

GENDER, POVERTY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequalities in economic life has become a causal factor in the chronic poverty of all household members, not just of women in poor households and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty which should not be sustained. Gender inequality is strongly associated with human poverty. While poverty means not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in decision-making processes. The effects of all these are the consequences that poverty and gender inequality impose on the environment. When people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life, there is no doubt that there will be a decay of the city. And when there are inadequate and unfit housing, the condition of the environment often result to slums and ghettos, there will be the disaster of homelessness, unplanned and sprawl nature of city growth. These issues *and many others are the basic consideration of this paper on how the good economic life could be sustained.*

Key words: Gender, poverty and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid environmental degradation taking place in Nigeria is increasingly becoming a major threat and it is gradually changing the landscape destroying the sources of livelihood. That is why the problem of pollution is getting more serious and complex in towns that in villages, and more in densely populated areas than in regions of sparse settlements.

Also alarming is the fact that the poverty level in Nigeria has been extremely high, with about two thirds of the population below the poverty line in 1996 (FOS, 1999) and 75.5 per cent in 2004 (FOS, 2006), which disaggregated into 70.7 per cent for urban areas, and 79.2 per cent for rural areas. The situation would have been worse but for the damping effect the period 1985 to 1992 had on poverty, when the rising trend of the earlier period was reversed, before the upward movement resumed again. Specifically, poverty level went up 50% between 1980 and 1985, going from 28.1% to 46.3%. Between 1985 and 1992, there was a drop of about 4 percentage points to 42.7%. However, by 1996, the level jumped to 65% an increase of more than 50% of the 1992 figures.

Gender inequalities in economic life has become a causal factor in the chronic poverty of all household members, not just of women in poor households and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Male-headed households were more likely to

be in poverty. The trend results showed for male-headed households that relative incidence of poverty varied increasingly from 29.2 per cent to 58.2 per cent from 1996 to 2004. The results for the female-headed households also varied increasingly from 26.9 per cent to 43.5 per cent from 1998 to 2004 (FOS, 2006). Norms about child marriage of girls, gender biases against girls' education, women's limited mobility, women's lack of control over fertility decisions, gender gaps in wages all contribute to difficulties of escaping poverty intergenerationally through vicious cycles between poverty and gender inequalities.

Gender inequality is strongly associated with human poverty. While poverty means not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in decision-making processes. The effects of all these are the consequences that poverty and gender inequality impose on the environment which must not be sustained. When people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life, there is no doubt that there will be a decay of the city. And when there are unsustainable, inadequate and unfit housing, the condition of the environment often result to slums and ghettos, there will be the disaster of homelessness, unplanned and sprawl nature of city growth. These issues and many others on how good life could be sustained are the basic consideration of this paper.

THE GENDER ISSUE

Concern for gender issues has a relatively longer history and dates back to the women's movement. Like the environment, the ideas were nurtured in the North, but overtime came into the international area with emphasis on the experiences of women from different parts of the world (Levy, 1992). There was a paradigm shift in both areas, from women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD) to reflect emphasis on social relations between men and women rather than biological differences.

The 1997 Human Development Report argued that across countries there are systematic relationships between gender inequality, as measured by the Gender Development Index (GDI), and the general level of human poverty, as measured by the PHI.

“Gender inequality is strongly associated with human poverty. The four countries ranking lowest in the GDI Sierra Leone, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali - also rank lowest in the human poverty index (HPI). Similarly of the four developing countries ranking highest in the PHI, three - Costa Rica, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago - also rank among the highest in GDI” (UNDP 1997, p.39).

The report also suggested that HPI and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), an index that measures the extent of gender inequality in political and economic participation and decision-making are correlated.

The relationship between gender disadvantage and poverty appears to be quite straight forward. Women or female-headed households, it is very often argued, suffer more from poverty than men or male-headed households in numbers and /or in intensity. The particular approach has been prominent in aid agency writings on “gender and poverty”, which have used

social and / or economic indicators to capture poverty outcomes. Such a perception underpins development agency arguments about the “feminization of poverty” and the frequent references to women as “the poverty of the poor”.

In these policy discourses, three strands of thinking stand out. First, the equation of female headship with poverty (*Jazairy et al., 1992*). Second, assumptions about anti-female discrimination within the household and consequent female disadvantage in well being (UNDP, 1995), and third, synergistic arguments positing a positive relationship between “investing in women” and meeting developmental objectives such as poverty reduction or fertility decline (World Bank, 1994). But at a deeper level, the gender analysis of poverty is not so much about whether women suffer more from poverty than men in numbers and/or in intensity, but rather about how gender differentiates the social processes leading to poverty.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into three constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social-political sustainability. Sustainable development does not focus solely on environmental issues. More broadly, sustainable development policies encompass three general policy areas: economic, environmental and social. In support of this, several United Nations texts especially the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, refer to the “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” of sustainable development as economic, social development and environmental protection. Nigeria is committed to a national policy on the environment that ensures sustainable development based on proper management of her natural resources in a manner, which meets the needs of the present and future generations. This requires balancing her human needs against the potential that the environment has for meeting them. The Nigerian policy, which identifies the correlation between the health and welfare of all Nigerians, and the urgent transition to sustainable development, attempts to provide the concepts and strategies that will lead to the procedures and other concrete actions required for launching Nigeria into an era of social justice, self reliance, and resource development that are environmentally friendly. But with the level of poverty among the people sustaining the environment will remain a herculean tasks.

The term sustainable development has been defined as ‘development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generations without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations. In a more general way, the concept of sustainable development may be seen as the facilitator for balancing the conservation of nature’s resource with the needs for development. That is, sustainable development means improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. These definitions will be reviewed along the poverty situations in Nigeria to see the effects on the environment.

POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENT CONCEPTS

A glance at the relevant literature rapidly shows that there is no general consensus on any meaningful definition of poverty (NISER, 2003; Schubert, 1994). In fact, there are perhaps as many definitions as there are researchers. A generally worded, and therefore interpretable, definition is relatively quickly found. The “Ninth Report on the Development Policy of the Federal German Government, for instance, states that people affected by poverty are unable “to lead a decent life” (BMZ

1992, 13). In this report, the following aspects are listed: “poverty means not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in decision-making processes”. Virtually everybody who writes on the topic of poverty can surely agree with this formulation. However, the way in which a “decent life” is to be translated into reality is a matter on which opinions will diverge, depending on culture, religion and value systems.

According to United Nations Development Programme (1990), an analysis of poverty typically differentiates between absolute and relative poverty. Relative poverty exists when the subjects under consideration are “poor” in relation to “others” - who remain, of course, to be more closely specified. Absolute poverty, on the other hand, refers exclusively to the situation of particular individuals without any comparison being made between them and others. Absolute poverty is considered to exist when the lives of those concerned are impaired by physical or socio-cultural deficiencies (Hemmer and Kotter, 1990, 29). If physical human subsistence (expressed in terms of nutrition, clothing and housing) is not guaranteed, this is termed primary (absolute) poverty. “Exclusion from participation in normal social life” (Schauble, 1984) or, in other terms, the non-attainment of a minimum level of conventional social and cultural existence is, by contrast, described as secondary (absolute) poverty. Obviously, this way of classifying poverty is linked to the concept of “basic needs”. People whose minimum or basic material or immaterial needs are not satisfied are regarded as “poor”.

In Nigeria context, at the Nigeria Economic Society conference of “Poverty in Nigeria” in 1975, many of the papers conceived of poverty as existing when incomes or disposable resources are inadequate to support a minimum standard of decent living. Some elements of this minimum standard approach are contained in Mabogunje (1975) and Onimode (1975) papers. In the same vein, Ogwumike (1991) defines poverty as a household’s inability to provide sufficient income to satisfy its need for food, shelter, education, clothing and transportation. He noted that minimum standards for food are based on nutritional requirements in terms of calories and proteins, consumption habits and customs. As for non-food items such as shelter and education, standards such as number of persons per room and number of children receiving education/level of education attained respectively are frequently used. His line of argument is based on the adoption of absolute or relative standards in the determination of minimum incomes or disposable resources.

According to Aigbokhan (1999), poverty is defined as a state or long-term deprivation of well being, a situation considered inadequate for a decent life. Poverty is thus synonymous with lack. Poverty is also a long-term phenomenon, it does not generally describe individuals in temporary difficulty. Beyond this broad definition, on which there is broad consensus, there are many debates on how well-being should be measured and what indicators should be used. What has emerged from the debate is that there are two broad approaches to defining and measuring poverty. The various definitions adopted in the literature are variants of either of these two broad approaches. These are the ‘welfarist’ approach and the ‘non-welfarist’ approach. The welfarist approach defines well-being in terms of the level of utility attained by an individual. The approach attaches great importance to the individual’s perception of what is useful to him or her. This approach therefore favours ‘neutral indicators, that is, those which do not favour one good over another, in which the individual decides.

The non-welfarist approach defines well-being independently of individual's perceptions of it. The approach relies on what planners consider desirable from a social point of view. For measurement of well-being, the approach uses selective indicators to distinguish certain goods considered to be socially useful. Examples are adequate food, access to education, health care and housing. Since the 1980s this has been expanded to include capabilities and other indicators of human development.

Since the mid 1980s reducing poverty has become a major concern for an increasing number of governments and donor agencies. This concern emerged from observed considerable effects of certain economic reform programmes. However, while recognizing the renewed interest in the subject, it must be appreciated that concern about poverty and the need to reduce it have existed throughout history.

On the environment, just as there are various approaches to defining poverty, so the word 'environment' has emerged to mean several things. Environment is defined as the outer physical and biological system in which man and other organisms live is whole, albeit a complicated one with many interacting components. The focus on the environment was popularized by the 1987 Brundtland Report which identified key environmental issues and their consequences for human development, and also defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs'. The 1987 Brundtland Commission asserted that poverty alleviation is an essential part of avoiding environmental problems.

GENDER AND POVERTY INDICATORS

Most of the ways in which poverty have been defined gave rise to poverty indicators and how they could be measured, these in essence are the components of what make up good or bad planning. According to Sen (1981), there are two essential questions regarding poverty: who are the poor? And at what level is poverty defined? Conventional definitions of poverty refer to a notional poverty line (Greenley, 1994). This is measured either as a minimum flow of real income per capital, or as a bundle of 'basic needs', which may be quantified. Often this approach is also related to an indicator of 'quality of life'.

Income has been the most consistent factor to be included in measurements of poverty, yet approaches to this are consistently under review. One key question is the assessment of income in terms of flows (such as sales from agricultural crops) or stocks (such as agricultural land that may be rented to others or used as collateral on loans) (FOS, 2006, 1999; NISER, 2003; Lipton, 1977, 1991, Dasgupta, 1998; Baulch 1996 a and b; Ravaillion, 1992, Reardon and Vosti, 1995). Income-based definitions of poverty have been widely criticized as being too narrow, especially in the developing country context. The Human Development Index (HDI) is an important attempt to broaden the range of indicators while retaining the advantages of quantification and international comparability. It draws on a bundle of indicators referring to general standards of health, education, and wealth which may be used to indicate general levels of development (Ravaillion, 1992; Reardon and Vosti, 1995). Figure 1 indicates the so-called 'pyramid' of poverty concepts, which may be adopted to indicate deprivation. The simplest and crudest definition is private consumption (PC) at the top of the pyramid. Below this comes concepts of common property resources (CPR) and state provided commodities (SPC), and then afterwards personal assets and the subjective assessments of 'dignity' and 'autonomy' (Baulch, 1996a).

However, recent research has pointed to weaknesses in approaches based on aggregate indices. Aggregating may therefore not provide policy makers with sufficient guidance for specific local problems. A related argument concerns the need to disaggregate definitions and indices of poverty in order to reveal ways in which it may be socially or geographically concentrated. As the environmental entitlement approach emphasizes, poverty is experienced differently according to social, gender, age and occupational groups. Processes of impoverishment need to be disaggregated to show such differences (World Bank, 1995a), as well as those linked to particular ecological conditions or diminished to key environmental goods or services. Also, discussions have emphasized that poverty as so defined is just one aspect of deprivation. Other factors include vulnerability, physical weakness and powerlessness, which may be interlinked and mutually enforcing.

GENDER AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA

It is a known fact that the relationship between gender and poverty is a complex and controversial topic. This relationship exists even though there is extensive literature on gender and poverty but how best to deal with two concepts remains controversial. Although much policy making has been informed by the idea of feminization of poverty, the precise nature of the nexus between gender and poverty needs to be better understood and operationalized in policy making (Beneria and Bisnath, 1997). The difficulty originates from the different shades and forms gender inequalities and poverty take depending on the economic, social and ideological context. Yet another difficulty involves the scarcity of gender disaggregated data for a number of countries.

Over the 26 year period 1980 to 1996 and 2002-2004, female-headed households were slightly better off poverty wise than their male counterparts. The trend results showed for male-headed households that relative incidence of poverty varied increasingly from 29.2 per cent to 58.2 per cent from 1996 to 2004. The results for the female-headed households also varied increasingly from 26.9 per cent to 43.5 per cent from 1998 to 2004 (FOS, 2006). In 1980 the poverty levels were 26.9% and 29.2% respectively, a gap of 2 percentage points. In 1985, the gap had increased to 9 percentage points but came down slightly to 5 percentage in 1992. However, the gap widened again to 8 percentage points in 1996. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (1999, 2006), the analysis showed that the major factor leading to this result is the fact that the average size of female headed households is generally smaller than that of their male counterparts. Consequently, the per capita consumption (pcc), (which is the basis of poverty computation) in female-headed households is higher than that of female headed households. However, the comparison here is in respect of the gender of heads of household and not the gender of all persons in general

On the issue of poverty and gender in Nigeria, previous figures present poverty indicators by gender of households' head in four survey years. In 1996, poverty incidence in male-headed households was 66.5%. The corresponding figures for 1992, 1985 and 1980 were 43.1%, 47.3% and 29.2% respectively. Thus, there was a 23 - percentage point increase in the four years between 1992 and 1996. Similarly, there was a 20 - percentage point increase between 1980 and 1985, whereas over the seven-year period 1985 to 1992, the earlier upward trend was reversed and a 4-percentage point decrease was recorded.

In the female-headed households, the incidence of poverty was 58.5% in 1996, double the 27.0% in 1980. The figure for 1992 was 39.9%, while that for 1985 was 38.6%. Unlike the male headed households, the upward trend in poverty was not fully arrested in the second period; rather a marginal increase of 1-percentage point was recorded in the period. Thus, for this group, poverty was on a continuous increase over the sixteen year period.

IMPLICATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Poverty and environment are often seen as inextricably linked, with the need to eradicate poverty as an initial step to protecting the environment for it to be sustained. In all the various definitions of poverty, some of the most notable features are the consequences that it imposes on the environment, which the physical planners have to combat. The condition of life so degrading as to insult human dignity often results to slums and ghettos. When people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life, there is no doubt that there will be a decay of the part of the city. And when there are unsustainable, inadequate and unfit housing, there will be the disaster of homelessness, unplanned and sprawl nature of city growth

In physical planning, when we talk of development control, one of the most notable features of many Nigerian cities is the very disorderly nature of the cities. There has been a phenomenal growth of urbanization resulting in our major cities growing and expanding in an unplanned manner. The central parts or core areas of most cities are decaying while the sections are increasingly becoming slums. Many buildings have been and are being constructed without approved layouts, illegal structures springing up arbitrarily, open spaces are disappearing fast and many parts of Nigerian cities lack access. Some of these acts are the consequences of poverty. For it is a well known idea in planning that the well laid out areas occupied by the high income people are the best maintained and well kept parts of the cities. The high cost of land, rent and property enjoyed by the neighbourhood is due to the nature of the environment. So we can easily discern the relationship between sustainable environment and poverty.

Compounding the problems especially in our urban areas is the alarming rate at which urban sprawl has been developing haphazardly. The household's inability to provide sufficient income to satisfy its needs for food, shelter, education, clothing and transportation as poverty is defined often result in cities continued growth at a rate faster than the types of facilities initially installed. In essence some of the problems of the environment are as a result of poverty. The rapid population growth and physical expansion of cities have been accompanied unplanned urban sprawl, environmental pollution, deterioration, deficiencies in modern basic facilities such as water, electricity, hospitals, sewage municipal and community facilities, and general urban decay. As increased poverty and urbanization exert more pressures on urban facilities, most Nigerian cities tend to have lost their original dignity, social cohesion and administrative efficiency.

Also, we have the damaging impact of capital intensive technologies, hydro electric energy and green revolution projects, uncontrolled pollutants from industries, deforestation, and degradation from mineral extraction. There are indeed greater challenges in sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere. According to World Bank (1996), the environment in Africa is at risk for the following reasons:

- i. Heavy reliance on natural capital leading to land degradation, deforestation, lack of access to safe water and loss of biodiversity compounded by climatic variation;
- ii. Extreme poverty along with very fast population growth; average income of \$520, and a growth rate of about 3 percent;
- iii. Problems of physical infrastructure and services, health consequences of crowding, increased exposure to concentrated waste, unsustainable consumption of resources and increasing settlement on ecologically sensitive areas due to rapid urbanization and migration;
- iv. Evolution of market economies unsupported by environmental policies and regulations and
- v. Political transition in an extremely fragmented continent.

CONCLUSION

This paper has tried to review the poverty level in Nigeria by examining the issues of gender, poverty and sustainable development. It discussed extensively on the measurement of poverty indicators and gender bias. It also examined the implications on the sustainable environment. Gender inequalities in economic life has become a causal factor in the chronic poverty of all household members, not just of women in poor households and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Gender inequality is strongly associated with human poverty. While poverty means not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor drinking water, inadequate health care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in decision-making processes. The effects of all these are the consequences that poverty and gender inequality impose on the environment. When people affected by poverty are unable to lead a decent life, there is no doubt that there will be a decay of the city. And when there are unsustainable, inadequate and unfit housing, the condition of the environment often result to slums and ghettos, there will be the disaster of homelessness, unplanned and sprawl nature of city growth.

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