

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the nexus between COVID-19 pandemic and Poverty in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper examines the causes and effects of poverty in Nigeria, identifies the economic groups that are worst hit by poverty, as well as ascertains the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Nigeria. Methodologically, as a theoretical study, the study made use of secondary source of data and content analysis. The study found a combination of illiteracy, corruption, laziness, poor economy, lack of industrialization, lack of entrepreneurship and viable skill acquisition education, lack of functional infrastructure and high standards of living and cost of living, among others as causes of poverty in Nigeria while crime, prostitution, youth restiveness, armed robbery, terrorism, street-begging and juvenile delinquency were found to be the effects of poverty in Nigeria. It was equally found that poverty in Nigeria is found among the rural landless, the small farmers, the urban under-employed and the unemployed. The study findings show that the level of poverty increased in the midst of COVID-19. This has made poverty eradication as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development by 2030 seemingly unrealizable. Recommendations were made in the areas of poverty alleviation, skill acquisition, apprenticeship scheme and other forms of technical and vocational training. On the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures on the pandemic's protocol should be strictly adhered to. Temporally, palliative measures can be taken to cushion the effects of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Palliative Measures, Pandemic, Poverty, Sustainable Development Goals

## INTRODUCTION

Cross-continently, COVID-19 pandemic has left no part of the world untouched. The virus emerged in Wuhan, China, and later spread to other parts of world with its devastating effects. According to United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2020), over the course of just a few weeks during the first few months of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the nature of social interaction and other spheres of human existence. Similarly, Gerell, Kardell and Kindgren (2020) averred that, with the virus spreading rapidly around the world during 2020, it has a tremendous impact on many countries, both directly through the disease it causes, COVID-19, and indirectly through the measures governments and other actors take to combat its spread. It is the measures put in place to curb the spread such as lock-down and restriction of movement that led to hardship and poverty in Nigeria. For instance, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) where most of the youths worked for a living were badly hit which has aggravated youth unemployment and its resultant effect, poverty. This is in tandem with the position of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (2020) which shows that the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic is having profound impacts on society and the economy.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, Nigeria recorded its first index case. From that period onwards, the number of confirmed cases has continued to rise uncontrollably in the country (Brisibe and Udeme, 2020). The government of Nigeria has taken a variety of measures to control the spread of the novel corona virus, including restrictions on movement that are being enforced by law enforcement agencies and the military (Transparency International, 2021).

The study of poverty in relation to COVID-19 pandemic is very relevant and timely; poverty (SDGs1. No poverty) tops the list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By extension, poverty is anti-sustainable development; high level of poverty implies low level of sustainable development. COVID-19 pandemics and its corresponding and necessary measures to curtail the spread namely lockdown and restriction of movement, has affected almost all spheres of human existence with poverty not being an exception in Nigeria. According to Chinedu and Ozden (2018), poverty reduction is an indispensable precondition for sustainable development, which entails meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability for the future. This idea is closely related to the idea of sustainability which implies meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The implication is that any human development goal that will jeopardize future environmental, economic and social well beings of future generations will elicit un-sustainability. Developing countries have been criticized for their inability to reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development, as observed by Asadi, Akbari, Hossein, Hoshang, Rostami and Saudati (2008), they are facing dilemmas such as un-sustainability and poverty as poor people are often seen as compelled to exploit their surrounding for short-term survival. This is one of the many reasons why 189 countries unanimously adopted the Millennium Declarations pledging to make effort to free humanity from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty across race and ethnicity. Contributory to inability of many developing countries to reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development is their attitudes to the environment. Owens (2013) attributed this menace to deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, lack of birth control and waste disposition in developing countries.

## **POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty is the deprivation from the basic necessities of life and is the condition of having insufficient resources or income. In most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water, and health services (Imhonopi and Urim, 2012).

Marshall (1998) refers to poverty, in absolute terms, as a state in which the individual lacks the resource necessary for subsistence. According to Ake (1981), economic need is man's most fundamental need. Unless man is able to meet this need, he cannot exist in the first place.

Poverty could constitute a major problem. When meeting the barest essentials of life is impaired by poverty and want, there is that tendency for some individuals to take to illegitimate means to fulfill basic needs. As Ewubare (2020) rightly pointed out, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria has worsened since the 1980s and became pervasive in the 1990s. Poverty in Nigeria is found among four identifiable economic groups namely the rural landless, the small farmers, the urban under-employed and the unemployed. In 2018, about half the population (87 million people) lived on less than \$1.90 a day. Most of the nation's poor live in rural areas and have markedly less access to clean water than those in urban areas (Borgen Project, 2021). In 2019, 40.1 percent of the total population was classified as poor-those living below the national poverty line of 137,430 per person per year (National Bureau of Statistics, in Odili 2020:209). In order to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria, the Economic Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017-2020) was initiated to focus on economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in tune with the aspirations of SDGs (Voluntary National Review, 2020). This move and its actualization are truncated by COVID-19 pandemic due to the hardship associated with the pandemic and its multiplier effects on economy and society. Similarly, Ogisi and Begho (2020) found that COVID-19 posed a substantial threat to the attainment of SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 8 in Nigeria. These are no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, and decent work and economic growth respectively. Priority shifted to corona virus and how to regulate its spread left the above-mentioned global goals unattended to. It is on that note that Osmond *et al* (2021) observed that some SDGs are being neglected or sacrificed in order to achieve control of the pandemic.

The 17SDGs which were developed and adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015 according to Goodness *et al* (2021), is a call to action for the eradication of poverty, protection of the planet, and ensuring that all peoples enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. In Nigeria, it was found that the preoccupation with COVID-19 cases have caused other critical socioeconomic issues to suffer neglect which could make Nigeria poorer due to distraction in economic activities (Fagbemi, 2021). This is detrimental to the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria.

## **CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

There is no mono-causation for poverty in Nigeria; it is a combination of factors that propel poverty in Nigeria. As well as other factors, the following factors are responsible for poverty in Nigeria:

**Illiteracy:** While it is very true that some persons are poor despite their high levels of education, some are poor as a result their inability to read and write in English language.

**Corruption:** Nigeria is one of the countries in the world that are infested with high level of corruption. That is why past governments have constituted different anti-graft agencies to tackle the menace of corruption. Independent Corrupt Practices

and other related Offences commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), as well as Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) are some of the efforts made by successive governments in order to reduce the level of corruption. The link between corruption and poverty is that, money meant to be used to improve the living standard of Nigerians is being diverted to individuals in positions of power and authority.

**Lack of Industrialisation:** Like most of the third world countries, Nigeria is not particularly industrialized. The few industries we have in Nigeria cannot accommodate many employable individuals in the country. The implication is that, a large segment of unemployed Nigerians are rendered hopeless in a country where the few industries can absorb limited number of job seekers. This can lead to poverty.

**Lack of Entrepreneurship Education and Teaching of Financially Viable Skills:** This is the fate of the nation where most people depend on the government to provide jobs for them. It is not as if the government is not doing anything at all in that direction; the efforts so far are not good enough. This has equally led to rising level of poverty.

**Poor Economy:** Lack of sound economic policies and development plans are some of the factors responsible for high level of poverty in Nigeria. Most of the policies are not people-friendly. When sound policies are made, it will propel development which can reduce poverty.

**Laziness:** While we, in most cases, attribute poverty to aforementioned, some persons have not made personal efforts to get engaged in one or two of few economic opportunities available in the country. The only reason is laziness which is a poverty-breeding factor.

**Lack of Functional Infrastructural Facilities:** It is very natural and logical to believe that, the capitalist economies of the West have low level of poverty due to the availability of basic infrastructure and their multiplying effects on the economy. This is not the case in Nigeria. There are inadequate and inactive infrastructural facilities in Nigeria which can increase the level of poverty.

## **EFFECTS OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty in Nigeria has a plethora of effects on Nigeria and Nigerians. They include but not limited to the following:

**Crime:** Crime is one of the effects of poverty in Nigeria. While it is very easy to assume that it is not every poor person that commits crime, it is a fundamental truth that poverty can lead to crime. According to Dambazau (2007), poverty may either be a remote or indirect cause, or an immediate or direct cause to criminal behavior.

**Prostitution:** This is a form of victimless crime that could rise with rising or high level of poverty. This act has become a source of livelihood to many people in Nigeria. There is virtually no city in Nigeria where one cannot find prostitutes in brothels. Victimless crimes such as prostitution could be the consequences of poverty.

**Youth Restiveness:** When the bulk of the youths in Nigeria are living in poverty, there is every tendency that, such situation could lead to youth restiveness. Most of the participants in Maitatsine uprising, Yandaba militancy, and Boko Haram insurgency were recruited from almajirai in the northern part of Nigeria. As a socially excluded set of people, they could take advantage of any slightest opportunity to better their living standard which is very costly in Nigeria.

**Armed Robbery:** Just like any other forms of crime, poverty can lead to crime of different magnitudes as mentioned earlier with reference to Danbazau (2007). This assertion is corroborated by Makinde and Adegami (2021) who found that involvement of youths in unpalatable activities such as armed robbery and others are traceable to poverty in Nigeria.

**Terrorism:** Terrorism is one of the violent crimes that are caused by poverty in Nigeria. A combination of poverty, unemployment, ethnicity and religion are factors responsible for Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

**Street-begging:** Street-begging is another poverty-related problem in Nigeria. Most of the people engaging in street-begging are living in poverty in Nigeria. This is common in the Northern part of Nigeria where almajiri phenomenon is rampant. This is in consonance with the findings of Namwate (2012) who observed that the phenomenon of street-begging is an outcome of many factors including poverty.

**Juvenile Delinquency:** Juvenile delinquency is one of the social implications of unemployment in Nigeria. Juvenile delinquency, according to Fleisher (1963), increases with unemployment and poverty.

### **COVID-19 AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

While it is true that the poverty level in Nigeria was relatively high even before COVID-19, it is a fundamental truth that, the level of poverty in Nigeria became relatively higher with the advent of COVID-19. This is particularly due to the measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus causing the disease to other parts of the country where there was none hitherto. According to the World Bank (2021), before COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, approximately 4 in 10 Nigerians were living below the national poverty line, and millions more were living just above the poverty line, making them vulnerable to falling back into poverty when shocks occur.

As observed by Andam, Edeh and Thurlow (2020), total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell 23% during the lockdown. Agri-food system GDP fell 11%, primarily due to restriction on food services. Household incomes fell by a quarter, leading a 9% increase in the national poverty rate. This is in tandem with the findings of the Borgen Project (2021) which show that, the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Nigeria has been especially disastrous. The downturn in Nigeria's economy due to COVID-19 affected a large number of people and worsened the impact of COVID-19 on poverty in Nigeria.

Before COVID-19, Nigeria's unemployment rate was already sky high at 23% while underemployment stood at 16%, according to a 2018 report by National Bureau of statistics (NBS). This has worsened with the pandemic. The implication is that more Nigerians, especially in the lower middle class, could potentially be forced to live below poverty line (Global Citizen, 2020).

The aforementioned is in tandem with the findings of Proshare Intelligent Investing (2021) with reference to data released by National Bureau of Statistics on unemployment and labour statistics on Q4'20, the number spiked 6.2% to 33.3% from 27% in Q2'20. The figure now makes Nigeria jump from No.5 to 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of unemployment in the world. It is troubling to the extent that when conflicted with the high level of multidimensional poverty of 64.8% in the North West of Nigeria, it shows that there are crises of poverty, unemployment, debt and productivity in Nigeria. This is due to the measures put in place by governments in order to curtail the spread of the corona virus. Lock-down and restriction of movement have affected economic activities thereby blocking people's source of livelihood and invariably accelerated the level of poverty in Nigeria. This development is not compatible with the sustainable development goals with target to halve world poverty (1:2) in 2030.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The study found a combination of illiteracy, corruption, laziness, poor economy, lack of industrialization, lack of entrepreneurship and viable skill acquisition education, lack of functional infrastructure and high standards of living and cost of living, among others, as causes of poverty in Nigeria while crime, prostitution, youth restiveness, armed robbery, terrorism, street-begging and juvenile delinquency were found to be the effects of poverty in Nigeria. It was equally found that poverty in Nigeria is found among the rural landless, the small farmers, the urban under-employed and the unemployed. The study findings show that the level of poverty increased in the midst of COVID-19. This trend will make the realization of United Nations (UN) and the World Bank programmes such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among others to eradicate poverty in the world by 2030 difficult.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the aforementioned findings of the study, recommendations were made in the areas of poverty alleviation, skill acquisition, apprenticeship scheme and other forms of technical and vocational training. On the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical measures on the pandemic's protocol should be strictly adhered to. Temporally, palliative measures can be taken to cushion the effects of the pandemic. Sound policies and strong political will by governments at all levels can elicit poverty alleviation in order to contribute to the attainment of sustainable development.

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