

AN APPRAISAL OF POVERTY ERADICATION THROUGH INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty is a common phenomenon in developing countries. This has being a matter of concern to the governments, agencies, professionals and individuals especially in a nation which is endowed with abundant resources (land, petroleum, farm products, human, etc.) like Nigeria. This paper therefore, appraises poverty eradication through information dissemination in Nigeria. The paper discusses concept of poverty, factors responsible for poverty in Nigeria and, the importance of information dissemination in the society. The paper concludes by suggesting some strategies that can alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

Introduction

It is a popular expression that Nigeria is referred to as the giant of Africa. The notion might be precipitated by virtue of various human and material resources the nation is endowed with. It is the belief that a country with abundant resources like Nigeria is rich bearing in mind that, wealth is one of the major determinants of a nation's development. With Nigeria at 50 years of independence as at 1st October, 2010; it is imperative to assess the level of its development in terms of physical, social, educational and human visa-viz its endowed wealth. Some developing or even African nations that do not possess fundamental resources like Nigeria enjoy better living standards. It is in this recognition that Abdullah (1998) opines that 'It is an obvious fact that Nigeria is rich but majority of her people are poor. Although evidently endowed, Nigeria has been unable to transform its rich resources, into economic development to commensurate with her level of developments' (p.26).

Though, no nation can be said to be self sufficient or totally developed but there are certain manifestations expected from each nation based on its endowments. In a report on Nigerian situation, World Bank (1995) reveals that rural areas account for 69.4% of the Nigerian population while Gupta (1996) similarly submits that the Nigerian rural populace constitutes the bulk of victims of poverty and inaccessibility to urban amenities and facilities such as good network of roads, pipe-bone water, electricity, health facilities and good shelter. Presently, unlike few decades ago when people in urban centers in Nigeria have the privilege of getting jobs, many are now unemployed and thus increasing the level of poverty in the country. Asoga-Allen (2008) asserts that most Nigerians suffer in the midst of plenty with more than half of the population living below the poverty line. He postulates further that unemployment is so rampant that the population of unemployed seems to double those that are employed.

Obviously, it a derision on the part of any nation or government despite the available developmental resources if most of its populace still experience abject poverty. In view of the foregoing, this paper believes that there should be multifarious dimensions to poverty eradication in Nigeria. For instance, information dissemination can be re-designed or rebranded as a measure of suppressing poverty affecting most of the citizens (employed and non-employed).

Concept of poverty

Poverty is a house hold phenomenon among the unemployed and even some employed citizens in Nigeria. Various authorities have described poverty in certain perspectives. Conceptually, Cambridge Thesaurus of American English (1994) perceives poverty as "a condition of poorness, destitution, insolvency, indigence, impoverishment, pennilessness, para city, penury and hardship beggary" (p.365). Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) and Oxford

Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2006) have an identical definition to poverty. They regard it as the state, situation or experience of being poor. In his submission, Odion (2008) views poverty as "a concept which presents some identifiable variants which can lead to spiritual poverty, intellectual poverty and more importantly fiscal poverty" (p.70).

It is acknowledged that spiritual and intellectual developments of the citizenry are essential for a societal excellence in a nation but they depend to a great extent on the fiscal development. The fiscal development deals with human basic or fundamental needs for a successful living, the absence of such in a nation results to fiscal poverty (economic weakness) which would further revolutionize to menace, vices and upheavals. From a macro perspective, a nation according to Odion (2008) is deemed to live above the poverty level if the economy can ensure provision of jobs, food security, safe water supply, good health-care delivery, good roads, regular power supply and other aspects of economic well-being. In a micro context however, an individual is assumed as living within the poverty level if he/she cannot enjoy the basic needs that are usually provided by the government. This implies that someone who is not economically buoyant may find it difficult to benefit from the basic facilities.

From the foregoing, if one has to examine the macro and micro perceptions of poverty, it will not be an under estimation to count that most of the Nigerian citizens (employed and unemployed) are critically experiencing poverty. This is so, in view of the fact that the unemployed suffer to meet the needs while the employed ones earned an income whose purchasing power is weak. Perhaps this can be the main cause of brain-drain and constant strike actions by various workers in the country.

The economic melt down though, a global phenomenon has continued to accelerate poverty rate in Nigeria despite her abundant human and material resources. It is very pathetic if only few citizens in Nigeria can live above poverty line. In a previous research, Akpotor, et-al (2005) while citing Okunmadewa (2001) on Nigeria situation report that:

.... In 1980, the poverty level in the country was 27.2% with a population of 65million, an estimated population of 17.7million living in poverty. By 1985, the poverty level increased to 46.30% with an estimated population of seventy five million people with 34.7million living in poverty. In 1992, the figure dropped to 42.7% with an estimated population of ninety two million out of which 39.7 million people were in poverty. By 1996, the level of poverty in the country sky-rocketed to 65.6% in an estimated population of one hundred and two million people while population of the people in poverty was 67.1million.(p.57)

In a corroborated report made by Ibrahim (2007) who is the head of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) Programme in Nigeria, it was revealed that more than half of Nigerians live below one dollar per day. According to her, one of the yardsticks used in measuring poverty around the world is for a citizen to afford one dollar daily for his or her basic needs. The question that may arise from this is; to what extent can one dollar sustain a citizen when the price of things have escalated?

It is pertinent to mention that certain measures have been made by governments in Nigeria at national, state and local levels to alleviate poverty. For instance, several training programmes have been organized for citizens on entrepreneurship and skills acquisition. The beneficiaries at end of the training are expected to be self employed and capable of meeting their basic obligations. In addition, certain financial and material grants are provided to certain citizens to embark on economic activities independently. Though, these are developmental efforts by the governments, it is however observed that the ventures have been politicized, thus making it difficult for non-partisans or non- party members to be enlisted in such poverty alleviation programmes. Similarly, provisions given to the few beneficiaries are not adequate for effective transaction.

Factors Responsible for Poverty in Nigeria

As earlier noted in this work, Nigeria is still adjudged to be blessed in view of available resources but her citizens are still being tormented with poverty and some factors are probably responsible for this. These factors include:

(a) Education: It is assessed as the bedrock and instrument of change and development in any nation. Presently, not every citizen in Nigeria can afford to attend the formal or informal education as a result of finance. Though, the government pledged to provide free basic education (primary to junior secondary education), the schools still charge varied amount which a parent of two-four children may not afford.

The nature of Nigerian education right from the primary to tertiary is full of theoretical teachings instead of practical, empowerment or entrepreneurship oriented. Products of such education will only be yearning for government jobs and if unemployed, is subjected to poverty life.

(b) Corruption: Quest for materialism is a common practice by most Nigerians and to attain this obnoxious mission, misappropriation of public funds set in. This is rampant among the public office holders and particularly the politicians. Though, the Federal Government of Nigeria established anti corruption commissions like Independent Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), the degree at which people perpetrate corruption in Nigeria is still high. The effect of this is for few to become rich while majority experience poverty. In this kind of situations, it will be hard for the government to provide the basic needs for the citizens since the financial allocations for these provisions might have been diverted or embezzled thereby creating more hardship to the masses.

(c) Greed: It is certain that all men cannot be at the same level just like all fingers are not equal, but, the responsibility of the rich is to extend hands of charity or empowerment to the poor to reduce the gap and suffering. In Nigeria like some other countries, some of the rich have not been very helpful to the poor non their immediate communities. This set of the bourgeois however prefer to spend extravagantly on personal ceremonies (e.g. birthday) instead of making impact on the lives of the people. In view of this, many citizens will still continue to experiencing poverty or remain helpless.

(d) Unemployment: Job vacancies in government ministries, parastatals, institutions, agencies and in companies are not sufficient for the numerous applicant that are available. Most of the trainings in our educational institutions are not skillful for self empowerment and entrepreneurship hence, jobless persons increase the poverty rate.

(e) Deregulation of Currency: Previously, Nigerian currency had a stronger purchasing power than the United States dollars, Riyadh of Saudi Arabia to mention but a few. However, with the deregulation of naira through the Structural Adjustment Programme and others in the 80s, Nigerian currency started to loose value with less purchasing power. Presently, one dollar as at April 2012 is equivalent to one hundred and sixty naira which many cannot have access to daily especially in this period of economic meltdown.

(f) Laziness: It is glaring that some citizens are lazy to carry out job despite the fact that they have been trained or are skillful in one thing or the other but only want to be dependants. Such people later become political thugs, militants or followers who now anticipate for income from the political fathers. The end result of this kind of living is poverty and this affects the economy of any given nation.

(g) Information Starvation: Information is an essential commodity for effective survival of citizens. It is however observed that majority of Nigerians and particularly in most rural areas are starved of information. These sets of people are denied certain information which if accessed can effectively improve their sources of income and elevate their economic status above the poverty

line. In urban centers, some do not also have access to needed information on job vacancies, empowerment programmes, scholarships, etc. The obvious consequence of information neglect and denial in any society.

In Nigeria in essence, certain measure have been taken to eradicate poverty, it is the belief of the researcher that information dissemination should be given a chance.

Importance of Information Dissemination

Information and knowledge are usually very instrumental to the development of an individual, group, community and a nation. In fact, a possessor of relevant information is informed and very articulate in his responsibility while a non possessor becomes deformed. To correct any abnormal situation like poverty, dissemination of relevant information is appropriate for its suppression or eradication. The growing importance of relevant and speedy information in all aspects of human life, has been considered very vital to development (Okoro & Okoro, 2006).

The ability of an individual or government to anticipate a problem or solution depends on the utilization of accessed information. The agitation of being conversant or keeping abreast of events and happenings within an immediate and outside world is an information search strategy which thus makes the searcher not only to be creative but also full of wisdom. Perhaps, this is why Ojedokun (2007) while stressing the impact of information posits that:

It serves as a reliable basis for adequate, successful behaviour. Without information, no individual or business can anticipate circumstances. Information feeds anticipation. The more information, the better an individual or business can anticipate and therefore make informed decision. People, businesses or governments that can properly anticipate their circumstances become masters of circumstance while those who fail to anticipate become victims of circumstance (P.11).

In a previous postulation, Issa (1997) believes that "no significant development can be attained in any human society where the vast majority of its people are continually being exposed to information deprivation" (P.7). In essence, the neglect of information as a ginger of social mobility has not only contributed to the marginalization of the under developed nations but also affected their standard of living. This shows that lack of information or its accessibility according to Martin (1984) frequents within cumulative syndrome of disadvantage, such as unemployment, limited access to social services and particularly poverty. The regular desire for information and its provision to the populace is without any doubt essential for individual and national development (Aziagba and Godbless, 2008). With the foregoing, it is appropriate to make a proposal for eradicating poverty through information dissemination.

Strategies for Poverty Eradication

Having realized the significance of information accessibility to individual, community and government, professional librarians or information scientists should specifically be charged with the responsibility of providing specialized information services towards poverty eradication. This means that the National Library of Nigeria and state public libraries need to restructure or rebrand certain services into a specialized package that can be tagged "information for poverty eradication". For grass root spread, each state library board should establish or consolidate rural information dissemination or mobile service in a repackaged or media oriented brand since most of the rural populace are illiterates. In addition, other types of libraries like academic and special libraries should also join in the campaign for poverty eradication through information dissemination.

The mission of the Federal Government of Nigeria in rebranding all the sectors in the country can only be successful if professionals in information industry (like libraries, information centers, information and communication ministries) are actively involved in the design and implementation of the effort. Obviously, Nigerians can borrow leaf from Andrew Carnegie who

initially was poor but resorted to the use of libraries for information accessibility and through which he got inspiring information and became a re-known industrialist. He was acknowledged for being very helpful to individuals, groups, and the world over. Despite his demise, the Carnegie Corporation still renders valuable assistance to educational institutions, libraries, etc.; Nigeria is also a benefactor. Similarly, Japan at a time, was in a serious economic strangle with high level of poverty rate. The country thus, decided to focus much attention to its educational and information sectors and which consequently resulted to improved economy. Presently, Japan though a developing nation, enjoys high standard of living and has succeeded in reducing its unemployment rate to 5.5% as at August 2009 (NTA network news textual highlights of 2nd October, 2009).

In the light of this, the following strategies should be systematically mounted by various libraries and information centers to suppress poverty in Nigeria:

* **Current Awareness Service:** The Current Awareness Services (CAS) is a specialized nature of information provision which requires that readers or citizens be kept abreast of necessary information concerning their needs in an un electronic format. This device is useful for non literate of information and communication technology. These devices include:

- Newspaper cutting on job vacancies
- Newspaper cutting on empowerment programmes
- Newspaper cutting on sales of shares and related issues, etc.
- Newspaper cutting on educational scholarships

* **Online Current Awareness Service:** This involves the searching of information for the needs of the community or citizens but through the internet. Though, those who are ICT literate can search on their own but information technologist or ICT librarian should take the responsibility to search for useful online information on job vacancies, empowerment programmes, scholarships, etc. The information should thus be brought to the notice through a display in various conspicuous centres for the attention of the citizens. In fact, many Nigerians have succeeded in getting jobs through the web and if further exploited can bail many others in attaining jobs nationally or internationally. Without any doubt, success in this strategy reduces the unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria.

* **Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI):** It is a specialized information service by professionals aimed at providing relevant bibliographic and physical access to information sources on a research, mission or topic. Some citizens might have succeeded in winning certain grants that can improve their conditions but lack access to facilitating documents for a better presentation or write-up. An approach to the reference librarian in any standard library can result to your information satisfaction without stress. Two of the Ranganathan's principles of library science which emphasis that "Every book its readers" and "Every reader his book" according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) acknowledge the individuality of reading and uniqueness of information seeking habits of library users.

* **Rural Information Service Delivery:** Since majority of the Nigeria populace are in the rural areas and are poor, an information repacking programme devised by Aboyade (1987) can be effectively mounted. This will afford the rural populace access to needed information in an appropriate format. The accessed information by this set of citizens can influence their creativity and thus improved their sources of income above the poverty line. The rural information service delivery does not require the rural populace to be literate but can access information using instructional media.

Conclusion

The standard living of citizens is one of the fundamental variables in evaluating the development of a nation. In other words, a high poverty rate is detrimental to a national development and thus a nation strategizes to reduce poverty rate of her citizens if it cannot be totally eradicated.

Information rebranding or repackaging have the ability to alleviate poverty in Nigeria if adequately tailored. To achieve this, adequate financial, material and human resources are required to be devoted toward the course as a diverse means towards eradicating poverty in the nation.

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