These people cannot afford to provide adequately for the members of their families especially children.

Food and Social Insecurity

Food security has been seen as having sufficient food all the year round (Meludu et al. 1999). It is a concept that has been defined by World Bank (1996), as when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for active and healthy life. Food security should not be viewed only in terms of access and availability of food but also in terms of resource distribution to produce food and purchasing power to buy food where enough is not produced. Food insecurity affects the poorest Nigerians, especially children who are unable to produce, buy or trade enough food because of a lack of income, assets or rights. Food insecurity that could be transient as a result of the following factors such as a seasonal variation, in the availability and price of food at household, regional or country level, civil wars, drought and famine (particularly insecurity that hits the poor and vulnerable people hardest) (Kankwenda et al. 2000) especially women and children. Transient food insecurity often leads to chronic and extreme poverty when temporary factors destroy assets such as land, food stocks and livestock. Poverty and food insecurity are vicious cycle, as poverty leads to food insecurity and food insecurity leads

to poverty. Therefore to strengthen the human capital of the poor, it is essential to break the link between poverty and food insecurity. Lack of food to sustain life and vitality can result to withdrawal attitude and social insecurity. This will affect the children, physically, socially, psychologically, intellectual capacity and rate of development. The focus of any society is to have socio-economic development, which entails an advance in the quality, quantity and equity in production and distribution of goods and services among the people (NISER 2000). Equitable distribution of available wealth and access to the benefits of growth is often seen as the social security dimension of development. Social insecurity means that people are not included in the development planning and execution, in other words, development effects do not reach the target poor and the social problem which arise as a result of the change in the process of development often are not met. Lack of access to basic social development indicators: - health/social facilities (basic sanitation, health services, safe water), protection from crime, disability, insurance etc make the society socially insecure. Lack of or underprivileged access to all these indicators lead to social insecurity, which will affect the capacity of an individual to productively function, will consequently result to poverty. A non-poor household is unlikely not to be socially insecure. Nevertheless, children from a non poor household may experience some kind of social insecurity; however, drastic effect will be more on the poor household. Therefore, an improvement in the social security situation will certainly contribute to increased capacity to produce, which will result in reduction in poverty. This can only be done through research on the dynamics of urban-rural poverty as it relates to children.

Explaining Results on Poverty Situation in Nigeria

This description is done on the result of participatory poverty appraisal result of the World Bank in (1996) and Meludu and Adekoya (2005). Poverty is also strongly influenced by location in Nigeria-nearly half of the poor are in the northern agro climatic zone (mostly rural). Poverty is devastatingly seen as a rural problem. The reason is that in 1992, 66 percent of the poor-(those below the poverty line) lived in rural areas. The result of the study carried out in 2005 by

Meludu and Adekoya revealed that the percentage of respondents classified as core poor in the rural area is still high (70 %) while the percentage of those in moderately poor group is reducing having only 11 percent. The percentage of the respondents in non-poor category increased (17%) when compared with previous research. The respondents residing in the city slum recorded 89 percent core poor, four percent moderately poor and six percent none poor. The degree of poverty in urban area is classified as having less than half (48.5 %) of the total population as core poor, 12 percent as moderately poor and 39.4 percent as none poor. Poverty is strongly influenced by education. In 1985, over 48 percent of household where the head has no education were poor, and this had only fallen to 42 percent in 1992. Households where the head had a secondary school education were much less likely to be poor – 28 percent in 1985 and 18 percent in 1992. Meludu and Adekoya (2005), explained that in overall, it is glaring that educational attainment quite expectedly, most urban dwellers are highly educated compared to rural respondents who are less educated and the city slum respondents in between the other two. The implication is that the respondents in urban area are less poor therefore can afford to go to and send their children to school. Age is also significant factor in poverty situation. The older the household head, the more likely he or she is to have no education and the more likely the household is to be poor – rising from 20 percent for young household head to 50 percent being poor for these over 50 years of age in 1985. In 1992, 35 – 45 percent of households headed by older people, depending on area, occupation and other factors, were still poor. Being a female-headed household is not a major cause of poverty, but such sub categories of female-headed households are indeed particularly vulnerable to poverty. These include household headed by widows, infertile women, unmarried and mothers with only female children. Social indicators for women and girls also reveal serious discrimination in education and health services: and of course, most poor households, regardless of who heads them include poor women, girls and children.

The percentage of the population of poverty in Nigeria fell from 43 percent in 1985 to 34 percent in 1992 – from 36 million people (out of a population of 83 million) to 34 million people (out of a population of 102 million). Of those in poverty,

ten million people were extremely poor in 1992 and of those 8.4 million lived in rural areas. Thus, while the proportion dropped sharply, the number of poor reduce little. This small decline of the number in poverty makes the different trends for the urban and rural areas-urban poverty increased and rural poverty declined. The number of poor in rural area fell sharply, from 26.3 million to 22.8 million while those in urban poverty rose from 9.7 million to 11.9 million. This probably is as a result of continuous rural urban migration that is evident in the country. However, income distributions worsened during this period nationally from 10 million to 14 million people. From a regional perspective the northern agro climatic zone of the country, because of its high reliance on subsistence farming was not able to capture as much of the growth that took place. However, commercial farming, particularly in the *fadama* irrigation area where cash crops are growing began expanding rapidly, and capital-intensive activities were also undertaken. In 1992 nearly half of the country's poor were in the northern zone, while only one – third of the population lives there. But while the middle and southern zone of the country experienced a dramatic increase in per capital household expenditures, and the number of poor (below the poverty line) dropped sharply, the depth and severity of poverty increased in these regions. Moreover, the regional perspective hides significant intra – regional variation. There were larger declines in extreme poverty in some states in both the middle and southern zones.

The concentration of poverty in agriculture and in the northern zone, and the increasing depth and severity of poverty in rural areas of the southern and middle zone reflects the adverse impact of the nexus between high population growth, slow agricultural growth and environmental degradation, in the absence of strong, sustained growth of the economy. Many of the poor in the southern areas have very little land on which to sustain still rapidly growing families. In the northern areas, lack of sustained growth in agricultural production and productivity results in the continued exploitation of a general fragile environment. Based on Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) in both rural and urban poor locations, it is possible to characterize the poor as follows: they live in areas served by bad roads or even with no useable roads, invariably lack access to production inputs as well as output

markets. They have small farms use traditional inputs and grow mainly food crops for own consumption. Poor household face food insecurity before harvest time and are limited to starch based consumption, stale food and leftovers. Poor people have minimal linkage to influential people, or to urban opportunities and limited access to savings and credit. The chronic poor do not have adequate shelter, have only one or two set of clothing worn at all times and do extensive physical works on the farm or in other works. Children in poor households cannot afford school uniforms, fees and or transport cost and they do such jobs as firewood gathering and sale, load carrying in market and hawking of ready to eat food. Generally, the poor have shabby appearance. Female-headed households, widows, single mother, elderly, children are isolated as group vulnerable to poverty (World Bank 1996), and children become victims of drop out from school to become destitute, beggars and indulge in arm robbery. Children who have lost their parents as a result of HIV/AIDS tend to become heads of their family and will face a great difficulty trying to survive.

Strategies for the Reduction of Poverty

Alleviating the unfortunate situation of hungry people presents two challenges: ensuring access to food, plentiful and increasing productivity of farmers that are hungry. The extended family that has been seen by Ndaghu (2000) as a means or reducing poverty among rural household could also increase poverty. Household cost on education, such as fees and uniform discourages enrolment, especially from the poorest families. More should therefore be spent on education to enable them escape from poverty trap. Akinbile (2002) emphasized that adequate technology dissemination will increase agricultural productivity, which will result to poverty reduction in rural areas. Akinbola (2002) feels that, better crop production is a means of reducing poverty in Nigeria. Poverty can only be reduced in Nigeria if there is a considerable improvement in government concern and the efforts of the Non Governmental Organizations. At the same vain several programs and projects have been initiated by the government to reach the poor but not much has been achieved. The programs include: The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Directorate for Food Roads

and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life Program (BLP), Agricultural development Programs (ADPs), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), The Strategic Grains Reserves Programs (SGRP), The Primary Health Care Scheme (PHCS), The Guinea Worm Eradication Program, The Nomadic Education Program, The Federal Mass Transit program, The National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERF), The People Bank Scheme, The Community Bank Scheme and National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviating Program (PAP) etc. In any case, there should be some programmes that will focus on childhood poverty or childhood issues should be integrated in the existing programmes.

CONCLUSION

A child living in a household that is food and socially secure will likely not be poor. Eradicating childhood poverty specifically should be looked at in several dimensions: providing shelter, ensuring social security, providing access to productive assets (especially those who can use them), ensuring social security and free medical care focusing on children. Apart from NDE NAPEP and CIAP new poverty eradication programs should be established to focus on children's poverty eradication. All it will take for households to be food and socially secured is required for these initiatives to function. Stakeholders' involvement is very crucial in this matter in micro policy formulation for the eradication of childhood poverty.

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