

Poverty reduction and international civil society intervention in Nigeria: A synopsis

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Abstract: Poverty is no stranger to all countries of the world. Where the difference lies is in the varying degrees of poverty in comparative terms, from one country to another. Particularly, the staggering level of poverty in Nigeria is a pointer to perilous times ahead, factoring in the dominant concepts of globalization and liberalization in global economics. The international poverty line was increased from \$1 to \$1.90 in September 2015, inadvertently pushing more Nigerians below poverty line. This study adopts structural-functionalism as the analytical framework to examine the effects of various interventions by international civil society organizations in Nigeria, on the level of poverty and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, the qualitative method is used to collect data while content analysis was applied on data gathered through secondary method. The study reveals that different administrations in Nigeria, both military and civilian alike, have expended enormous efforts to reduce poverty in the country without significant results. The extreme level of poverty in Nigeria is attributable to factors such as bad governance, unequal distribution of the nation's wealth, unemployment, injustice and marginalization, corruption, lack of education, among others.

Keywords: Civil societies, government policy, Sustainable Development Goals, poverty reduction, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Objective of this study is to ascertain the extent of federal government's efforts in poverty reduction. The study investigates the role and impact of selected international civil society organizations and their various intervention programmes on the current level of poverty among Nigerians, and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. The goal of government and international civil society interventions is to meet the socio-economic development needs of people living below poverty line of \$1.90 dollar. To develop this paper, we will work with the following research questions: i) What are the effort of government in alleviating poverty in Nigeria? ii) what roles do civil society organizations play in reducing poverty in Nigeria in line with the Sustainable Development Goals? iii) Are there any significant changes with the introduction of poverty alleviation programmes by the International Civil Society Organisations?

What is poverty? Poverty is not exclusively a socio-economic problem but also has a political perspective. In the words of Nelson Mandela, many people are trapped in the prison of poverty; as such, poverty is not an accident but man-made and can be removed by actions of human beings whenever they are willing to do so (Guardian, 2005). The rate of poverty in Nigeria varies from one state to another. The World Bank report on trends in Nigeria variously pegged the poverty line at 27.2% in 1980, 46.3% in 1985, 42.8% in 1992, and 65.6% in 1996. as at 2023, the figure of Nigerians caught under the poverty line stood at 104 million. This has been variously attributed to ridiculous government



policies like the currency redesigning of President Mohamradu Buhari, and removal of petrol subsidy by the incumbent President Ahmed Bola Tinubu. We would also say that various countries have risen up to the task, giving rise to issue-based policy to fix the line below poverty level (BPL) and above poverty level (APL) as applicable.

A look at the roles of international civil societies to reduce poverty calls to mind the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiated in year 2000. The goals of the MDGs was a commitment to combat poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy, discrimination against women, and environmental degradation, which member states agreed to achieve before 2015. In 2015, the United Nations came up with 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Out of the seventeen goals identified, poverty featured as SDG goal number one. Incidentally, irrespective of such noble objectives, poverty is still ravaging the Third-world countries.

Some international civil societies have as their mandate to reduce the level of poverty in a country. The Agents for Citizen-driven Transformation (ACT) programme was officially launched in Nigeria on September 24, 2019, in Abuja. The ACT works with non-state actors such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to enable them to contribute significantly to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) worldwide. The ACT was designed and funded by the European Union and its programmes are implemented by the British Council in response to the identified need to invest in, and engage with civil society organizations. The ACT provides capacity strengthening support to selected civil society organizations to improve their institutional mechanisms through coaching and mentoring support. The Agent for Citizen-Driven Transformation (ACT) programme provides a platform for structured and regular multi-stakeholder engagements for improved and effective civil society regulatory environment that can lead to the reduction of poverty in Nigeria.

Again, the United Nations encourages its member states to carry out regular and inclusive reviews of progress towards achieving SDGs (poverty reduction) at the national and sub-national levels, tagged Voluntary National Review (VNR). VNR is "developed in the context of strengthening government policies and institutions in mobilizing support for various stakeholders and is expected to become a means of global partnership" (Supriyatningsih et al, 2017, p. 324). Meanwhile, Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a process by which countries take stock and assess successes and challenges experienced in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. The VNR provides a veritable platform for countries to share experiences, improve evidence and data on SDGs with a view to strengthening policies and institutions of government to monitor progress on sustainable development, among other things. The VNR aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of 2030 agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we will explore some key issues relating to poverty, particularly as it impacts on the Nigerian people. Early studies on poverty underscore the economic perspective using the relative income breakthrough. In Xiaomei (2020), the argument centres on the absence or inadequacy of those diets, amenities, standard services and activities which are common or customary in a society to determine poverty. Later, Townsend (1970) proposed the theory of relative poverty which was centred on a survey of household resources defined on the basis of relative deprivation. In Robert Chambers' research work (1995) on the helplessness and isolation of the poor, he believes that poverty is due to lack of physical necessities, assets and income. Gordon (1977) observes that every society effectively establishes its own definitions of poverty. To Sen (1982) poverty is the absence of certain capabilities which include largely being unable to participate fully in one's society with dignity (cited in Agbor, 2017). For the purpose of clarity, to ascertain the cause of poverty, Akeredolu-Ale (1975) makes four theoretical postulations on the causes of poverty. These include (i) necessary theory, which is separated into three variants – functionalist, evolutionist and capitalist entrepreneurial. Akeredolu-Ale argues that poverty emerged spontaneously with inequality arising from a system of evaluation that rewards some roles higher than others; (ii) individual attribute theory, which holds the view that the individual's position in the hierarchy of reward is determined by himself; (iii) natural circumstantial theory, which explains the causes of poverty from environmental and geographical constraints; that is, in the case of unfavourable geographical location and scanty natural endowment, people automatically spill into poverty; (iv) power theory of poverty, which asserts that what determines the extent and distribution of poverty is the structure of political power. Bassey & Ndiyo (2017) claims that the concept of poverty stems from the "vicious circle", that a poor person is not rich because he is poor, and may remain poor unless the person's income level increases.

Poverty-focused policies have evolved from a set of principles based on the major element of the new conceptual and strategic framework which includes participation of domestic and international civil society. The poverty reduction strategy approach (PRS) was aimed to enhance the poverty focus of the World Bank and IMF concessional lending (IMF, 2015). Ekpo (2017) writes that the PRS process was developed in response to poor record of poverty reduction in the 1990s and the need to justify an increase in multilateral funding through debt relief. Englama & Bamidele (1997) brings up certain measurement issues in poverty, such as conceptual and data problems. The first stage which is conceptual, has to do with the appropriate yardstick to be used in assessing living standards and determining who is poor and who is not. The second stage process is beyond the income or consumption dimension of poverty. It measures the depth and severity of poverty. The severity of poverty could be in terms of access to safe water, life expectancy, infant mortality rate, among others. Ndiyo (2008) says that the poverty lines provide the basis to (i) measure the poverty profile and determine a yardstick for

measuring standard of living (ii) choose a cut-off poverty line, which separates the poor from the non-poor (iii) take account of the distribution of standard of living among the poor (iv) compare poverty trend over time, among individuals and group in a nation, and (v) guide policies on poverty alleviation programme. Scholars measure 'poor' as complex and varied, a tool devoted to the methodology for quantifying the extent of poverty (Ndiyo, 2008).

Recently some consensus has emerged in literature as to the definition of poverty. In general, this body of literature defines poverty in its absolute sense, as a situation where a population or a section of the population is not able to meet its bare subsistence essentials of food, clothing and shelter in order to maintain minimum standards of living (Ndiyo, 2008). The foregoing literature stresses that the definition is weak because there is no yardstick to be used to assess living standards so as to determine who is poor and who is not. It therefore submits that "the major merit of tracing the evolution of poverty conceptualization is that it provides insight into the fault lines in poverty analysis and conceptual debates" (Ndiyo, 2008, p. 14)

In sum, a number of scholars have made emphatic statements on the concept of poverty either as an economic or a social term. To do this, international poverty line is defined as the percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day in 2015. Again poverty line across varies in terms of their purchasing power and the currency devaluation that raises dollar and other developed countries currencies above the local currency. Meanwhile, according to the World Bank (1992), poverty at the community level, is seen as general deprivation: Poverty has been defined as a situation where a population or a section of the population is able to meet only its bare subsistence, the essentials of foods, clothing and shelter, in order to maintain a minimum standard of living (Balogun, 1993).

RESEARCH METHOD

The research involved an analysis of data on poverty reduction in Nigeria and international civil society intervention as well as relevant literature review. With this approach we extract data from textbooks, journals, newspapers, periodicals and other data retrieval methods. The time limitation of this study covers majorly the Fourth Republic starting from May 29, 1999 to 2024. The study adopts the structural functional approach. Structural functionalists argue that as the division of labour requires everyone to play a role, so also the poor in the unskilled area benefit the society in a general way (Davis & Moore, 1945). Structural functionalists maintain that there have been major challenges in political systems and that the challenges have occurred as follows: penetration and integration (state-building), loyalty and commitment (nation-building), participation, distribution, and international penetration (international civil society intervention role to reduce poverty). This approach strives to give details to the causes of poverty by trying to explain that poverty is merely a result of social stratification present in the society.

Conceptual Issues

Poverty

Poverty as a concept has been viewed by analysts from different perspectives, including political, socio-economic and psychological. We note here that none of these perspectives is exhaustive in treating this issue. Rowntree (1901) views poverty from the angle of nutrition in individual families (cited in Harris, 2000). Thus, to Harris, nutrition revolves around how people feed themselves to be healthy and go about their daily activities. Townsend describe poverty as not just a failure to meet minimum nutrition or subsistence levels but rather as a failure to keep up with the standards prevalent in a given society (Ndiyo, 2008, p. 13). Ndiyo writes that in 1980, poverty was viewed from four dimensions: the incorporation of non-monetary aspects, the interests' invulnerability and security, the interpretation of poverty from livelihood, and the acknowledgement of Sen's introduction of the notion of food entitlement or access to poverty.

In the 1990s, emphasis was shifted to how poor people view their situation as expressed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Voice of The Poor". The programme was of the view that the poor must be heard and taken seriously by national leaders so that they can be elevated out of poverty. In this sense, World Bank Organization owns up that:

"Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action ... for the poor and the wealthy alike ... a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities" (cited Bowen, 2024).

In Nigeria, more than 100 million people live below poverty line (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The World Social Report 2020, World Health Organisation 2023, and Transparency International Report are unanimous in agreement that underdevelopment and inequality are making life insecure for people and at the same time reducing their opportunities. That same reports also claim that eight hundred and forty-four million people lack access to clean water and live in fear of water-borne diseases worldwide. Indeed, the social dimension to definition of poverty requires that a minimum level of welfare be attained with regard to these indicators.

Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction is a way of lifting people out of poverty. In most countries, poverty reduction strategies include programmes in education, health and entrepreneurship, technology, giving certain amounts to increase the purse of the poor, income redistribution and introducing different methods to improve economic development. The 2023 United Nations Report notes that:



"According to the most recent estimates, in 2023 almost 700 million people around the world were subsisting on less than \$2.15... from 1990 to 2014, the world made remarkable progress in reducing extreme poverty, with over one billion people moving out of that condition. The global poverty rate decreased by an average of 1.1 percentage points each year, from 37.8 percent to 11.2 percent in 2014. However, between 2014 and 2019, the pace of poverty reduction slowed to 0.6 percentage points per year, which is the slowest rate seen in the past three decades. Within the 24-year period, most of the poverty reduction was observed in East Asia and the Pacific, as well as South Asia."

Many commentators are of the view that reducing poverty in underdeveloped countries is one of the persistent challenges facing their leaders, and is an offshoot of bad policies. "Ogoniland in Nigeria was the source of more than \$300 billion worth of oil but the land and water pollution was creating severe health hazards, endangering the people and many are poor". (The Africa Report, 2024, p. 8). Still on the Nigeria factor, Obadan (2001) submits that the country earned over US\$300 billion from petroleum during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the twenty five (25) poorest countries at the threshold of twenty-first century whereas she was among the richest fifty (50) in the early 1970s. This was in spite of initiatives by the subsequent military and civilian regimes towards poverty reduction. Instances include Accelerated Food Programme, Operation Feed the Nation, River Basin Development Authority, Green Revolution, Mass Mobilization for Social and Economy Recovery, National Directive for Employment, National Poverty Eradication Programme and others. These programmes could not deliver irrespective of the huge funds invested in them. Rather, they served as avenues for corruption, maladministration and misappropriation.

In 1994, the interim government of Shonekan inaugurated a committee tagged Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC). The objective of PAPDC was to advise the government on the design, coordination and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes (Obadan, 2001). The submission of the committee paved the way for a new approach which culminated in the establishment of Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA) which adopted a combination of social funds and social action strategy. This approach could not tackle the problem of poverty in Nigeria.

Analysts are of the view that effective poverty reduction strategy needs to follow the path of the Target Approach. Just like the name implies, the government can target the delivery of some services and resources to reach the poor areas in their communities by providing safety nets, micro credits, school meal programmes and so on. The Buhari government's Purse Programme is a typical example, being an approach geared towards distributing money to market women and men, a programme that still came short of the aim.

The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen had heads of states and their personal representatives from 134 countries in attendance. Some international bodies become prominent at this point, including Action Aid, The Organisation for Poverty Alleviation and Development, Concern

Worldwide, End Poverty Now, Global Citizen, World Relief, Care International, Institute for Research on Poverty, Innovation for Poverty Action, Muslim Hand, European Anti-poverty Network, The Borgen Project, Advocate for International Development, Green Shot Foundation, Inter Action, International Child Care, Engineers Without Border, Humanitarian Organization for Poverty Eradication, World Vision, World Hope International, Village Enterprises, Trickle Up, Oxfam, Volunteer Service Overseas, and so on. All these organisations tackle the issue of poverty through advocacy, microfinance and ad hoc approaches.

Civil Society

Olukotun (2018) and Adam Jezard (2018) write that before the concept of civil society gained prominence in the late 1980s, Professor Samuel Huntington referred to Civil Society as a 'Third force'. It was called the third force or sector, after government and commerce as it has the power to influence the actions of elected policy makers and businessmen. Olukotun (2018: 3) writes that "Civil society is crucial to the establishment of good governance to the extent that it invokes state-society relations, issues of legitimacy of the public realm, how policies are framed and implemented, as well as how consensus and consents are brought about". World Bank (2000) categorises civil society into a wide array of organizations, including community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGO), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations and foundations. Civil society organisations are generally classified into Operational CSOs and Advocacy CSOs. The distinction between the two reflects their functions and roles in the development of policies by governments. The Operational CSOs include those whose interests revolve on the economy, culture, socio-political, environment, health, education, among others. Advocacy CSOs on the hand incline towards faith based, professional associations, and social movements among others.

The contributions of the civil society organizations have been enormous in the areas of employment. As argued by Jezard (2018), civil society organizations "have over 54 million full time equivalent workers and have a global volunteer workforce of over 350 million people which made the external environment of civil society to change". Olukotun (2018) looks at CSOs from the perspective of their roles which include holding institutions to account for actions taken in some projects, to promoting transparency, raising awareness on societal issues, delivering services to meet education, health, food and security needs, implementing disaster management, preparedness and emergency response, bringing expert knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy, giving power to the marginalized and encouraging citizen engagement. Civil society is an essential building block of development and national cohesion. They expect government to improve relationship among communities by protecting them against external attacks. Also, CSOs fill the space between government

and the private sector and where there is conflict they come in to play the role of reconciliation. They are an important source of information for citizens and the government.

International Civil Society

By International civil society', we mean civil society organizations whose headquarters are located outside Nigeria, and whose activities cut across two or more continents. Among African countries, civil society is generally understood as the third sector that has created a vibrant avenue in rising against and challenging the negative character of democratic governments. To corroborate this point, 'civil society, by their actions, attempt to see the end of authoritarianism, build wider participation in governance, constitute the intervening groups between the individual and the state, and attempt to be a part of the formal processes that seek to shape the politics and economy that a state operates' (Aiyede, 2003). International Civil Society are organisations that are global in scope with specific functions than those in the domestic countries. These organisations in turn provide the institutional mesh to hold together other civil societies.

The activities of international civil society organisations are funded using different means, mostly from sources like bank loans, donations from local philanthropists and foreign donors such as the Canadian Trust Fund, Development and Peace Grumman Trust, Ford Foundation, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Church Action, International Cocoa Organization, British Council, Friedreich Ebert Foundation, German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GT2), and so on (Ndiyo, 2008, p. 73). There have been momentous changes over time in the civil society setting and the concept has evolved from associational platforms to comprise a wide range of organized and unorganized groups of different forms and sizes. Corroborating this line of argument, Ernest Gellner argues that civil society organisations have to guard against not only central authoritarianism but also communalism; as he puts it, from the 'tyranny of kings' and the 'tyranny of cousins'. Simply put, international civil society ensure democratic governments globally do not use power absolutely.

Poverty Reduction: The Nigerian Experience

In the course of its sixty three years or so after independence, Nigeria has recorded several poverty reduction programmes introduced by different administrations ranging from Operation Feed the Nation, to Green Revolution, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Peoples Bank of Nigeria, Better life for Rural Women Programme and Family Support Programme, Nomadic and Adult Education Programme, Poverty Alleviation Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), and Nigerian Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), to mention a few. Despite the funding that went

into galvanizing these programmes, it is regrettable that they could not fulfill their mandates as the rate of poverty in Nigeria is still very high.

Poverty reduction requires resources and capacity to adapt programmes to diverse conditions alongside a strong performance orientation supported by demand to pull out the poor themselves (Ndiyo, 2008:97). In this case, collaboration, cooperation and partnership would be necessary to reduce poverty. Partnership is an association of individuals, groups and sectors sharing risk and benefit in a joint venture which is necessary to encourage sustainable development. At the level of partnering, it gives the various stakeholders the opportunity to work closely together as partners towards implementing policies and programmes (Ndiyo, 2008). The primary purpose for establishing the framework for partnership is to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to collaborate and work in synergy towards achieving sustained development. This framework is anchored on the principles of a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA). The strength of the participatory methodology lies in its ability to identify “felt needs”, established priorities for development (Ndiyo, 2008, p. 101). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a way of learning from, and with community members in Nigeria. It helps to investigate, analyze and evaluate constraints and opportunities and make informed and timely decisions regarding development projects. Ndiyo (2008) maintains that more CSOs are closest to the grassroots level and are therefore capable of handling responsibilities such as maintaining the bottom-up approach which is the basis for the design of communities’ development plans.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extant data in this study would be based on three concepts - poverty, poverty reduction and international civil society with particular interest in the ways ActionAid in Nigeria participates in reducing poverty. In the past, Central Bank of Nigeria bullion (2003) says that “in the mid-80s the poverty rate in Nigeria started rising. For instance, about 43% of the Nigeria's population was living below poverty line between 1985 and 1986. It rose to 53% and 61% in 1996 and 1997 respectively. By 1999, about 66% lived below poverty line, making Nigeria the 54th in the Human Poverty Index (HPI) and among the twenty poorest nations in the world (cited in Bello et al., 2009, p. 284)

The scope of this study is from May 29, 1999-2024 as an explanation and analysis of previous study in the area of poverty reduction. Towards the poverty reduction programme, government set aside 10 billion Naira for the creation of 200,000 jobs in the year 2000 (Bello et al., 2009). At a benchmark of 3,500 naira stipend, the beneficiaries of the programme are to engage in labour intensive activities such as unblocking and cleaning of drainages, sweeping of roads, filling and sealing of cracks and potholes, installation and restoration of road signs, rehabilitation and maintenance of public buildings such as markets and hospitals (Chukwuemeka & Amon, 2001). A criticism of this programme notes that, throughout the years it was in effect, it benefited some people rather than the targeted poor. The

programme was plagued by corruption, lack of transparency, over-centralism, uncoordinated management style, irregular payment, and lack of logistics, proper monitoring, and evaluation. National poverty eradication programme was now released in 2001 with state coordinators which coordinates all poverty eradication programmes of all federal agencies.

Selected Record of Poverty Reduction Agencies

Table 1. Poverty Reduction Agencies Established by Government, 2000-2024

Serial Number	Organization	Year	Mandate	Performance
1	Poverty Alleviation Programme	2000	To address the challenges of rising unemployment particularly among the youth	The outcome of the programme was below expectation due to bureaucratic bottleneck (Ojowu, 2017)
2	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	2001	Its mandate consists of four schemes- i) to provide strategies for eradication of poverty. ii) Youth Empowerment Scheme deals with capacity acquisition iii) Social Welfare Service Scheme deals with special education, food security and many more. iv) Conservation scheme	It could not address the issue of poverty
3	National Economic Empowerment Strategy	2003	It focuses on reorientation, poverty reduction, and employment	The unemployment rate in Nigeria is above 60%
4	National Health Insurance Scheme	2004	To promote equitable distribution of health care	People living below poverty line find it difficult to pay for medical bills
5	Youth Employment Scheme	2004	It was aimed at acquisition of skills by the youth.	It did not achieve its purpose given the rate of unemployment
6	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEED II)	2008	NEED II was launched as a continuation of the vision, mission and strategies of NEED I which placed more emphasis on production, human resources and strengthening of the private sector	Infrastructure development, particularly power generation, unemployment and inequality worsened (Ojowu, 2017)
7	Graduate Internship Scheme	2012	The age range targeted for the scheme was between 18 and 40 years, and was aimed to provide unemployed graduate youth with job apprenticeship in a reputable public /private sector to drive the nation transformation agenda and vision 2020. It was a programme plan for four years designed to mitigate the impact of fuel crisis	Poor targeting of intended beneficiaries

			and provide the unemployed with job apprenticeship opportunities (SURE-P)	
8	Almajiri programme	2012	To encourage the nomads to go school.	The interest of nomads were not captured in the programme as many move around with their children to rear cattle.
9	National Social Investments Programme	2016	It is designed to assist young Nigerians	The monthly stipend was not regular and some people were owed by the government.
10	National Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (NPRGS)	2021	To address poverty particularly in rural areas. Government claimed that 1.8 million citizens collected N25,000 monthly grant under the conditional cash transfer scheme	The programme did not reach the initial 15 million people (Vanguard, August 18, 2022).

Source: Author 2024, Chukwuemeka and Amon (2001), Young et al, (2017).

Table 1 captures government efforts to create jobs through skills acquisition in order to alleviate poverty. However, bureaucracy and other factors like the interests of elites as varying from that of the targeted people, did not allow the efforts of government to materialize.

Theoretically, in using the structuralist functional theory to explain this paper, it is not only a tool of investigation or evaluating poverty reduction programme, it also provide an explanation to the structural inequality in a state. Scholars argue that poverty comes along with health threats. For instance, if a person is not eating balanced diet, it can manifest in several diseases. To combat this at the national level, the federal government in 1972 introduced Agriculture Development Project (ADP) to strengthen agricultural production, food production and income to small scale farmers. Auta and Dafwang (2010) findings show that 63.6% of the ADPs had weak funding and only 22.7% had excellent funding status. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE)'s Act, CAP 250 of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gave the NDE her legal backing as an employment agency statutorily charged with the responsibility to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment. The principle and strategy of self-employment does not develop the technological capability of the trainees (Young et al, 2017).

The first question is what has been the effort of government in alleviating poverty in the Nigeria? Poverty has been seen as a barrier to education because the poor would not be able to send their children to school to receive quality education. To mitigate against this, government established schools for the Almajiri, also known as nomadic education, in the north to increase literacy. Nigeria Bureau of Statistics reports that out of over 200 million Nigerians, a staggering 133 million are ensnared in multidimensional poverty. 65 percent of poor people live in the north which amount to 86 million while



35 percent nearly 47 million live in the south of Nigeria (Nigeria Multidimensional Index, 2022). “The burden of poverty is disproportionately higher in rural areas where 72 percent of people face deprivations compared to 42 percent in urban areas, 29 percent of school-aged children are not attending school with a staggering 94 percent of these out of school children living in abject poverty in most of the suburban areas. Furthermore, over 26 percent of Nigerians living in multidimensional poverty reside in households with a child between the ages of 6 and 15 who is not attending school (Vanguard, 2023). As at 2021, World Bank’s Human Capital Index placed Nigeria at 168th out of 174 countries. The ranking and other challenges push both local and international civil society organisations to have interest to provide for some of the downtrodden with material things.

The second question dwells on what roles civil society organizations play in reducing poverty in Nigeria in line with the Sustainable Developments Goals. Part of the mission statement of Action Aid in Nigeria is to achieve social justice, gender equality and development goals to reduce poverty by working with people living in poverty. Vanguard Newspaper of October 18th, 2023, reported that Deputy Country Director of Action Aid Nigeria, Suwaiba Dankwabo, says that “in Nigeria, the struggle against poverty is not one-dimensional. It encompasses a web of interconnected challenges that touch upon livelihood, access to basic needs, and the absence of social protection for the most vulnerable among us”. That statement shows the extent of poverty rate in the Nigeria that needs urgent attention and calls for collaboration. An Action Aid work-plan titled the “Social Justice to End Poverty, 2018-2023” has it that the organization is implementing various poverty reduction and capacity building programmes in 222 communities in 26 states in a period of six years. Action Aid tried to raise £60 million pounds from donors, local fund-raising institutional donors from high value network (www.brtnews.org).

In the southern part of Nigeria, Action Aid’s programmes involve health, education, food and agriculture, human security in conflict and emergencies, women’s rights and so on. They donated 3 million naira toward relief materials to help many of those in Abagana, Anambra State in the South-east of Nigeria, the location of an internally displaced persons camp who have suffered the herdsmen crisis in Anambra. They provided 380 mattresses, 350 bags of rice, 436 packs of sanitary pads, 341 packs of diapers for babies, five sets of baby bath, five cartons of baby food and 436 packs of bar soaps for washing and personal hygiene use. These materials helped many who were displaced and suffering from poverty (Vanguard, October 2018). The program focuses on improving the standard of living and dignity of the communities, especially women and children at the local communities and states. Since inception the program has reached out to over 14,400 women/girls, 4400 children, 2200 men / boys, 100 persons living in disability in 11 communities such Agba-Ameta, Amikpo, Amuro Oshiri, Agbaja, Obegu-odada, Ephumenyin, Ovuoba, Edda, Okpuitomo, Offia-oji (www.actionaidnigeria.org). South-west Nigeria has also benefited from the activities of the Action Aid.

In the northern part of Nigeria, ActionAid has assisted women in the North-east and North-west in order to give them an opportunity to create and begin building small businesses. They are trained to gain skill and knowledge to provide for their families. This is a region seriously ravaged by terror groups like the Boko Haram, resulting in an educational emergency affecting 2.8 million children (World Economic Forum, 2019). In the North-central, ActionAid has carried out a lot of activities in Kogi and Nasarawa state due to bandits, herdsmen and Boko Haram.

Table 2. Record of interventions to reduce poverty in Nigeria by International Civil Society

S/N	State	Rate of poverty per state	Challenges in improving poverty	Civil society organization role in poverty reduction	Geo-political Zone
1	Abia	30%	Abia State faces a number of challenges in improving poverty rates. These challenges include corruption and poor governance in the state.	Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in reducing poverty in Abia State. They work to raise awareness about causes and consequences of poverty, advocate for change and provide direct assistance to those in need. They have also been working to improve governance and fight corruption, which are key factors in reducing poverty	South-east
2	Adamawa	75.41%	Lack of access to education and skills training	They helped to improve access to basic services	North-east
3	Akwa Ibom	38.9%	Unemployment: There is a high level of unemployment in Akwa Ibom	They have been engaged in numerous activities to reduce poverty	South-south
4	Anambra	40.1%	Unfavourable agro-ecological condition	They provide access to loans for small businesses	South-east
5	Bauchi	61.53%	In Bauchi State there is an existence of high levels of illiteracy	They have been advocating for good governance and accountability	North-east
6	Bayelsa	46.5%	High dependence on oil and gas	They have been working to resolve disputes peacefully	South-south
7	Benue	32.9%	In Benue State there exist climate change	They help in reducing conflict and violence in the state	North-central
8	Borno	77.8%	Humanitarian crisis	They have been working to create economic opportunities for people in the state	North East
9	Cross River	32%	There is limited economic opportunities and at the same time issue of Deforestation	They have been promoting sustainable development practices and environmental conservation efforts	South-south
10	Delta	35.5%	Issues of environmental degradation	They help in supporting peace building effort and human rights	South-south

11	Ebonyi	79.76%	Limited access to education and lack of infrastructure	They are helping to create a more prosperous future for the people of Ebonyi State	South-east
12	Edo	22.1%	Issues of corruption, unemployment and low agricultural productivity	they have been working to promote sustainable livelihoods	South-south
13	Ekiti	32.6%	Dependence on agriculture and unemployment	They have been working to ensure the fair and transparent distribution of government resources	South West
14	Enugu	58.13%	Poor access to healthcare and inadequate infrastructure	They help in promoting good governance and improving access to education	South-east
15	Gombe	62.31%	Inadequate education	They advocated for policies that support economic growth	North-east
16	Imo	48.2%	Weak social safety nets	They help to create job opportunities and support small businesses	South-east
17	Jigawa	87.02%	Inadequate education and insecurity	They built and supported hospitals, clinics, trained teachers	North-west
18	Kaduna	43.5%	Insecurity and limited job opportunities	They advocated for government policies that supports poverty reduction	North-east
19	Kano	55.1%	High level of urban poverty	They have been providing financial supports to schools, building health care clinics	North-west
20	Katsina	56.4%	Poor infrastructure and limited job opportunities	They have been working to fight against corruption in the state	North-west
21	Kebbi	50.2%	Low agricultural productivity	They have been providing technical assistance to farmers	North-west
22	Kogi	45.1%	Limited job opportunities	They provided humanitarian assistance to those in need	North-central
23	Kwara	35.6%	A weak agricultural sector	They advocated for improved governance, accountability and transparency	North-central
24	Lagos	7.9%	A large informal sector and high cost of living	They address issues such as inequality and corruption	South-west
25	Nasarawa	57.3%	Insecurity and High population growth rate	They played a key role in promoting good governance and accountability	North-central
26	Niger	66.11%	A high population growth rate	They have made positive impacts on the lives of many people	North-west
27	Ogun	27.8%	High rate of youth unemployment	They have worked to improve access to healthcare, education, etc	South-west
28	Ondo	34.2%	Low literacy rates and insecurity	They involved in peace building efforts and advocacy for social justice	South-west
29	Osun	31.8%	Lack of job opportunities	They have worked to improve access to education and health care	South-west
30	Oyo	35.1%	High level of out-of-school-children	They promoted economic development and job creation	South-west
31	Plateau	50.2%	Inadequate infrastructure and insecurity	They have worked to improve governance and transparency in the state	North-central

32	River	37.1%	Poor health care and insecurity	They help in the area of food distribution, income generation	South-south
33	Sokoto	87.73%	Low level of education	They play a significant role in poverty reduction efforts	North-west
34	Taraba	87.72%	Insufficient investment in education and healthcare	They provide humanitarian assistance and working to help people rebuild their lives	North-east
35	Yobe	72.34%	Limited economic opportunities	They have worked to improve access to education and health care	North-east
36	Zamfara	73.98%	Limited access to water and sanitation	They helped in providing services such as education and health care	North-west

Source: Ajakaiye 2001, Ogwumike 2008, Guardian newspaper, 2022, The National average of poverty in Nigeria is 40 %

The third question dwells on the impact of these poverty alleviation programmes by international civil society. The growing international interest in poverty reduction results mainly from aids from donor agencies and thousand of international civil society organizations. Their role is to promote the sustainable poverty reduction, advocate for the rights of the people caught below the poverty line, and provide effective service for the poor at the grassroots level. Between the various military and civilian administrations in Nigeria, a lot of policies targeted toward reducing poverty have been implemented. The continuous increase in the number of people living below \$1.90 dollar per day have made Action Aid to participate squarely in reducing poverty in Nigeria. However, put together, these various efforts by the government, ActionAid and other international civil society organisations have not created any significant impact of reducing poverty. This has compelled commentators to ask if the civil society groups are really working.

CONCLUSION

Poor people experience physical pain that comes with too little food and emotional pain stemming from paucity of income to get their daily needs. Government have come up with different strategies to reduce poverty, efforts which have not readily created much impact because of the enormity of people caught within this wealth bracket.

The intervention of international civil society groups in Nigeria has also not been forthcoming in noticeably alleviating this condition. Credit has to be given to them though from the angle that, on many occasions, they have mounted pressure on government in ensuring the monitoring and implementation of some of the poverty alleviation programme introduced. But these efforts have not created significant impact in reducing poverty even with the contribution of new ideas.

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