POVERTY CAUSES: RURAL POOR PERCEPTIONS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

About 25% of the world's 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty are in sub-Saharan Africa, where Nigeria is ranked among the poorest nations. States in the Middle belt and Northern Nigeria have the highest population of the poor. Benue State belongs to the Middle belt, with severe, multidimensional and widespread poverty increasing considerably in the last two decades. Government and development partners often base their design and implementation of poverty interventions in rural communities on universal causes of poverty, leading to partial success or outright failure of such programmes, often abandoned by the target group. This study enquired into the rural poor perspectives of the causes of poverty in Aokpe and Ohirigwe communities in Benue State, Nigeria. Governance issues, like inept government leadership and non-involvement of citizens in decision-making, which are commonly listed causes of poverty in development literature, were rated low. Enriching of the lexicon of poverty studies were alcoholism, womanizing, witchcraft, and gambling - new submissions added to the list of causes of poverty. The paper recommends the accommodation of these actual causes of rural poverty to position the government and development partners to design and implement better informed and more effective poverty interventions.

Introduction

Actions are being accelerated by relevant bodies in pursuing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially that of halving the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 (IFAD, 2001a). Globally, 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty. About 25% of this lives in sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is part. About 75% of the poor live and work in rural areas. Over half of the world's extreme poor depend for their livelihoods mainly on farming or farm labour (IFAD, 2001b and Eneh, 2005).

Nigeria is ranked among the poorest nations in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the country is rich with natural resources, her people are poor. Over US $200 billion was earned from the nation's petroleum resources from 1970 to 1996, yet her per capita income in 1996 was about the same as in 1972. Poverty incidences were 43% in 1986, 34.1% in 1993, 69.2% in 1996, and 70.2% in 2003. She is worse off today than in the 1980s. She is the poorest and most deprived of the OPEC countries (World Bank, 1996; UNDP, 1998; UNDP, 2001; CBN and World Bank, 1999; Eneh, 2006 and ADB, 2007).

Reports on regional dimensions of poverty in Nigeria submit that while the North accounted for 36% of the country's population, it accounted for 46% of the poor and 47% of the extreme poor in 1992. The South constituted 45% of the population, but accounted for 32% of the poor and 31% of the extreme poor. The Middle belt accounted for 19% of the population, 21% of the poor and 22% of the extreme poor. States with the highest population of the poor were in the Middle belt and the North, where there was widespread poverty and incidence of household food insecurity among the rural poor (World Bank, 1996). In 2004, double poverty line records gave 18.1% for South-south, 19.0% South-east, 24.2% for South-west, 37.2% for North-central, 44.3% for North-east and 44.4% for North-west (NBS, 2005: 23).

The incidence of poverty also varies between urban and rural locations. Rural poverty is a widespread phenomenon in Nigeria. Out of 34.7 million Nigerians living in poverty, 11.9 million (34.3%) reside in urban areas, while 22.8 million (65.7%) reside in the rural areas (Obinne, 1999 and World Bank, 1996).

Benue State belongs to the Middle belt region of Nigeria. Highlights of a preliminary assessment and scooping of poverty in Benue State indicated that poverty in the State is severe, widespread and multidimensional and increased considerably in the last two decades. The report further stated that poverty is a predominantly rural phenomenon and has a marked gender effect and that the most vulnerable groups include women, children, the aged and victims of HIV/AIDS (FOS, 2001).

Earlier participatory studies have cumulatively shown that the poor also experience and understand their poverty in terms of a range of non-material and intangible qualities such as insecurity, lack of dignity and status or a lack of power or opportunity (Obinne *et al*, 2009a). Preliminary studies had shown that the rural poor have their perspectives of poverty causes. These perspectives differ from the universal indices of poverty usually employed in designing poverty intervention programmes for rural communities, leading to failure of most of such programmes and the attendant abandonment (Chambers, 1983; Eneh, 2006).

Poverty reduction programmes span from the 1970s to date in Nigeria. Successive governments have embarked on a number of programmes geared at development and poverty reduction. To this end the federal government of Nigeria set up at various times a number of agencies between 1970 and 1996. These include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB), Nigerian Bank for Credit and Industry (NBCI), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Strategic Grain Reserve Programme (SGRP), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Mass Mobilization for Social and

Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA), Better Life Programme (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Peoples' Bank and Community Bank Programmes (Onah, 2006).

Given the escalation in the number of people living in poverty between 1986 and 1997, it is easy to conclude that, put together; all the programmes have failed to achieve their objectives (UNDP, 1998; Eneh, 2008). The Third Republic yet witnessed the emergence of other programmes, including the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Nigerian Agricultural, Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), the Microfinance institutions, privatization and commercialization, the recapitalization of the banking and insurance industries, and others. These are aimed at economic growth, human development and improvements in government service delivery through public sector reform and a drive against corruption. A complement to NEEDS is the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) expected to be implemented by all the States in the federation (NPC, 2004). LEEDS is the grassroots version of NEEDS/SEEDS (Onah, 2006).

Nigeria also has a poverty alleviation or eradication programme that seeks to alleviate poverty by increasing the standard of living in rural communities through expanding marketing opportunities for agricultural produce; provision of micro credit to the poor through intermediary local non-governmental organizations; the provision of reproductive health care as well as HIV/AIDS and STD services. The various sectoral reforms programmes of the FGN are parts of the integrated poverty reduction measures and strategies (Onah, 2006).

At the continental level, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has been set up to promote the rapid development of the region. The government of Nigeria believes that the main framework for finding a sustainable solution to hunger and poverty in Africa is the New Partnership for Africa's Development

(NEPAD) and that agriculture will provide the engine for growth of the African economy (Onah, 2006).

Once the actual causes of an ailment are not ascertained, it becomes difficult to design an effective solution. This is majorly responsible for failure of decades of numerous and different rural poverty programmes by successive governments in Nigeria. Therefore, a participatory study to ascertain the rural poor perspectives rural poverty has become imperative for designing effective and sustainable poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria.

There is the need to ascertain the causes of poverty in the rural areas, based on the views of insiders and the rural poor themselves in the rural community. This will aid the design of sustainable poverty intervention programmes and projects that will succeed and stand the test of time. The purpose of this study is to enquire into the causes of poverty in Aokpe and Ohirigwe rural communities in Benue State of Nigeria, as perceived by the rural poor.

Literature is rich with universal poverty causes and indices, but lacks in rural poor perspectives of poverty causes in Aokpe and Ohirigwe communities in Benue State in the Middle belt region of Nigeria, in which poverty is severe, multidimensional and widespread, increasing considerably in the last two decades. This study, therefore, is justified on the ground of generating the rural poor perspectives of rural poverty in the two target rural communities as guide for designing and implementing effective and sustainable poverty interventions for the rural poor.

Literature Review

In its global perspective, poverty is linked to underdevelopment. Underdeveloped countries are said to be poverty-ridden. Poverty is reflected in low gross national product (GNP) per capita. In the World Bank's classification system, 206 economies (each with at least 30,000 population) are ranked by their levels of gross national income (GNI) per capita. By the 2003 classification, fifty-nine (59) nations (28.6%) fell under the low-income countries (LICs) with GNI of $765 or less;

57 nations (27.7%) fell under the low middle-income countries (LMCs) with GNI of between $766 and $3,035; 35 nations (17.0%) fell under the upper middle-income countries (UMCs) with GNI of between $3,036 and $9,385; 35 nations (17.0%) fell under "Other high-income countries" with GNI above $9,385; and 24 nations (11.7%) fell under the high-income OECD nations (Tables 1 and 2) Accordingly, nations are broadly divided into 2 groups. These are the "developing countries" formed by LICs, LMCs and UMCs, and the "Other high-income countries"; and the "developed countries" (the high-income OECD nations) (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 38-47; ADB, 2007: cover; Jhingan, 2007: 22iii).

Table 1: Classification of Economies by Region and Income, 2003

East Asia and the Pacific		
UMC	*LMC*	*LIC*
American Samoa, Malaysia, Palau	China, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Marshal Islands, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Thailand, Tonga, Vanuatu	Cambodia, Korea, Dem. Republic, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Solomon Islands, Vietnam
Europe and Central Asia		
Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic	Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine	Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
Latin America and the Caribbean		
Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominica, Grenada, Mexico, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St.Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela	Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Savador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname,	Haiti, Nicaragua,
Sub-Saharan Africa		
Botswana, Gabon, Mayotte, Seychelles,	Cape Verde, Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland,	Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo Democratic Republic, Congo Republic, Cote d'Ivoire , Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Middle East and North America		
Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia,	Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza,	Yemen
South Asia		
	Maldives, Sri Lanka	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan

Source: World Bank (2004)

Table 2: Classification of Economies by Region and Income, 2003: High Income OECD Countries

High-Income OECD Countries	***Other High-Income OECD Countries***
Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea Republic, Luxembourg,, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States	Andorra, Aruba, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Bermuda, Brunei, Cayman Islands, Channels Island, Cyprus, Faeroe Islands, French Polynesia, Greenland, Guam, Hong Kong *China), Israel Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Macao (China), Malta, Monaco, Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Qatar, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Taiwan (China), United Arab Emirates, Virgin Islands (U.S.)

Source: World Bank (2004)

The "Other high-income countries" are developing countries with one or two highly developed export sectors that enable them earn GNI of $3,986 or more, which is sufficient to belong to developing countries group, but in which significant parts of the population remain relatively uneducated or in poor health for the country's income level. Examples include the petroleum oil exporters, such as Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The upper middle-income economies also include some tourism-dependent islands with lingering development problems. Some upper middle-income countries are designated "newly industrializing countries" for having achieved relatively advanced manufacturing sectors (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 38-39).

Also, a few of the high-income OECD member countries, notably Portugal and Greece, are viewed as developing countries at least until recently. Another way to classify the nations of the developing world is through their degree of international indebtedness. Thus, the World Bank classifies countries as severely indebted, moderately indebted, and less indebted. Importantly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) classifies countries according to their level of human development, including health and education attainments (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 38-40).

The developing world is made up of sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, Asia (except Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean, and the "transition" countries of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia (including the former Soviet Union). In contrast, the developed world constitutes the core of the OECD and is comprised of countries of Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 38-39).

Most developing nations share a set of common and well-defined goals. These include a reduction in poverty, and unemployment; the provision of minimum levels of education, health, housing, and food to every citizen; the broadening of social and economic opportunities; and the forging of a cohesive nation state. Related to these economic, social, and political goals are the common problems shared in varying degrees by most developing countries: widespread and chronic absolute poverty, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, wide and growing disparities in the distribution of income, low levels of agricultural productivity, sizeable and growing imbalances between urban and rural levels of living and economic opportunities, serious and worsening environmental decay, antiquated and inappropriate educational and health systems, severe balance of payments and international debt problems, and substantial and increasing dependence on foreign technologies, institutions and value systems (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 41).

It is not relative poverty but absolute poverty that is more important in assessing developing economies. Absolute poverty is measured not only by low income but also by malnutrition, poor health, clothing, shelter, and lack of education. Thus, absolute poverty is reflected in the low living standards of the people. In such countries, food is the major item of consumption and about 80% of the income is spent on food as compared with 20% in advanced countries. People mostly take cereals and other starches to the total absence of nutritional foods, such as meat, eggs, fish, and dairy products. For instance, the per capita consumption of protein in LICs is 52 grammes per day as compared with 105 grammes in developed countries. The per capita fat consumption in LICs is 83 grammes daily as against 133 grammes in developed countries. As a result, the average daily calorie intake per capita hardly exceeds 2,000 in underdeveloped countries as compare with more than 3,300 to be found in the diets of the people of the advanced countries (Jhingan, 2007: 22ix).

The rest of the consumption of such countries consists mainly of a thatched hut and almost negligible clothing. People live in extremely insanitary conditions. More than 1,200 million people in developing countries do not have safe drinking water and more than 1,400 million have no sanitary waste disposal. Of every 10 children born, 2 die within a year, another 3 die before the age of 5, and only 5 survive to the age of 40 years. The reasons are poor nutrition, unsafe water, poor sanitation uninformed parents and lack of immunization. Services like education and health hardly flourish. Recent data reveal that there is a doctor for 2.083 persons in India, for 5,555 persons in Bangladesh, for 20,000 persons in Nepal, and for 870 persons in China, as against 410 persons for the developed countries (Jhingan, 2007: 22ix).

Most developed countries are expanding educational facilities rapidly. Still such efforts fall short of the manpower requirements of these economies. In many low-income countries, about 70% of the primary school age children go to school. At the secondary level, enrolment rates are lower than 20% in these countries, while enrolment in higher education hardly comes up to 3%. Moreover, the type of education being imparted to the majority of the school and college-going children is ill-suited to the development needs of such countries. Thus, the vast majority of the people in LIC countries are ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed and ill-educated (Jhingan, 2007: 22ix).

About 1 billion people in developing countries, excluding China, are in absolute poverty. Half of them live in South Asia, mainly in India and Bangladesh; a sixth live in East and Southeast Asia, mainly in Indonesia; another sixth in sub-Saharan Africa; and the rest in Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East. Poverty is, therefore, the basic malady of an underdeveloped country which is involved in 'misery-go-round'. Hence, "the underdeveloped countries are the slums of the world economy" (Jhingan, 2007: 22ix; Cairncross, 2007: 15). Here comes the importance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) classification of countries based on human development index (HDI).

Poverty is anti-development. Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996) argue that poverty is linked to a shortage of vital resources and the endurance of harsh and inhospitable environments, including the breakdown of economic, demographic, ecological, cultural and social systems, and 'bad governance' which they claim sustains poverty in developing countries. They maintain that poverty is caused when a 'distortion' becomes so pronounced that people, groups and countries lose their capacity to adapt, change and survive. Poor people, because of lack of access to basic needs, like food, clothing, shelter, education, information, health facilities, justice, decision-making process, and others, are not able to realize their full potentials and so cannot contribute their best to the development of the society. Thus, poverty is a manifestation of underdevelopment and contributes to underdevelopment. This is expressed as the vicious cycle of poverty. The poor, because of their low standard of living, are malnourished; have no access to safe drinking water, health facilities, and good shelter; and cannot afford good education for their children. As a result, the poor people's children are disadvantaged from birth and would not be able to realize their full potential, nor contribute maximally to the development of the society.

Poverty is considered one of the manifestations of underdevelopment in Nigeria (CBN, 1999). It is a paradox in the country. As the sixth largest oil-producing African nation and the seventh in the world, and with abundant human and natural resources, it is a contradiction of sort that poverty walks tall in Nigeria. More than four in ten Nigerians live in conditions of extreme poverty on less than N320 (about US$2) per month or 10 cents per day, which barely provides for a quarter of the nutritional requirements for healthy living. The country's three-decade lingering debt burden of over US $29.1

billion was relieved only in the year 2006. The 1998 Nigerian Human Development Report, NHDR stated that poverty was on the increase in Nigeria, adding that 48.5% of the total population of Nigerians lived below the poverty line on less than US $1 per day. It further stated that about 37.2 million people lived in extreme poverty in Nigeria as at the end of 1997 (UNDP, 1998). According to the CBN (World Bank, 1999), the corresponding figures for 1985, 1992, and 1997 were 43%, 34.10% and 69.2% respectively.

Many survey data suggest that education and literacy levels were poor and declining (UNDP, 1998). The life expectancy of Nigerians at birth decreased from 52 years in 1994 to 50 years in 1995 and 1996 respectively; and literacy rate decreased from 52% in 1995 to 51% in 1996. Only 39 % of the sources of water in rural areas are safe and about 80% of the sources in urban centers are safe. Also more than 10% of the sources of water are farther than 1km away from inhabitants, which means increase in burden and stress of trekking long distances for domestic water and its haulage by children and women and the attendant loss of time (Eneh, 2009a).

Poverty has a gender connotation as well. It can be experienced differently by men and women and can differ according to geographical areas, social groups, and political or economic contexts. The poor is not a homogenous group. It is generally believed that women bear the brunt of the effect of poverty, as they produce a major part of the developing world's food supply with restricted access to training, technology, credit and inputs. Female farmers are handicapped in both their subsistence and income-producing activities. They face more obstacles and barriers than men because of the technologies they use, their cultural status and their functions in the family (World Bank, 1996).

Poverty may be imposed, extraneously, on a community or an individual. Examples of such imposition include harsh weather conditions, desertification, bushfire, etc. which could destroy farmlands, market shops, houses, schools and industries, thus reducing the economic fortunes of a person or community (Obinne *et al*, 2009 a and b).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Rural poverty is a pronounced development challenge in developing countries. Two-thirds or more of the people in developing countries live in the rural areas and their main occupation is agriculture. Four times as many people engage in agriculture in developing countries than in advanced countries. In LICs, like China, Kenya, Myanmar and Vietnam, more than 71% of the population engages in agriculture, while the United States, Canada and West Germany have 3%, 3% and 4% respectively. This heavy concentration in agriculture is a symptom of poverty. Agriculture, as the main occupation, is mostly unproductive. It is carried on in an old fashion with obsolete and outdated methods of production. The average land holdings are as low as one to 3 hectares which usually support 10 to 15 people per hectare. As a result, the yield from land is precariously low and the peasants continue to live at a bare subsistence level (Jhingan, 2007: 22ix-22x).

Nigeria belongs to the LICs (World Bank, 2004), and was the 158th country in the global assessment of human development (UNDP, 2007). Poverty in Nigeria needs to be seen in a broad context. Nigeria has the largest population in sub-Saharan Africa; encompasses a complex society: regional, climatic and ethnic differences are reinforced by different historical and socio-economic legacies. It also has a complex political history; frequent, often abrupt, changes in government have led to sharp changes in economic and social policies. These have, for the most part, impacted adversely on the population and have worsened income distribution (World Bank, 1996).

In an effort to cope with the feeling of hopelessness and despair, which develop from a poverty situation, poor people develop a subculture called the ‘culture of poverty’ i.e. the way poor people are constrained by poverty to live their lives. Some of the traits of the culture of poverty are borrowing from local money lenders at exorbitant rate of interest (usury), living in crowded localities, dominance of male superiority, unemployment and underemployment, low wages, child labour, chronic shortage of cash, and low participation in national welfare activities. The poor have several strategies and informal safety nets to cope with their poverty situation. These strategies to include: community self-help projects; the use of traditional healers, traditional birth attendants and chemist shops to meet health needs. Urban and rural dwellers have slightly different mechanisms to deal with poverty. While both resort to borrowing, diversification of sources of income, cutting down expenses, begging, stealing and praying; the urban poor include migration from urban centres back to rural areas, while the rural poor resort to eating up their planting materials (seed yam, grain seeds meant for planting, etc.). They also noted that the poverty level has become so bad and persistent that these coping strategies are fast becoming livelihood strategies (Ayoola *et. al*, 1994 and 2001).

Materials and Methods

Men, women and youth were randomly selected from two *Idoma* communities, Aokpe and Ohirigwe, in two different Local Government Areas (LGAs) in senatorial Zone C of Benue State. Questionnaire copies were administered to them with a view to finding out their opinions on the causes of poverty in their rural communities. Focused group discussion (FGD) as well as probing extra-questionnaire questions (who, how, what, which, when, where, and why) were also used where necessary to elucidate and resolve some volunteered answers to questions in the questionnaire.

Answers were grouped according to frequency into first grade, second grade, third grade fourth grade and least grade.

Results

Table 1 shows the causes of poverty as identified by the rural poor. Laziness and ill-health (especially HIV/AIDS) were the most incriminated causes of poverty, followed by poor soil fertility, poor education, and alcoholism. The third grade causes of poverty were communal conflict, carelessness, poor planning and management of resources, womanizing, and loss of belonging to thieves. The fourth grade causes of poverty were large size of family, low self-esteem, and lack of access to market. The least causes of poverty were witchcraft, lack of support, gambling, bush burning, lack of access road, and inadequate market.

Table 1: ***The causes of poverty as identified by the rural poor.***

S/No.	**Causes of poverty**
1.	Laziness*****
2.	Ill-health, especially HIV/AIDS*****
3.	Poor soil fertility****
4.	Poor education****
5.	Alcoholism****
6.	Communal conflict***
7.	Carelessness***
8.	Poor planning and poor management of resources***
9.	Womanizing***
10.	Large size of family**
11.	Low self-esteem**
12.	Lack of access to market**
13.	Loss of belonging to thieves***
14.	Witchcraft*
15.	Lack of support*
16.	Gambling*
17.	Bush burning*
18.	Lack of access road*
19.	Inadequate market*
20.	Inept leadership of LG*
21.	Non-involvement in decision-making process*

***** first grade causes of poverty

**** second grade causes of poverty

*** third grade causes of poverty

** fourth grade causes of poverty
* least grade causes of poverty
Source: Field survey of Aokpe and Ohirigwe Communities, 2009.

Discussions

The submission on laziness as a major cause of poverty is in line with provisions in the holy writ (Holy Bible, 1996):

> *But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up?... A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest – and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like and armed robber* (Proverbs, Chapter 6 verse 9-11).

The submissions of ill-health, poor education, poor soil fertility, carelessness, poor planning and management of resources, losses, large size of family, low self-esteem, lack of access roads, lack of support, and bush burning agreed with the findings of a participatory poverty diagnostic survey in Iboa, Moyo community in Uganda. The survey identified poor health and diseases, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of education and skills, idleness and laziness, and large family size as causes of poverty (World Bank, 2005). However, striking, eye-opening and enriching of the lexicon of poverty studies were alcoholism, womanizing, witchcraft, and gambling - new submissions added to the list of the causes of poverty.

Governance issues, like inept government leadership and non-involvement of citizens in decision-making, were rated low. Yet, these are commonly listed causes of poverty in development literature (Eneh, 2007 a and b and 2009).

The causes of poverty tend to reinforce each other to effectively prevent the poor from getting out of poverty. For example, the poor cannot afford good food. This results in malnutrition, poor health, frequent illness and the attendant incapacitation and disablement. This leads to inability to attend school or work. Failure to attend school leads to diminution of opportunities to develop to full potentials and to contribute to national development, while failure to attend work leads to inability to earn a good income and inability to afford good education for children. The ill-equipped children cannot help their poor parents at old age, nor can they help selves. The vicious cycle of poverty continues. Thus, poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood, as impoverished children often grow up to be impoverished parents, who in turn, bring up their own children in poverty. To break the generational poverty circle, poverty reduction must begin with children (UNICEF, 2004).

Similarly, land-related conflict, as an effect or manifestation of poverty (the poor often resort to violence to settle scores with perceived enemy), leads to destruction of crops, property, and the death of some breadwinners of the household, thereby further impoverishing the affected families and communities. The loss of loved ones leaves children with psychological and psychosocial distress. Again, the daughters of the poor often take to prostitution in an attempt to either augment family income or meet up with the lifestyle of the rich. In the process, they may contract HIV and spend more than they had earned, thereby, getting further impoverished and worse off (Sobhan, 2001).

In a related manner, the poor are embedded in certain inherited structural arrangements, such as insufficient access to productive assets as well as human resources, unequal capacity to participate in domestic and global markets and undemocratic access to political power. These structural features of poverty reinforce each other to effectively exclude the poor from partaking from the benefits of development or the opportunities provided by open markets (Eneh, 2007c).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study succeeded in extracting the actual causes of rural poverty as identified by the rural poor. The government and development partners would be making better informed designing and planning of poverty interventions, if they would accommodate these actual causes of rural poverty. This would enhance the success rate of such interventions.

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