

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF ECONOMIC RECESSION ON CHILDREN IN MOTHERLESS BABIES HOMES IN AWKA, ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This paper aims at x-raying the effects of the Nigeria's economic crisis on children in motherless babies homes in Awka. Economic recession has had its most immediate and direct impact on children in the motherless babies homes. It has handicapped families, visitors, different organizations and philanthropists from rendering support to these deprived children. Specifically, the paper sought to: assess the nature of the impacts of the recession in the motherless babies homes, to identify the coping strategies that can be employed by caregivers/officers and to find out the effectiveness of available support systems for children in the affected motherless babies homes. Based on the nature of this study, only purposive sampling technique was used. The data were collected through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and case studies. The descriptive survey research method was adopted. Due to resources and time constraints, only two motherless babies homes were selected. These include: Tender love orphanage home, Awka and Faith Community children's home, Awka. As Nigerian children in motherless babies homes are regarded as endangered species due to their peculiar environment, things have started falling apart as a result of this issue of economic recession. The findings show that these children in the motherless babies' homes face many challenges. There are critical observations that there is an absence of the needed medical services, dietary, psychosocial care, inter alia. The study therefore recommends appropriate intervention strategies to attend to the needs of these vulnerable children.

Introduction

It is no longer news that Nigeria, the giant of Africa is presently experiencing a challenging time which has a great toll on the dignity of the citizens of the country, especially the children in the motherless babies' homes in Awka. Economic recession according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) is a period of general economic decline spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial products and wholesale/ retail sales. It is a negative real GDP growth rate for two or more consecutive quarters. Amadoe (2016) maintains that GDP is the market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. In the words of Mabugu (2010), the economic crises and the resulting recession impacted negatively on key drivers of economic growth, especially trade inflows, capital inflows, natural resources and agricultural exports. In Nigeria, the impact of the general decline in GDP across most of the economic sectors has been characterized by job losses and shrinking disposable incomes in many households. There is hunger in the land; the economic recession threatens the full range of human rights, particularly economic and social rights such as the rights to adequate standard of living and the rights to health, housing, food and education.

Mabugu (2010) avers that during an economic crisis, the poor eat less frequently and often consume less nutritious food, which in turn could negatively impact on the nutritional needs of children. No wonder Blair, Jones & Simpson (1975) affirmed that the fundamental needs of the child include; need for status, security, affection, independence and competence. More so, the provision of quality child care demands that the resources will be available to meet with the needs of the child at any given time. Similarly, Scroufe (1996) as quoted in Uchendu (2010) define quality child care as consistent response to signals, being available for communication alleviating stress. These children need special attention not only because they can no longer hear their mothers voices which hither-to they had been hearing from the womb (Klaus & Klaus 1985) but more importantly because they have been removed from the natural environment. Depending on the above background, one can assent to the fact that the impact of economic recession in Nigeria is enormous on the children in the Orphanage homes. It can be seen that children in motherless babies homes suffer a lot of deprivations since their caregivers are handicapped, incapacitated and vetoed to carry out their duties on them with the indication that they cannot meet up with standard. Thus, economic recession is an impediment on the provision of quality child care, especially the children in the motherless babies' homes/orphanages. Studies that assess the causes of these challenges and possible effective interventions will help government and its partners address these challenges more effectively.

Motherless babies homes/Orphanages: An overview

Motherless babies homes/orphanages and rehabilitation homes are such places where deprived children at different stages are taken care of. Children in these two homes have been classified as deprived children. This classification is based on the fact that they are in peculiar environments which are exceptional in social setting (Morrison 2001). It is worthy to note that some of the owners of these orphanages/motherless babies' homes have set them up not because they have ample resources to provide for the orphans and abandoned children. They've done it because of passion for humanity and human survival. After their resources are exhausted a lot of founders have to depend chiefly on public humanitarian and philanthropic donations from well-meaning Nigerians. However, when such donations aren't forthcoming, they often resort to all kinds of activities to keep the orphanages running.

Apart from the ones operated by government and the religious bodies with definite access to regular funding, a lot of the orphanages/motherless babies' homes are usually engaged in activities demeaning the children. Actually, motherless babies' homes have welfare officers, organizations and workers who take care of these children. Visitors visit these homes individually and sometimes in groups and thus provide them the much needed warmth. Unfortunately, there is a general consensus that the economic recession has handicapped families, visitors and philanthropists' from rendering support to these deprived children.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The overall aim of this study is to understand how the economic shock was affecting the well-being of children in the motherless babies' homes in Awka and how adequate the coping strategies and the existing social assistance programmes are in dealing with the effects of the shock.

Specifically, the key objectives of the study were to investigate:

- a. The nature of the impacts of the Nigeria's economic recession on the children in the motherless babies homes in Awka.

- b. The coping strategies that are being employed by the motherless babies' homes.
- c. The effectiveness of available support systems for children in the affected motherless babies' homes.

Methodology

Employing qualitative data collection methods, information was gathered through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data comprised in-depth interviews (IDLs), participant observation and focus group discussion while the secondary sources of data were drawn from academic research reports, documentaries housed in public and private libraries. Due to resources and time constraints, only two motherless babies' homes in Awka were sampled.

Possible causes of economic recession in Nigeria

Many Economists have attributed the following as the main causes of Nigeria's economic recession. These include:

- (a) **Poor economic planning:** This is one of the major causes of recession. This means no concrete implementation of economic planning connected with exchange rate policy and economic delay. Nevertheless, the government manifested , that its planned to implement some general indulges like:
 - ✓ Encourage of foreign investments
 - ✓ Raising agricultural output
 - ✓ Improving manufacturing sector
 - ✓ Improving mining sector
 - ✓ Diversifying of the economy

There is no doubt that the government of Nigeria proclaimed these possible implementations and even showed some steps toward it. These steps, like the elimination of dollar purchase for importers of 40 items, which include soaps, textiles margarine, poultry, among others. In the same vein, the government caused a serious poverty problem.

- (b) **High inflation rate:** Inflation according to McKinney (2016) refers to a general rise in the prices of goods and services over a period of time. The higher the rate of inflation, the smaller the percentage of goods and services that can be purchased with the same amount of money. Again, the banning of essential agricultural products with no gestation period also led to economic recession in Nigeria. The products like rice, beans, turkey were banned for import as Nigeria decided to fill the demand by itself. Nevertheless, additional removal of fuel subsidy and the banning of these products only sponsored the speculation in the stock market.
- (c) **High interest rate:** When rates rise, they limit liquidity or the amount of money available. The culprit was the Federal Reserve, which often raised interest rates to protect the value of the dollar. Investors are not ready to bring more money into the economy of Nigeria. No money from the investors means high unemployment rates, which causes severe damage to the GDP of the country. Therefore, high interest rates are a cause of recession because they limit liquidity, or the amount of money available to invest.
- (d) **High taxation:** Economic recession is usually a period when the Government should rethink its taxation policy and provide a better climate for investors, small businesses and employers. Nevertheless, the murder of small business in Nigeria with high taxation and high interest rate leaves no chose to the aggregate demand. It's expected to be low and even lower.

- (e) **Policy conflict:** The conflict between economic policies gives no choice than to expect the continuance of economic recession. High interest rate and high tax rate are considered to be the tight monetary policy measures. Still, the Government keeps telling the public that it is the expansionary policy. The results are simple budget deficit.
- (f) **Reduced consumer confidence:** This is another factor than can cause a recession. If consumers believe the economy is bad, they are less likely to spend money. Consumer confidence is psychological but can have a real impact on nay economy.
- (g) **Implementation of treasure single account:** This idea was created to stop the corruption and consolidate all funds of the Federal Government. Therefore, all departments, ministries and agencies transferred their funds from all the commercial banks to the Central Bank of Nigeria. Any approach against this decision was treated as corrupt. The banks who delayed the instructions from the Government were heavily fined. Government's deposits were a reliable source of deposits for commercial banks and their withdrawal was the extreme damage to the banks. Consequently, companies that relied on loans will sell less, produce less and sack more workers. Small companies will be forced to close their businesses. The government officials might have acted with good intentions as the high level of corruptions was needed to be stopped, but, the speedy implementation of the policy resulted in major side effects.
- (h) **Stoppage of pipeline contracts:** The intentions of the Government were to simple stop all bogus contracts of predecessors. That included the contracts with the Niger Delta warlords and the suspension of the Amnesty Program. This gave the militants the excuse to recommence the sabotage of the Nigerian oil assets. It caused almost the financial crisis as it provided the reduction of revenue from gas and oil plants. This had effects on prices, revenue and salaries. The consequences were the reduction of manufacturers output due to lack of raw materials, reduced revenues and sack of workers. Moreover, the Niger Delta was one of the regions that attracted investors to the country, and now with the Niger Delta Avengers and military operations ongoing, there was a huge withdraw of international investments. Reduction in the amount of crude oil available for export is like an addition of blindness to the problems of a crippled man.

NATURE OF IMPACTS ON CHILDREN IN MOTHERLESS BABIES HOMES IN AWKA

There are strong indications that the economic recession has had its most immediate and direct impact on these vulnerable children. This section presents findings regarding the nature and extent of the recession's impact on food consumption patterns, children's education, welfare, health, interpersonal relationships, and the impacts at all levels.

Impacts on food consumption patterns

Increase in the cost of foods has resulted in a reduction in the amount of foods consumed/or the substitution of higher priced foods for less expensive foods which are less nutritious. Over a long period, such changes may have negative consequences for nutrition, both through the quantity of foods consumed for maintaining energy balance as well as for the quality of foods consumed for maintaining sufficient intake of proteins, fats and micronutrients such as vitamins, minerals and trace elements. These foods are crucial for the growth and development of young children especially those in the motherless babies homes. It is a known fact, that economic recession poses a lot of problems in motherless babies homes/orphanages; they were more likely to cut food expenditure, change the type of food eaten in the homes and reduce the

number of meals eaten per day. The nutritional consequences of increased food prices will have long-lasting detrimental effects and needs to be prevented vigorously.

Impacts on children's education

Faced with economic recession, the motherless babies homes studied had made some difficult decisions regarding their children's education. Consequently, some of these children are denied of sound training in befitting places or institutions. A number of choices had been made, which are detrimental to the future of these children. Contrary to the principles of quality child care; some had taken more children out of school, transferred some to a cheaper/more affordable school because they could not raise transport fare for these vulnerable children as a result of the recession. As much as there is a high level of school enrolment among the deprived children, so also are school absenteeism and school drop-out rates.

Impacts on child welfare and health

The Nigeria's economic recession also seems to be taking a toll on the psychological health of these children. The poor condition of health is rampant now there is recession on children in these homes. Meanwhile, it has increased cases of infant mortality among these children in Awka.. The existing homes and orphanages found it difficult to feed these children.

A potential risk factor for children is separation from parents, cases of abuse and child neglect do occur in these homes, such cases are more likely to crop-up when children are sent to be looked after by "someone else". With the effect of the recession, families increasingly are unable to make ends meet; it becomes difficult for them to visit motherless babies' homes. The pressure on demands for government-funded social services increases; since governments also experience drops in revenue collection during recession (something that, in some cases, lead to the recession in the first place).

Failure to raise the required payments for medical treatment can negatively impact on these children's health. The affected motherless babies' homes narrated that they had themselves failed to access medical treatment because they could not raise the required funds, or could not pay for medical treatment for these deprived children. Generally speaking, the children are left to experience untold economic hardship, lack of love and attention, withdrawal from school, poor health, psychological and emotional difficulties.

IMPACT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Inadequate support from external bodies and individuals brings along with it financial instability in the homes. Already existing tensions may be exacerbated by low income to the homes and conflicts may occur. It is clear that those motherless/ orphanage homes who were not receiving government support experienced negative impacts on interpersonal relationships. Similarly, negative relationships with the caregivers and the children were more prevalent because things were no longer as usual. Consequently, there is no bond of productive and amiable relationship between the management and the workers.

COPING STRATEGIES

Faced with the shock and impacts of this recession, the motherless babies homes often have to decide on new (and often innovative) survival strategies. In this section, findings regarding coping strategies based on utilization of savings and borrowing from financial institutions, starting a small business, disposal of assets, establishment of income generation projects, producing one's own foods. Meanwhile, some of the affected homes had neither the

knowledge/ skills nor the capital to venture into such activities, thereby leaving them exposed to the shock and impacts of the recession. While it may be possible to borrow from friends and family members, such coping strategies are often unsustainable especially in affected motherless babies' homes/orphanages where the whole communities depend on continued survival of a specific sector. In such situations, friends and family members are likely to be equally affected.

Analysis of the data showed that some of the affected homes no longer have savings in their bank accounts. However, of the two affected motherless babies' homes, one is receiving church support while the other one is not receiving any support. Because the disposal of assets was employed as a coping strategy by one of the affected orphanage homes; the data from the orphanage home who did sell some of its assets suggests a tendency to dispose of non-essential items such as motorbikes, bicycles, electrical goods and some furniture or clothes. Generally, the motherless babies homes studied indicated that they had started some kind of "small business" to generate income.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study utilized multiple methods (a cross-sectional survey, IDIs and case studies) to assess the impacts of the Nigeria's economic crisis on children in motherless babies' homes/orphanages in Awka, Anambra State; and how adequate the coping strategies and the existing social assistance programmes are in dealing with the effects of the shock. Across all the study areas, the economic shock caused by the recession went beyond the directly affected homes (both upstream and downstream) also experienced moderate to severe knock-on effects from the recession. The nature and extent of the shock experienced by the affected motherless babies' homes was outrageous.

Besides, the direct economic meltdown experienced in the different areas and sectors, appears to have had a cynical impact on children in motherless babies homes. The recession appears to have contributed to interpersonal relationship problems among caregivers; they became financially vulnerable due to lack of funds. This was especially the case among the affected motherless babies' home who is not receiving government/church support. The most common coping strategies among affected motherless babies homes who ventured into alternative means of survival were: (i) starting a small business and (ii) own food production. Most institutional orphanages are overcrowded and dilapidated, some rife with corruption, neglect and abuse. Even when managed by people with good intentions, orphanages often lack the necessary funds, resources and knowledge to properly provide for the children in their care. After over-stretching or exhausting their resources, many of them have to depend on donations from well-meaning Nigerians and when such donation aren't forthcoming, they often resort to all manners of activities to keep the orphanages running. Government cannot claim to have achieved most goals of the MDGs while millions of orphans are still suffering from out of school; when more than 40% of Nigerians can hardly feed even once a day due to abject poverty and the health and emotional well-being of orphans and vulnerable children are not prioritized. Ours is a country whose number of orphans, abandoned and vulnerable children keeps increasing almost daily.

Governments at various levels should look beyond the political achievement of MDGs and chart a way forward towards addressing the plight of children in motherless babies' homes in this country. As a matter of deliberate policy, the Federal Government should set up a task force through the ministry of social development to liaise with the state ministries of social development towards appraising the activities of orphanages/motherless babies' homes. Educational support should be provided to them, nutritional support through the provision of cost effective, locally sourced and sustainable nutritional supplements in order to address the nutritional needs

of these deprived children. Individuals and groups operating and managing orphanages/motherless babies home have done and are still doing their own part of championing the cause of humanity; it is time for governments at various levels help them to help humanity. Corporate bodies, the well-to-do in the society and of course all Nigerians have a role to play at addressing the plight of vulnerable children in our midst, particularly now that the country is faced with appalling economic crises.

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