

## Review

# An overview of pseudo-therapeutic approaches to poverty in Nigeria: The citizens and the state

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**Mounting pressures on poverty eradication on world scale is informed by its severity and impact on the poor and the disadvantaged. In Nigeria for instance, where its large population lived in rural communities and engaged in subsistence agriculture they are said to be the worse hit; their condition is exacerbated by poor rural infrastructure, bad governance, unsustainable population growth, ethno-religious and tribal conflicts, adverse effects of globalization, inappropriate economic policies, HIV/AIDs pandemic among others. This paper is a general survey of therapeutic approaches on poverty issue in Nigeria. It delved into theoretical and empirical postulations of causes and types as well as attempt to chart a course for critical examination of the depth and magnitude of poverty. The survey drew curtain on the relationship between the citizens and the state in a post-colonial Nigeria. The broad focus of this work hinged on the premise of prevailing trend of poverty in Nigeria and the inadequacies of governmental policies and actions to meet up the yearnings and aspirations of its citizens. The work finally identified the deepening crisis of development in Nigeria as a function of mismanagement, corruption, inequitable distribution of political power and resources. The general perception of the recent economic reform policy in the country is that the policies are alien and western oriented meant to deepen the existing economic gap in the society. This notion has led to the situation of citizens versus the state in series of unhealthy engagements since the reconstitution of democratic institutions in the country.**

**Keywords:** Citizens, states, economic policies, corruption, poverty eradication, bad governance, tribal conflicts.

## INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial state in Nigeria has been chagrined. Its snail-pace movement towards a sustainable good governance and development is daunting as various measures employed to combat the soaring poverty ratio appears to have failed, failing or does not suffice. Widespread disillusionment is exacerbated by the increase in ethno-religious violence in the country reminiscent of bad governance orchestrated by erstwhile military leaders. Arguably the increased level of poverty in the country have been attributed to long military rule, corruption, fiscal indiscipline of expenditure, mismanagement and over reliance on a single commodity (oil) for export and domestic consumption.

Poverty is a condition where an individual finds it extremely difficult to meet the basic and essential needs of life that differentiate him from animal. In the recent past, poverty was seen as exclusive feature of rural dwellers where the bulk of the population earns its livelihood from agriculture and where poverty has reached alarming proportions. At the close of the 20th century

nearly half of the population in sub-saharan Africa (some 320 million people) lived in absolute poverty (Mwabu and Thorbecke 2004:16 - 65) irrespective of where they live, urban or rural centres. Commenting on this, Bigsten and Kwasi Fosu (2004) advanced to say, why we have a swollen poverty size in the rural areas is because there has been an urban bias in policy making which has contributed to poor infrastructure in the rural sector. In addition, the rural economic environment is characterized by missing or poorly functioning markets. This situation according to them has compelled the farmers to choose diversified subsistence, which has not been an effective basis for growth.

The incidence of poverty has been prevalent in Nigeria before and after independence. Against this background, the Federal Government has in recent years embraced poverty reduction strategy as one of the core objectives of the macro-economic policy. Successive governments in Nigeria had collaborated with various international organizations notably the World Bank, United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Organization (UNDO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and of recent New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) etc to initiate special programmes toward poverty eradication.

The citizens are still disillusioned as it is no longer news today in Nigeria to hear governments or its functionaries talk about “eradicating” “alleviating” “reducing” or “eliminating” poverty. These are terms that have been over flogged by the state over the years - in seminars, conferences, symposia and as key objectives. Also, it has been an elongated discourse among academics, Non-government Organizations (NGOs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs). Among these, the economic dimension of the debate seems to have upper hand. The economist perspective assumed the leading role among all other models based on the simple message it conveyed. From this perspective, poverty is perceived as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living (World Bank 1990). Not only does considering poverty in exclusively economic terms simplify analysis but it is also unrealistic and unjust. Approaches to the issues of poverty have largely been volatile in our societies. Therefore this volatility requires a broad range of theorization. This paper impinged on theoretical and empirical issues of poverty by highlighting the depth and magnitude of the concept in Nigeria. The paper also analytically assesses the therapeutic measures used to curb the high percentage of poverty by critically examining their applications and efficacies.

Interestingly, the final concluding section of this work tie up the various discourse by looking at the total condition and plight of the citizens in terms of their disposition to institutions of governance and resource distribution by taking a critical look at the performance of the state. The discourse sets out a number of policy recommendations for considerations.

## **THEORIZING POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF CAUSALITY AND TYPOLOGY**

Ever since the behavioural movement in America in the 1950s, social science has never remained the same. Theorization of phenomena has come to occupy a space that an explanation devoid of it is considered as mere conjecture. This revolution spilled over to the study of social sciences in Africa; Events and phenomena are understood within the prism of specific messages. Theorization of poverty in this discourse is meant to sharpen our knowledge of what constitutes poverty it causes, types and impact.

### **CAUSES OF POVERTY**

The factors that cause poverty are multidimensional.

What is responsible for poverty in community ‘A’ might entirely be different from that of ‘B’ or ‘C’, however both conditions can be regarded as poverty. A report released by the World Bank (1996) indicates that poverty kills 40 million people every year throughout the world. The major part of the world, which suffers the most, is the “rich” land of Africa. Only one out of every four Africans eat sufficient amount of food daily and six out of every ten children died before reaching the age of five years. The report further stated that the reason why poverty is so endemic in developing nations is due to bad government, mismanagement, Aids pandemic and laziness. It went further to highlight that about forty five percent (45%) of the approximately 590 million people in sub-Sahara Africa live below the national poverty line. Suffice it here to say that the socio economic structures in Africa and long years of savage economic extraction and economic dependence, long military rule are partly responsible for this. The share of people living in poverty is large in Africa and the poor are poorer than in any other region. A share population distribution living on less than \$1.00 a day in 1998 shows that East Asia and pacific have 23.2%, Europe and central Asia 2.0%, Latin America and the Caribbean 6.5%, sub-Saharan Africa 24.3% (World Bank 2001).

It is imperative to note that the alarming figure sparks up scholarly discourse on the causes of poverty in Africa. Various models ranging from colonialism/neocolonialism, imperialism, underdevelopment, dependency, modernization, globalization were outlined. For adroit presentation I shall pin on just two.

Firstly, colonialism/neocolonialism and secondly modernization. There is close relationship between the first school and the school of thought that emerged in Latin America known as dependency theories. Their position remained distinct. According to them, Latin America’s development was undoubtedly conditioned through the process of its incorporation into the capitalist mode of production (Frank, 1967; Amin, 1974). Frank argued that Iberian conquest absorbed pre-Colombian America into the world system of capitalism. As a result of this incorporation, economic surplus was extracted by Spain and Portugal and later when Spain and Portugal become economic dependencies of newly industrialized Britain, the surplus found its way to Britain. The chain of surplus extraction created centres and peripheries both on a world scale. Latin America came to supply the developed countries with raw materials and in return imported manufactured products. At a regional level, the major cities acted as the centres with the provinces and rural areas relegated to peripheral status. In a similar vein, it was in the process of the integration of Africa into the world capitalist system that both dependence and disarticulation became features of African economics. Dependence and disarticulation not only arise from the same source, they mutually reinforce each other (Ake, 1981).

Obviously, different colonial experiences had diverse economic and social consequences throughout the colonized

World. Colonialism and neocolonialism left behind insidious mechanism that subverts independent opinion, which would have created a process of economic independence. The increased dependent role played by the developing world in an unequal economic system left more questions to be answered. Even after the exit of the colonialists it is still difficult in the developing world to come up with a unified measure that would lead to the deconstructions and restructuring of the state, which will make it more relevant to the people. The modest attempt at this brings us to the second model-modernization.

Ake (1996) described Africa as society of beggars, parasites and bandits. We beg for technical and financial assistance, consume what we do not produce, or manufacture, steal and divert the little we borrow from abroad to our unused foreign accounts. It will indeed amount to sheer play if in such condition Nigeria still thinks of development while what is on ground is virtually borrowed or copied from the western world. Attempt at infrastructural development in urban cities under the guise of development in Nigeria has helped to increase poverty; this is so because trickle down effect doesn't seem to work in Nigeria. The impact of infrastructural development is not payable at the rural communities. Rather, the sitting of projects in rural communities engenders suspicion, rivalry and conflict.

Nevertheless, identifying the cause of poverty in Nigeria requires a broad view in addition to the model examined above. It is therefore germane to note that there are people who have been born into poverty due to circumstances either through slavery, caste system, war, natural disasters like drought, locust, flood or fire or as a result of the accident of their birth - physical disability or diseases. There are also others who are poor as a result of inability to acquire education; some as a result of their age (children and the aged) while some also because of certain cultural taboos, their gender and the nature of their employment.

## **TYPES OF POVERTY**

### **Absolute poverty**

Many elements are involved in the definition of poverty; these include physical, moral and psychological factors. Absolute poverty in this context is the inability to secure the minimum basic needs of life like water, shelter and food. Poverty of this magnitude is the convergence of the absence of material well-being, idea/knowledge and courage/wisdom. Absolute poverty in this sense is a degenerated condition whereby a person or individuals are unable to attain to a minimum standard of living (World Bank, 1994). That is to say a person or individual is living below the poverty line. Absolute poverty is a common sight in developing world due to differences in resource distribution and access to economic and political power. This condition is exacerbated by

high rate of corruption, mismanagement of public fund, Aids pandemic and other related diseases and increase in population size. In the recent past, absolute poverty is more pathetic in local communities where agriculture formed the backbone of the rural economy however; the urban centre now shares the chunk of this.

Absolute poverty is quietly decimating large proportion of work force in developing society. In sub-Sahara Africa, for example, the presence of absolute poverty have been traced to so many roots, chief among them is colonialism and neocolonialism, military rule and natural and man made disasters. These were alleged to have been responsible for extraction, squandering and decimation of human and natural resources in the continent. A question quickly comes to mind as, with the erosion of colonialism and military rule what has been the response of African leaders to the issue of absolute poverty in the continent? Attempt at this lead us to the next type of poverty.

### **Relative poverty**

Relative poverty means that the relatively poor may barely secure the minimum basic needs and also have such limited resources, they lack the means of adequate social participation. The categories of persons within these strata are the socially and politically disempowered groups. Their ability to afford some basic needs does not significantly indicate that they are economically/socially empowered. In his democratization of disempowerment thesis, Ake (1994) consistently maintained that the adoption of the colonizers language was part of the structure of colonial domination but it has now become, in the post-colonial era, a means of disempowerment and domination. "He further argued that every state, every political system, has its own grammar of politics; mastery of this grammar is required for political competition and contestation and for maneuvering through the minefields of politics and also for the sharing of meaning and the appropriation of values" (Ake, 1994).

The post-independence political, economic and social structures are embodiment of disempowerment. At Independence Nigeria inherited disarticulated institutions that reinforce asymmetrical relationship. If the consensus among scholars remains that education is a panacea to poverty, the Nigerian condition absolutely remain debatable. Majority of urban dwellers particularly the working class who have acquired Western education are not better-off than semi-skilled or stark illiterate businessmen, materially. The working class and the unemployed are victims of one circumstance - poverty has eaten deep into the fabric of the society that primordial loyalty, sectional, ethnic and religious affiliations have essentially remained the way out. 'Good connection' or 'god fatherism' thesis gives a clear picture of this scenario. In Nigeria today, no one can boast that where he or she is presently occupying is legitimately acquired on merit. It is obvious that someone somewhere has cushioned the ground. Gainful

employment both in the private and public sectors, admission into higher institution is now based on whom you know or closely connected with. In this contest of "good connection or god fatherism" the unconnected fizzle out despite their merits. This is a dangerous trend that has crept into our society. Patrimonial/matrimonial cleavages are threat to development since concessions are inevitably granted in obvious cases at the expense of merit, which would lead development thereby reducing the spate of poverty.

Finally, political competition is a terrain for engendering ethnic acrimony and civil strife. The Federal arrangement in Nigeria is too authoritarian that the centre (that is, the Federal level) is stronger than the other tiers (State and Local Governments) and made them dormant in terms of exercise of authority. It is as a result of this that competition to occupy the highest seat assumed zero-sum game. The winner takes all while the loser losses all. It is in this contestation that the elite class mobilizes the masses hence they are predisposed to mobilization as a result of their impoverished condition for their (elite groups) political and economic benefits.

#### **DEPTH AND MAGNITUDE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

The inability to meet basic requirements of life is a common feature in Nigeria. It is a common sight to find beggars almost all over the streets, railway line tarmac, carparks, vehicles terminus, market squares, hospitals, schools etc. Absolute poverty creates a condition of precariousness and hopelessness, which is tantamount to retrogression and underdevelopment. Amis and Rakodi (1994) observed that the major impediment to democracy in Africa is poverty. Masses are easily cornered, brain washed and their right of choices manipulated to a point that some of them are susceptible to bribery and can be used as political thugs to cause confusion, harassment or intimidate an opponent during election period. This view is shared by most political commentators. It is alleged that the increased ethno-religious violence in the country in the recent past is associated with choices of manipulation. The continued condition of absolute poverty in the country is due to the fact that most so-called populist regimes in the past and present used it for the purpose of drawing support and legitimacy for their governments, while the so-called rich or the political class exploit it to show their class differences (Ake, 1996).

Since the 1990s, Nigeria has been classified as a poor nation based on its low Gross National Product (GNP). The UNDP using its Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Nigeria 142<sup>nd</sup> amongst the 174 poor countries in the world (UNDP 1990). In its 2003 report Nigeria Human Development Index was 41.6% placing the country among the poorest nations in the world. Also, additional report from Federal Office of Statistics (2000) indicates

that life expectancy for the country is now put at 53 years, adult literacy rate 56% while 70% of the rural population lacks access to potable water, healthcare facilities and electricity.

Absolute poverty has come to be deeply entrenched as a result of the persistent poor material condition, which has made dependency on subsistence agriculture absolute. The cultivation of cash crops is not encouraged as most of the produce is relatively sold at cheap rate for lack of good road network. Domestic animals are not kept for the purpose of consumption but to be sold at later dates in order to use the money to buy clothing, soup ingredients, drugs, detergents and payment of school fees for wards and in some cases marry additional wife. Polygamy in the rural communities is common hence it is believed that the more number of wives one has determine the amount of wealth one possesses; one can acquire large plots of land as a number of one's household increases. Three quarters of such polygamous homes in Nigeria have no formal education. Not many parents can afford to pay their children's school fees as able bodied youth who are supposed to till the land have fled to the cities leaving behind the aged and widows. In some cases those who remained either indulge in one vice or the other like smoking hard drugs, turning to thugs, local militias, impregnating the young girls or drinking of locally brewed beer.

The State has not helped so much in this direction; this explains why there was an overwhelming support to NGOs by the masses of Nigeria at their appearances. The NGOs have played great role in the area of capacity building, mass mobilization, organization of the civil society, increased ethical awareness as well as public opinion and reaction on government policies and programmes. One of such was the nationwide 1986, 1989 civil revolt against the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which attacks the civil rights of Nigerians. This provided the spur for the reawakening of the broad democratic consciousness of various social groups as they began to build alliances to defend their material interests and check the authoritarianism of a military government determined to force through market based economic reforms even at the expense of basic human and democratic rights (Olukoshi, 1998). Another instance of popular uprising was civil society denunciation of the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1993 Presidential election result annulment which Gen. Babangida Junta unleashed like a brim of fire on Nigerians who were then recuperating from the "SAP Plague". The most recent of all is the nationwide strike embarked upon by Nigerians from all walks of life against the hike in prices of petroleum products by President Obasanjo. The mass reaction to Obasanjo's petroleum price increase was not a litmus test of democracy in Nigeria as it is assumed. The confessional reaction was provoked by the severity of poverty in the country. The impression that the nations' institutions and parastatals had long been disarticulated

by past military regimes is not an alibi to further increase the hardship of the toiling masses. What appeal to most Nigerians is the satisfaction of their material needs. To the teeming population, democracy, which spells political /civil rights, is hardly appropriate because on the average the greater percentage of Nigerians are engaged in communal production for subsistence. Ake (1994) raised a pertinent question to this position. In his contention of abstract rights he queried that, of what benefit is political/civil rights to a hungry man who is not sure of his next meal after the last one? It is apparently of no importance at such point in time because when the stomach is empty one could hardly think right talk less of joining a long queue to exercise one's franchise. It is against this background that various strategies of survival are employed by many Nigerians. Sacred places are desecrated and abused in the pretext of entrenching morality. Ibrahim (1999) writes that the mass of people are psychologically predisposed to mobilization because they are being displaced, poor, lacking family bonds and protection and because religious organizations propose means of material redemption they are naturally attractive to people in impoverished conditions. No wonder Marx described religion as the opium of the masses. Poverty has increased the spate of religious fanaticism in Nigeria. Religious militancy and fundamentalism are not done for the genuine desire to propagate such religion or the tendency of piousness but rather a means of creating a pandemonium that would guarantee intimidation, harassment and looting for the purpose of survival. In this methodology of survival, some of the so-called propagators of religion are so diabolical and cunning in their scheming that they erect or hire structures which they are either the general overseers or founders and continued to claim access to the deity (God) and or their wives are made treasurers. In some cases others erect structures at the entrance of their residence where the masses (poor people) go to worship and remained subservient to them. Thus, traditional healers (herbalist) are also not left behind in this survival struggle. It is believed that the manifestation of their powers can displace an opponent in the contest for power and also elevate a person's social status. In this condition of economic uncertainty they continue to enjoy the patronage of their clients. Mbembe (1988) argues that Africans accepted Christianity, the religion of the conqueror, in the "African sense". It was a new element to reinforce their traditional beliefs and practices based on the age old tradition of using all forces to confront the objective problem of survival.

Furthermore, at schools and households levels, students and parents alike have resorted to one zero one (1-0-1) or zero, zero one (0-0-1) strategy of survival of non-caloried food in order to keep the body and soul together. While in some cases people sell their rights, women go on prostitution men engaged in outright armed robbery, "419" or intimidation of innocent citizens for the

purpose of survival. These are all non-productive methods as the individual productive capacity is now shifted to his personal survival.

### **THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO POVERTY**

Poverty exists barely in every society in the world. The probable advances of it, more often than not attract attention and solution. In Nigeria for example, the frontal attack on poverty dates back to the early period of independence when in 1962, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, governor of Western region introduced a communist method like organized agricultural scheme by the name Farm Settlement Scheme. This was aimed at establishing farms in rural areas in more organized form as a supplement to subsistence farming. However, lack of evaluation and follow-up measures for the continuity of the scheme made it short lived. River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA) and Agricultural Development Projects (ADPS) were introduced in the 1960s to eradicate poverty. In 1974 National Accelerated Food production Programme (NAFPP) was introduced, this was later modified to Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). In that same year "Green Revolution" was introduced. The succeeding years witnessed various policies and programmes aimed at poverty alleviation. The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was established in 1986 to reactivate and mobilize the grass root towards organized rural employment opportunities. Other institutions and schemes include: Peoples Banks, Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank, National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Agency for Mass Literacy, National Primary Health Care Scheme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women, Federal Urban Mass Transit Agency, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Petroleum Special Trust Fund (PTF) and National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP). The endemic nature of poverty in Nigeria is so attractive that International agencies and institutions like the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO); International institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), African Regional Agricultural Credit Association (AFRACA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) etc became enmeshed in the cases of education, health, Transport population and agriculture in Nigeria on the notion to eradicate poverty.

Another area that impacted on programme formulation on poverty eradication in Nigeria is the World Summit for social development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995, which highlighted the notion of social development and poverty eradication. The summit brought together 117 heads of state and another 69 ministerial- level representatives who committed their government to

eradicating poverty “as an ethical, social political and economic imperative”, and committed themselves to creation of an economic, political, social-cultural and legal environment that will enable people achieve social development in the year 2000 two important UN General Assembly meetings took place: one was the special session in Geneva to review the social summit (Copenhagen Plus 5) and the other was the UN Millennium Summit which led to the formulation of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) as a strategy to reduced the scourges of poverty and other related elements in the world by the year 2015. Also, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) emerged out of a deep concern to finding suitable solution to the sharp decline of economic growth that affect Africa. Eradicating poverty is one of the cardinal goals of this new development strategy. Nigeria as a co-founder has adopted this strategy to address her deepening crisis of development. NEPAD focus is to have consistent policy over a long period that will lead to sustainable development; which will not only generate economic growth but distribute its benefits equitably as well as empower the people rather than marginalizing them.

### **Strategy, application and limitations**

What Ake observed some years back as major problem facing African development strategy is still prevalent till today. Ake (1981) identifies three key areas as the source of African problem, these include:

- 1) Absence of identifiable strategies that may reinforce laid down plans.
- 2) Problem of indigenization and.
- 3) Incompatible goals.

In addition to the above, inconsistency, inappropriate implementation of programme of action, lack of proper impact assessment measures, imbalance in sectoral distribution and lack of focus on target area are special features of programmes' failure in Nigeria. Some of the programmes failed because of the fire-brigade approach to issue of poverty; they lack feasibility studies such as analysis, statistics, evaluation, and assessment of mode of application of programme, inconsistency among others. These can go on and on. The problems with previous poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria can be situated within the context of these problems highlighted in addition to lack of political will. Some of the previous attempts have suffered from either not properly designed, formulated, co-ordinated or implemented, whatever they suffered from it is on records that those programmes have been total failure.

In the year 2001 the federal Government earmarked the sum of ten billion naira (₦10 billion) in that fiscal year to fight poverty. Ten thousand job opportunities for the

unemployed youths who are to receive three thousand five hundred naira (₦3,500) at the end of every month were created. Each states of the Federation including Abuja have been given the chance of employing five thousand semi-skilled and unskilled persons. This exercise provoked an inexhaustible criticism. The target population of poverty alleviation programme suffered from the problem of policy design and direction. This is a reflection of insensitivity and lack of proper focus. The severity of poverty in Nigeria cuts across various vulnerable groups like women, children and the aged. Social indicators have shown that by 1985-86, 45% of Nigerians were living below the poverty line; by 1990 it was 50% by 1996 the ratio roused to 53%, reaching 66% in 1999 and 67% in 2005 (NAPEP, 2005).

It is pertinent to note that poverty is a phenomenon that threatens the survival of mankind. Just like the government observed a certain portion of the population living in poverty state; it is not just that group alone, there are also other vulnerable groups (women, children and the aged) that require urgent attention. No amount of money disbursed to a specific group in the name of alleviating poverty will suffice in this country as long as the enabling environment for increase in production, competition and investment has not been created. The employment opportunities NAPEP intends to create for a target population has not been properly identified. Planting of trees, clearing of gutters and other public places as a way of engaging the youths are not a supporting process of entrepreneurship. Employment creation, which is a macroeconomic objective of NAPEP, lacks the basis of evolving a programme of action that will lead to economic growth.

The larger population concentrated in the rural areas are the worse hit in terms of poverty. Those groups of persons have little or no access to government job creation. The endemic state of poverty in the rural communities in addition to long time neglect need urgent redress if the government really want to meet the millennium development goal by the year 2015 of ensuring that poverty is reduced to a barest minimum in the country.

### **THE CITIZENS AND THE STATE IN CONTESTATION**

Welch Jr. (1995) in one of his earlier writings states that the communal pressures that have characterized the Niger Delta and many other parts of Nigeria are not only a matter of ethnic self-determination but also complex expressions of economic and political disparities. Against this background therefore as observed elsewhere in this work the survival strategy employed by the citizens of this country subsume the genuine desire to fight poverty. The platforms of this struggle are multidimensional but the single purpose is to attain a goal i.e. a total extrication from poverty. Several studies have shown that the

continues protest and agitations in the country only reinforces ethno-religious chauvinism viewed as panacea to poverty, simply because the state is silent to its social context.

Nigeria is the sixth world exporter of petroleum and the largest producer in Africa yet comparatively, her share population are still swindling below poverty line. This is borne out of the fact that the unfolding economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s fuelled by absolute mismanagement, corruption and prebendalism supported the emergence of new class that reduces the state to a 'rentire status'. This new 'army of accumulation' that scavenge on the scarce resources network with associate outside the state to build "empires" and live ostentatiously. To them liberal democracy is the best alternative form of governance but Ake (1996) has this to say "we somehow tend to think of democracy and democratization as an abstract process dissociated from a specific human content. Perhaps this is because in our self-reflexivity, we take the human content for granted, having unconsciously made ourselves and the likes of us that content."

The aura of democracy in the country is yet set to response to specific issues that impinged on what the government term as "national interest" and the likes. The issue of national question that boils down to the survivability of the country as a corporate sovereign entity, the Niger Delta environmental pollution, the Sharia saga and other ethno-religious and cultural cleavages like the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) the Biafran course championed by the people of south east, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) the Middle Belt alignment with the minority in the south-south, the Arewa Forum and recently the sharp divide in the National Assembly along geopolitical region over constitutional amendment and consequently the National sovereign conference which recently started its sitting in Lagos under the auspices of pro-National Conference Organization (PRONACO) or Peoples National Conference (PNC) under the leadership of veteran politician, chief Anthony Enahoro. These issues appear to have been borne out of the disparity in wealth distribution that the citizens modeled institutions and structures to stage-manage their political and economic conditions. Although the character and scope of these burning issues appears with regional sentiments and bias but they can be viewed objectively as "genuine agitations" seeking to redefine the meaning of democratic engagement in a nation where elite (state) behaviour is characterized by endemic corruption and a flagrant assault on human dignity.

Undisputedly, Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa with a contestable figure of 120 million persons as well as the most populous black nation in the world. For the past seven and the half years of the present (Obasanjo) democratic regime the government have hike the prices of oil eight times; this have exacerbated the economic hardship of Nigerians. These increase also

witnessed a situation of outright confrontation between the citizens and the state, there have been series of industrial strike organized by the irrepressible Nigerian Labour Congress in conjunction with other civil society organizations. The most recent of this protest was the one staged in five state (Lagos, Kano, Maiduguri, Yola and FCT) of the Federation guarded under heavy police armed patrol in December 2005.

Nonetheless, the present economic reform policy pursued by the Obansajo regime, which include liberalization, privatization, commercialization, deregulation, de-subsidisation is perceived as a teleguided western agenda meant to pauperize the citizens. Obviously, it appears in such form and shape as the president often make rhetoric remarks about his reform programmes, on National Television as "Nigerian will suffer for a while but there is light at the end of the tunnel" this provoked criticism and reactions from the civil societies on a large scale. Ihonvbere and Vaughan (1995) some times ago observed that popular democratic movements in Nigeria have for the first time questioned social contradictions within the country and raised some fundamentals questions about the uncertainties of globalization, the pre-eminence of Western powers and major multilateral institutions, and Nigeria's subordinate role within this new world order. The collective response derived impetus from economic and social contradictions of the post-colonial state.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has gone a long way on theorizing poverty by identifying causality and typology within the context of general perception and understanding of the concept. The therapeutic approaches to poverty in Nigeria appear to be more abstract than real as a result of insufficient pursuit and failure to aligned goals with empirical evidences on ground. This as the paper observed was responsible for other methods implore for survival by citizens, which put them in sharp diametrically opposed line with the state.

Consequently, based on the above premise the work makes the following recommendations.

- 1) Supporting agriculture, expanding labour intensive industries and investing heavily in basic social services is fundamental to elimination of poverty in Nigeria. This can be achieved with equity to create wider sources of non-oil sector participation in the economy.
- 2) Macroeconomic policies measures aimed at strengthening the foundation of self-sustained and balanced growth for medium and long term planning should be encouraged.
- 3) There should be continuity of structures and institutions of poverty eradication in the country. They should be reappraising from time to time in order not to outstay

its usefulness.

- 4) There should be independent institution which from time to time it will appraise and evaluate the policy implementation of National policy on poverty eradication.
- 5) Government should cautiously address the burning agitations in the country by intensifying its campaign against corruption through Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) to ensure equitable distribution of political power and resources.

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