

## The Challenge of Multi-Dimensional Poverty in A Post-Covid Nigeria: Any Panacea?

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### Abstract

This work titled *The Challenges of Multi-dimensional Poverty in a Post-Covid Nigeria: Any Panacea* investigates the nature, causes and effects of extreme poverty in Nigeria today. Poverty is a state of lack of basic necessities for a meaningful life and existence. Poverty is a glaring phenomenon in the Nigerian society and the indices abound; corruption, hunger and malnutrition, lack of opportunities, high unemployment rate, health complications, and high number of out of school children, street begging etc. The existence of abject poverty is an assault on human dignity and disrupts the peaceful coexistence of the nation. The available data and research materials have shown that there is increase in poverty ration in Nigeria since the 2019/2020 Covid pandemic. A hermeneutic method was employed for data analysis and interpretation. The findings reveal that abject poverty in Nigeria is as a result of unethical attitude of bad governance and incompetency of the ruling class. These result to non provision of the basic amenities such as good education, good healthcare and employment opportunities. In addition, there is non-congenial atmosphere seen in neglect and absence of critical infrastructure in the areas of transportation and agriculture, giving rise to food insecurity. The work is very significant as it exposes and tackles the root cause. This therefore, will help the people especially the policy makers and implementers to tackle the scourge. It also contributes to the body of knowledge by bringing in the perspective of the 'why' of poverty also in Nigeria, a country endowed with rich human and natural resources and offering a globally systematic way out of poverty.

### Introduction

It is true that poverty has always existed in Nigeria just like every other place on earth, but there are indications that the poverty level has increased within the given years of our study. Many factors are accounted as responsible for the surge, but the underlying strand is that they have their root in human actions and inaction.

The world has known the ravages of plague and pandemic. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the world experienced the Black Death pandemic that reportedly rose in Asia, and spread through Europe; killing one-third of the world population. Recently, the entire world was locked down occasioned by the outbreak of the viral disease known as *corona virus*. Corona virus, otherwise known as or COVID-19 was reported to the World Health Organization on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak a global health emergency, and on March 11 2020, it was declared a global pandemic (Cennimo, 2023). Till today, the world is still battling the pandemic and its effects, which claimed over four million lives; and may be still counting. The Pandemic had negative effects and impacts on the socioeconomic lives of the people. Social analyst holds that it will take some years for the world economy to recover fully after the Covid experience.

Since 2015, World Bank has repeatedly alarmed Nigeria on her slide into poverty, against some gains in the previous years. In 2018, Nigeria surpassed India to become the world poverty capital with about 87 Million people living in extreme poverty (Oluwole, 2022). The recent releases show that Nigeria has maintained that lead. In 2023, World Poverty Clock identified Nigeria as the world poverty capital with 71 Million people living in extreme poverty, and a total of 133 million people classified as multi-dimensional poor according to National Bureau of Statistics (Ubanagu, 2023). Again, World Bank estimate based on National Bureau of Statistics show that 89.8 million Nigerians fell below the poverty line in first quarter of 2023, with additional four million in May of same year, making it a total of 93.8 million. This is 43% of the 216 million Nigerians as per population wise (Bailey, 2023).

Today, the world talks about the post Covid-19 era. In the reality of the rising rate of multi-dimensional poverty in post Covid-19 Nigeria state, what are the redemptive steps?

### **The Concept of Poverty**

Human realities are complex and as such, they are not always seen, defined and understood from just one angle rather there are always perspectives from individuals and different schools of thought. Poverty is such a reality that has no consensus or a standard definition. It has variegated understandings of its nature, definition and manifestation. It has been a matter of debate for scholars and researchers about who a poor person is and the measure of the level of one's poverty (Callan & Nolan, 1991). This may be a result of the fact that poverty has not just one indicator but many indicators. According to Danaan (2018), this debate has continued because poverty has both tangible and intangible indicators. In spite of the fact that poverty is variously conceived, one strand goes through all the understandings and conceptions, and it is, that poverty has adverse effects on individuals and human communities. Thus, "The poor tend to be powerless and voiceless; they live in sub-standard environments with low income, inadequate social amenities and opportunities for improved well-being. Poverty may lead to a loss of self-confidence and self-actualization. Self-fulfilment, lack of good orientation and abandonment of cultural values and heritage such that people are ashamed of their cultural and racial identity" (Danaan, 2018). According to Kurfi (2009) poverty is a multifaceted concept that is perceived by different people using different criteria to assign a meaning to it, and therefore it is difficult to give a concise meaning to the term. There are no uniform definitions of poverty due to its complexity and extensive historicity, and yet it is a ubiquitous phenomenon. There is no income bracket when it comes to the description of poverty as there are different income levels for different countries (Liu & Xu, 2016).

However, in the context of our study, poverty should be understood as defined by the United Nations as a Denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, and not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation (United Nations, 1998). This classification of the United Nations seems to sequel with the understanding of what Dannan refers to 'absolute poverty', and which others understood as multi-dimensional poverty.

### **Understanding Multi-Dimensional Poverty**

Oyeranti & Olayinola (2005) noted that there are two senses to understanding poverty. First, is poverty defined by the 'headcount index' which measures poverty from the point of view of minimum personal income per day? This is what economists call GDP per capita. As of 2022, World Bank placed \$1.90 as the minimum which is taken to maintain an acceptable living standard given the cost of living in a given country. The second is *multi-dimensional poverty*, which measures poverty by income and by the access that people have to health, education and living standard indicators like sanitation, drinking water, electricity and housing. This measures poverty in terms of availability and accessibility of basic or essential needs of life. The preference to understanding poverty through its multi-dimensional notion is further elaborated critically by Max Roser (2021). He observed that poverty, prosperity and economic growth are often measured in monetary terms that are abstract that we forget that the reality on the ground is about people's access to goods and services. So for him, these things should be measured concretely on how many things we care about as evidence of good standard of living are available to the people. Thus availability and accessibility of housing, good health care, education, social connection, respect and peace, respect of human right, a healthy environment, happiness and so on, are fundamentals towards the eradication of poverty. The absence of the above explains what in reality multi-dimensional poverty is.

Forced out by poor leadership and insecurity of all kinds, millions of people live in uncertainty in their own land or as migrants and refugees in other unfamiliar lands. The camps for internally displaced persons keep rising in the country as a result of insecurities, ecological problems like flood and the menace of herdsmen terrorist group. This is the situation that confronts many Nigerians in their territorial space. In addition to these, the poor management of the nation's economy has heightened the

poverty rate in its multi-dimensional sense in the country within the last eight years. Thus, Nigeria has become the poverty capital not just in Africa, but in the entire world.

### **The Reality of Poverty in Pre-Covid Nigeria (2010-2019)**

While Nigeria is besieged with many problems, one of the most glaring of these is the reality of abject poverty. Nigeria is a country blessed with enormous material and human resources, yet it shows the paradox of a nation that has many of its citizens living in abject poverty. In spite of the oil wealth which is the major contributor to the GDP, the effect of these huge sums of money has not been felt so much in the lives of Nigerians, especially the common masses. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in her report "2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria" says that 40 per cent of the entire Nigerian population amounting to 80 million people in Nigeria is living below the poverty line of N137, 430 per year. This report is based on the living standard survey conducted in 2018-2019.

A lot of study has been done in the area of poverty by many scholars, each approaching it from a particular perspective. Olowa (2012) studied the dimensions and causes of poverty in Nigeria. The appraisal identified the causes of poverty to include low economic growth, unemployment, low productivity and wages in the informal sector, inappropriate macroeconomic policies, economic degradation, crime and violence, and workers retrenchment among others. Addae-Korankye (2014) carried out a review of the causes of poverty in Africa. The study revealed that corruption, poor governance, inadequate opportunities for employment, poor use of resources and infrastructure, inadequate policies, war and conflict are some of the causes of poverty in Africa. Ighodalo (2012) carried out an assessment of poverty and socio-economic development in Africa with particular reference to Nigeria. The study acknowledged several factors that hinder the growth of a country among which are corruption, lack of national integration, ethnic and religious crisis, and conflicts among others. The study recognizes the need for empowering the people and allowing them to be actively involved in decision-making in order to foster development. Ucha (2010) maintained that unemployment among graduates, non-diversification in the economy, corruption in public offices, inequality in income, low quality of education and idleness are the key factors affecting Nigeria's poverty. For him, those various causes are interrelated and interconnected as one can lead to the other. For example, individuals who lack the right quality and quality of education lack the opportunity of having a good job. Following the above research, the reality and causes of multi-dimensional poverty in Nigeria will be evaluated according to the main geo-political regions.

The banditry and kidnapping in the various parts of the country orchestrated by the Fulani herdsmen do not allow for smooth economic activities in these different regions of the country which has affected negatively the income level of individuals, organizations and governments as it disrupts activities that bring income into the life of these groups. This situation of poverty has been worsened by other forms of humanitarian crises being experienced in different parts of the country. The Boko-Haram menace in the North since 2011, especially the North-East part of the country has affected the political, social, and economic aspects of life with its adverse effects on the living conditions of the inhabitants in that region and consequently the entire country, thereby, plunging many into untold hardships. Boko Haram insurgency has displaced nearly 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad basin. These religious extremists disrupt educational, agricultural and other commercial activities through which the people earn their living, leaving them with no livelihood. They bomb and burn residential houses, schools, bridges, markets etc., and cart away people's properties, harvest their farm produce, kidnap them and demand for monetary ransom. They attack security agencies and destroy their vehicles.

All these activities of this group have further degenerated the poor health conditions and poor educational standards that this area has been experiencing before. The inhabitants of this region live in fear and anxiety having been traumatized by the horrible happenings, an affront to their psychological well-being. Educational activities are halted which has increased the illiteracy level, a very bad situation for the true empowerment of the people. Many of the inhabitants moved to other places in search of refuge and survival and many packed in IDP (Internally displaced persons) camps established by the governments. The situation reduces many more Nigerians to live in abject poverty, below the world standard of good living.

The Lake Chad Basin region is grappling with a complex humanitarian emergency. According to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2020), over 3.2 million people are displaced, including over 2.9 million internally displaced persons in north-east Nigerian, over 684,000 IDPs in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger and 304 refugees in the four countries. With all the efforts and the effect of government and humanitarian aid, some 12.5 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance in the Lake Chad basin region with 5.3 million people suffering food insecurity (UNHCR) (2020). The National Human Rights Commission in 2018 revealed that there were more than 56,000 unclaimed children in the IDP camps deprived of their rights to health, education and comfort. More than 25,000 widowed by Boko Haram have suffered degrading and inhuman treatment The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics said in 2020 that 40% or 83 million Nigerians live in poverty and projected that the figure may increase to 90 million or 45% of the population in 2022.

In the North-Central and Middle-Belt regions, the farmers-herders clashes are raging which have resulted in low farm engagement and consequently, low output. It should be noted that sufficient food production is necessary for a good life in any nation. Food scarcity comes with negative consequences as it demeans human flourishing. The majority of the people in these regions engage in agricultural activities at both subsistence and commercial levels as a source of income and a means of livelihood, but with the incessant attacks from herders, they have left their farms to avert being killed. The region is now witnessing a downturn in farming output, affecting not just the region alone but also the entire country. The struggle of the farmers to defend themselves has led to the destruction of life and property, leaving many maimed for life, homeless, orphaned and widowed thereby plunging them into greater hardship. Displaced from their ancestral land and homes, many families live in congested IDP camps in school establishments resulting in many deaths through malnutrition, diseases and frustration. In Wurukum, Benue state, the record shows that between 2014-2016, about 542 families with a population of about 4,804 people shared a building block of 12 classrooms (Tori, 2018), a very dehumanizing condition.

In the southeast, the activities of secessionist group IPOB and their allies, and attacks by the government security agencies have brought about disruptive economic activities. Today, the economy of the region is adversely affected by the notorious 'sit at home' promulgation of these non-state actors. The southeast region of the country has commercial activities as its main occupation and engages in both the importation and exportation of goods and services. This clash has resulted in non-robust commercial activities, a situation that scares away investors from investing especially foreign investors who would have contributed significantly to the growth of the GDP of the nation by creating jobs and employment. Also, the unfavourable business environment is worsened by government policy somersault, inflation and high tariffs, which have stifled many businesses and commercial activities, have been affected badly. Many have lost their businesses and others cannot import as they used to do in the past. Today, many in the region find it difficult to afford good education and health care system for their children. In the south-south region, environmental degradation caused by oil miners and explorers has destroyed the natural and aquatic habitats and invariably the means of livelihood of the majority of the inhabitants thereby causing poverty and forced migration. Besides disrupting their farming and fishing activities, the spillage poses a great health hazard for the people. This situation has attracted the attention of environmentalists and human rights activists as they are demanding from the government and the company the cleaning of the land and compensation for damages. This breeds a relationship of tension between the natives and the corporations and sometimes ensues into violent attacks and interruption of social and economic activities in the region.

In the South-West region, there is an increased attack on the farmers in the bush and wanton destruction of their farms by herders. This has led to heightened tension in that region. Many lives have also been reportedly killed by attacks and reprisal attacks between the inhabitants and the Fulani herdsmen. This has led to an exodus of many farmers from the bush and consequently reduction in food production and income levels for both individuals and the government.

The Nigerian workers are also crying of hardship because of either non-payment of salaries or inadequate remuneration from their employers, especially those working with the government. They are working under unfavourable conditions that are inimical to their entire well-being. This was the

background for which Nigeria University lecturers were on strike for eight months in 2022. The poor remuneration of workers has resulted in the mass exodus of Nigerian citizens especially the young ones to other countries of the world in search of greener pastures and meaningful existence. The Nigerian professionals in different fields of human endeavour are fast migrating to foreign lands in search of better working conditions and better wage earnings thereby causing brain drain in Nigeria, those who would have been contributing towards the economic growth of the country. In 2015, about 1,438,331 Nigerians migrated to other countries, more than double those who left the country between 1990 and 2013 (Integral Human Development). The government on her own part has explained that there is a serious fall in her financial fortune that she is not able to meet up with the workers' demand nor provide needed critical infrastructures like health and educational facilities that uplift life and bring about economic rejuvenation as a result in the fall in the oil price which is the major government revenue.

### **Poverty in Post-Covid Nigeria**

The recent COVID-19 pandemic which affected every aspect of human life and existence all over the world, led to the economic recession and untoward hardship among the people mostly the vulnerable ones of the society. According to Adesina, the managing director of the African Development Bank, 39 million Africans may fall into poverty in 2022 (Iyatse, 2021). This is a result of the worsening humanitarian crisis in the continent, especially the taunting effect of covid-19 pandemic that has brought an economic downturn and subsequent loss of jobs, increased unemployment rate and a lack of basic necessities of meaningful living. In Nigeria, 7.1 million people are in need of urgent assistance in 2021. Again, 1.8 million people were internally displaced, 80% of which are women and children (OCHA, 2019). The situation of poverty in the country is worsened by the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first instance, there is a restriction on trade movement and closure of borders. In the second instance, it has resulted in food inflation which according to the World Bank in her publication entitled: *Covid-19 in Nigeria: Frontline Data and Pathways for Policy* (Lain et al, 2021) could push an additional six million Nigerians into poverty. The apex global bank is quoted as follows:

The rise in prices witnessed between June 2020 and June 2021 alone could push another 6 million Nigerians into poverty, with urban areas being disproportionately affected (Azeez, 2021). In the same vein, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said that "the annual food inflation rate rose for 24th consecutive month to 20.75 per cent in October from 20.71 per cent September 2021 owing to further increase in the prices of basic food items. (Adegbesan, 2021).

There is an opinion held by some economists that since the existence of Nigeria, the economy expanded slower between 2015 and 2020 (Akinmurele, 2021). The data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows a 1.9per cent contraction in 2020, the meaning of this is that the Nigerian economy has failed to match its average population growth rate of 2.6 percent for six years. The simple explanation of this is that "when economic growth fails to match population growth it means the economy is not creating new opportunities to accommodate a fast-rising population, and is a sign of worsening poverty levels" (Akinmurele, 2021). Therefore, from all indications, the poverty rate in Pre-Covid-19 is projected to be on the increase in this Post-Covid-19 period. The implications of this reality on the nation and her citizens can easily be deduced. It is simply a worsening case of multi-dimensional poverty.

### **Ending Multi-Dimensional Poverty as a Developmental Goal**

There is a correlation between economic growth and poverty reduction. True economic growth brings about a multiplier effect and trickling-down effect simultaneously and as such reduces poverty because goods and services are readily accessible and available to the masses, including low-income earners. While Nigeria brandishes figures of economic growth, the reality on the ground shows that its effect is not felt among the populace. The growth being experienced is not a result of the production of goods and services which usually distributes income among different cadres of the society, but rather the so-called growth is a result of exploration and sale of crude oil which has remained the country's main source of income since its discovery and has led to neglect of other sectors, a condition that is at the base of Nigeria's present socioeconomic woes. The huge debt owed by Nigeria's federal and state governments further exacerbates the problem. The Debt Management Office said that the total amount

owed by the government both federal and state as of September 30, 2021, is 38 trillion naira. This serves as an alarm against further borrowing which will plunge the nation more into extreme and severe poverty.

The existence of extreme poverty is an assault on human dignity as it deprives those under its grip access to things that give life meaning and make it worth living. The net effect is that extreme poverty is a violation of human rights as every human being has the right to quality and deserving life. This is the first of the fundamental human rights which are inalienable rights given to human beings ingrained in their very being by their creator, and entrusted to them to be kept and preserved inviolate. According to Tom Campbell (2003), “poverty ought to be regarded as a violation of human rights and therefore as a condition that ought to be abolished.” Consequently, Dharmendra Kumar Singh (2017) noted that poverty incapacitates the people ridden by it to claim any kind of rights; as it is not only a deprivation of rights but a violation of human dignity.

Knowing well that poverty is an affront to human dignity and so must be fought with every temerity and dexterity, the world leaders under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) in 2000 set Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the intention of improving the living standard and the quality of life of the people. Hence, they outlined some practical programs of action to enable the actualization of this intent. These goals emphasize three main areas; human capital, infrastructure and human rights. Human beings have always struggled towards the betterment of their living and existing conditions. This is actually the reason behind the formation of governments and civil society organizations to aid in the actualization of this noble and desirable task. The United Nations was formed to aid nations, especially the member nations to form a common front to arrest odd situations and remove hitches against human flourishing. The United Nations Millennium Declaration which the member countries signed in the year 2000 gave a responsibility to world leaders to fight poverty, hunger, diseases, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination (especially discrimination of women). These objectives were outlined in the 8 Millennium Development Goals and had a target to be achieved by the year 2015. It is interesting to note that the first among others in the goals is the eradication of extreme poverty.

In 2015, having done a review of the MDGs, the organization reiterated its resolve to ensure a better and more meaningful life for humanity through a reformulation of the earlier goals. The world leaders again adopted a set of 17 “Global Goals” with 169 targets in a document entitled: Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN DOC, A/RES/70/1, 2015). In this document, goals one and two also discuss eradicating poverty and ending food insecurity. The UN also engages in various interventionist programs in countries and areas that experience intense humanitarian crises like poverty. In like manner, Caritas International, an international faith-based civil society organization that helps in the monitoring and implementation of policies especially that of the government of various nations has also as its goals to end poverty, promote justice and uphold the dignity of the human person.

Coincidentally, since May 29<sup>th</sup> 2023, the newly inaugurated Federal Government led by Bola Ahmed Tinubu has brought into the Nigeria social space the trending lexicon: *Let the poor breathe!* Nevertheless, the agenda for eradication of multi-dimensional poverty is beyond rhetoric. The question now is: how can the Nigeria governments systematically begins an end to the rising rate of multi-dimensional poverty in the country.

### **Which way Nigeria?**

Karl Marx noted in his dialectic materialism that *‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.* (Marx, 1845). The basic challenge is how to systematically bring to an end the growing multi-dimensional poverty and its effects in Nigeria. The reality of the ‘monster’ has been noted and its causes exposed. The challenge is on how to fight multi-dimensional poverty in the country. Primarily, it is important to acknowledge that the steps in curbing poverty in Nigeria must be SMART: systematic, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. The S.M.A.R.T model of Peter Drucker and G.T. Doran (CMI, 2014) will ensure a systematic evaluation of the plans and project as it impacts directly on the people. There are countries to emulate at this instance.

Many nations have demonstrated the workability of reducing poverty rate through fidelity to the plans and recommendations of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The top in the list of countries that successfully implemented the recommendations and pulled their citizens out of poverty steadily are China, Brazil, Canada, United States of America and Denmark.

There has been verifiable progress in the war against poverty over the past decades. The estimates recently shows that in 2015, 10 per cent of the population lived at or below \$1.90 a day; which is down from 16 per cent in 2010 and 36 per cent in 1990. Remarkably, China in the last 40 years have pulled 800 million people living below the daily \$1.90 out of that poverty line (Worldbank, 2022). Thus, China became the first developing country to reach MDG by halving its poverty rate. Elaborating on the above, Fan Xiaojian, the Director of the State Council leading Group office of Poverty Alleviation and Development said that the number of poverty stricken Chinese had decreased from about 94 million in the end of 2000 to about 27 million in the end of 2010, signaling a poverty rate decrease from 10.2 per cent to 2.8 per cent (MDGIF).

From the above statistics, the way forward for Nigeria is doing what China, Brazil, Canada and others are doing. It is faithfully and judiciously implementing the plans and recommendations of the UN SDGs. The implementation must be integral and wholistic, because all the 17 goals which are a 2030 agenda are interwoven and integrated. The goals are: 1. No poverty 2. Zero hunger 3. Good health and well-being 4. Quality education 5 Gender equality 6. Clean water and sanitation 7. Affordable and clean energy 8. Decent work and economic growth 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure 10. Reduced inequality 11. Sustainable cities and communities 12. Responsible consumption and production 13. Climate action 14. Life below water 15. Life on land 16. Peace, Justice and strong Institution 17. Partnership for the goals (NGS). To achieve this, Nigerian government must go beyond the political rhetorics and adopt the measures and plans that saw the Chinese through; and that is the way forward.

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