

Interrogating the Cause(s) of Poverty in Southern Taraba State-Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty is prevalent in local communities in Southern Taraba state even though the zone is naturally endowed. Its impact on those communities differs; but some of the observable effects include deprivation, dependence and poor well-being which necessitated its mitigation. The objective of the study is to determine, if the culture of poverty theory standing alone or whether structural constraints also combine to explain the prevalence of poverty in southern Taraba state. A thorough assessment reveals that the people's lifestyle and other structural constraints combine to perpetuate the spread of poverty in the area. Consequently, this paper recommends the use of social re-orientation and education to change the people's psyche as the starting point for genuine poverty eradication effort. It should be followed with the provision of supportive infrastructure to reinforce the success of any chosen policy framework to mitigate the poverty challenge in the zone

Keywords: Culture, Structural Constraint, Human Security, Lifestyle, Poverty, and Social Change

INTRODUCTION

Globally, poverty is a serious developmental challenge. Poverty speaks of people whose attainments place them at the bottom of the socio-economic distribution scale. It reflects social and financial scarcities which cause people to live their lives without the essential liberty of actions and choices that some people around them have. It mirrors the inability of a person to meet his/her basic need necessary for enhanced wellbeing which keeps them emotionally and mentally unhappy. The poor are most vulnerable to sickness, natural disasters, institutional abuse and exploitation (Chikelu, 2016). Though its effects may differ from one society to another, but for the very poor, it is severe. It is their desire to be relieved of its harmful effect that the legitimate concern of the ordinary people is to seek security (Emuedo, 2012); human security in its real sense. All efforts to eliminate poverty so that vulnerable people in the society are freed from fear, want, to enjoy their rights and fully develop their human potentials (UNDP, 2005) has remained weakened.

As at 2013, the poverty rate in Nigeria was 47.6%. In 2016, the number of the poor rose to 53% (World Bank, 2016). Within the same period, Nigeria was ranked 54th on the human poverty index (HPI) - making it the 20th poorest country in the world. Nigeria occupied 40th position from below on human development index (HDI), these figures have not significantly improved for the better (Chikelu, 2016). In 2017, the number of people living below the \$1.90 a day benchmark was estimated to be 98million or 53.5% (MPO, 2019). In 2018, Nigeria's multidimensional poverty incidence was 51.4% with an intensity of 56.6% (UNDP & OPHI, 2019). Data from the Brookings Institute revealed that Nigeria is currently the world poverty capital with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty. Further finding suggests that out of the 98 million people living in extreme poverty there is the likelihood that six people will fall into extreme poverty every minute (Awojobi, 2019). It is predicted that of the 98million living in poverty 85 million Nigerians that are poor are at risk of spending their entire life below the poverty line (Zuhumnan, 2018; UN-DESA, 2019). Obviously, poverty is pervasive (Jega, 2007; IFRC, 2019).

In Nigeria, regional inequalities remain profound with huge disparities between the urban and rural areas as well as between the southern and northern geopolitical zones of the country (Olu, et. al., 2017). Poverty is highly manifest in urban slums and rural communities (Killick, 1981; Schaefer, 2006; Trussell and Mair, 2010; FAO, 2018). The average incidence of urban poverty is 60.2% (Nweke, 2012) while rural poverty is above 80.4% (Eko, et. al., 2013). The reported 2019 poverty statistics for national, urban and rural levels are: National: MPI-0.291, H-51.4%, A-56.6%, Vulnerable-16.8%, Severe Poverty-32.3%, Population Share-100.0%; Urban Areas: MPI-0.112, H-23.4%. A- 47.7%, Vulnerable-19.3%, Severe Poverty-8.9%, Population Share- 3.8% while Rural Areas: MPI-0.383 H-65.7%, A-58.2% Vulnerable-15.6%, Severe Poverty-44.2%, Population Share-6.2% (OPHI, 2019)

The poverty variation between the north and the south is because of the higher concentration of drivers of poverty reduction in the south (World Bank, 2016). The disparity between the urban and the rural areas is not unconnected with the outright neglect of the rural areas by the government. The disparity in poverty distribution between states within the same geopolitical zone also reflects these differences. The various federal and state governments have implemented numerous poverty alleviation programmes and projects with minimal success (Danaan, 2018). Some of those latter efforts triggered a slight decline in the rate of poverty in Nigeria in 2016, albeit, the number of poor persons remained unvaried with more vulnerable households (World Bank, 2016; Ab-Rahim & Mohammed 2019). Though Nigeria has achieved rapid economic growth, the extent to which poverty reduction has accompanied this growth remains uncertain (Olu, et. al., 2017). This signified that the growth was too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. Worst still, the weakness of the agriculture sector stymied the rise in incomes of the rural poor, while high food inflation adversely impacted the livelihoods of the urban poor (MPO, 2019). The implication is that growth in Nigeria has not been sufficient nor did it have the potential to help the poor break free from poverty (Zuhumnan, 2018).

Taraba state was created by the splitting of the defunct Gongola state into Adamawa and Taraba states on 27th August, 1991. The state lies within the tropical zone with an estimated land area of about 54,428 sq. km, the state lies roughly between latitudes 6°25'N and 9°30'N and between longitudes 9°30'E and 11°45'E (Emodi and Albert, 2016). Geographically, the state lies in the Middle-Belt region but was political placed in the northeast region. Generally, the North East geopolitical zone has the second highest poverty rate in the nation after the North West. She is bordered by Benue state to the south, Plateau and Gombe state to the west, Adamawa state to the north and the Republic of Cameroon to the east. It has an approximated population of 2.7 million people based on the 2006 national census. The state has seventeen (17) local government areas and it is constitutionally delineated into three senatorial zones of north, central and southern zones (The 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria). In Taraba State, smallholder farming is the major livelihood activities of about 75% of the population. The southern senatorial zone consists of five local government areas namely Wukari, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, and Donga. The major ethnic groups in the zone include the: Jukuns, Tivs, Kuteb, Chamba, and Fulani. The southern zone located within the lush savanna grassland and it is endowed with vast arable land, appreciable rain fall, rivers and waterways that support the production of variety of agricultural crops all year round. Paradoxically however, the zone is characterized by low level of technological development, low incomes and savings, small-scale farming that is labour intensive and family based, inadequate access to agricultural inputs, credit facilities, and markets, poor storage facilities, lack of improved production tools, (Patrick, 2013) and politically induced crises that have combined to undermine farmers output and income.

Taraba state poverty head count indicates that about 51.8% of the populations are poor (UNDP, 2016), national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was 0.448 in 2017 while the 2018 UNDP measure of the state-level are: MPI is 0.35, and the Human Development Index is 0.4286. This figure indicates that Taraba state HDI score is below the national average (UNDP, 2018). In 2019, Taraba state poverty statistics are MPI-0.335, H-64.8%, A-51.7%, Vulnerable-20.4%, Severe Poor-33.8%, Population Share-1.6%. On the whole, about 1.6 million people are presumed poor in Taraba state. Despite these poor statistics, the southern zone is a major contributor to the national food security agenda of the federal government because of its massive production of maize, soya-beans, ground nut, cow pea, sorghum, millet, yam, cassava, rice, ginger, smoked-fish and livestock, among others. The objective of this paper therefore is to examine the cause of poverty in the southern zone of Taraba state so that the explanatory value derived from the study will help the government to adopt the right poverty eradication measure to combat the problem appropriately. This study used documentary sources as well as observation methods and unstructured oral interview with some citizens in the zone.

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Poverty is not only a state of existence but also a process with many dimensions and complexities (Khan, 2000:3). Generally, poverty depicts a state where the poor lack the capacity for self-sustenance, the inability to influence both their environment and the process of governance in their society (Onyishi, 2009). It represents the lack of income and assets (Khan, 2000; WDR, 2001). Although income and assets are interrelated, it is the former that produces the latter and as such, what makes a person poor is not the lack of money but the lack of productive assets (Sen, 1981). The degree of returns on assets depends on access to market, behaviours of the market, the appropriate performance of the institutions of the state (WDR, 2001). The ability or inability to rightly manage these issue-areas so that the people can translate assets into income which empowers them to access basic necessities (Elizabeth, 2006) are at the root of the poverty question. Poverty, seen through the lens of entitlement is taken to be the various bundles of goods and services over which one has command, taking into cognizance the means by which such goods are acquired and the availability of the needed goods (Olatomide, 2012).

Poverty reinforces voicelessness and powerlessness for those that are poor, increase their vulnerability to adverse shocks, and undermine their ability to cope with them (WDR, 2001). Poverty is a consequence of inefficient use of common resources due to weak policy environment, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of access to technology or credit.

Similarly, it is a product of systemic exclusion of some groups from participating in economic activities and the democratic process (Olatomide, 2012).

There are three paradigms of exclusion:

1. Specialization paradigm-because of the individual's specialization that cannot be accommodated in the factor market,
2. Monopoly paradigm-occasioned by the various interest groups that establish control over the input of available resources, for example, on goods and labour markets and simultaneously foster solidarity within the respective interest groups; and
3. Solidarity paradigm-triggered because an individual has a troubled relationship with the community (Olatomide, 2012).

The identifiable character of these three paradigms of exclusion reflects in discrimination, market refusal or unenforceable rights and voluntary conduct (Anyanwu, 1997). These are responsible for the deliberate social delinks to the wider community (Scott and Marshall, 2005) for those excluded. Poverty is not unconnected with the structures of segregation embedded in a society productive setup (Addae-Korankye, 2014). It depicts a state of lack and deprivation. Inequalities leave some people far away from the social mainstream that the deprivations they experience push them below what is viewed as basic standards (UNECE, 2017). If these conditions are improperly managed it increases the degree of human vulnerability. Vulnerability is the risk of a person or a household falling below the poverty line, or for a person or household already below the threshold, of falling deeper into poverty (Development Initiative, 2016). These inducers of poverty undermine wellbeing (Khan, 2000) and reinforce deprivation.

Poverty can be structural (chronic) or transient. The former is entrenched and permanent socio-economic deprivation occasioned by factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skills for gainful employment, endemic socio-political and cultural factors and gender. While the latter is transitory/temporary and it is linked to natural and man-made disasters; it is however reversible but can become structural if it persists (Olatomide, 2012). Irrespective of whether poverty is structural or transient there is the possibility of moving out of it. Sadly in Nigeria's case the reality is that, the poor are expected to escape poverty at the age of 85.46 years on average. However, there is heterogeneity in the exit time, with the transient poor averaging 3–7 years below the poverty line and the chronically poor averaging 37 years or more. Given these exit times and life expectancy, the mean age of the poor at their expected time of escaping poverty exceed the average life expectancy, meaning some of the poor are not guaranteed to escape poverty in their remaining lifetime (Zuhumnan, 2018).

Poverty is operationalized and measured in terms of income or consumption poverty (UNECE, 2017). Hence, the conceptualization of poverty has revolved around its relativity and absoluteness (Mood and Jonson, 2016; Development Initiative, 2016) and it is from these two perspectives that the different approaches of measuring poverty emerged. Measure of poverty enables us show its decomposability by population, capture issue of social capital and how the poor themselves measure poverty (Olatomide, 2012). Measuring poverty is symbolic. First, it provides estimates of the magnitude of the problem, and also raises its visibility by keeping poor people on the policy agenda. Second, poverty measures are needed to identify poor people and pockets of poverty, and then to target appropriate policy interventions by providing policymakers with different perspectives on poverty with different empirical conclusions. Mores so, high quality poverty statistics are needed to monitor and evaluate outcomes—especially the effectiveness of policy, programming, and project interventions focusing on poor people (UNECE, 2017). There are chronicles of tools for measuring poverty which include: Living standard; Poverty lines; Objective Poverty Lines; The food-energy intake method; The cost-of-basic-needs method; The Food Component; Subjective Poverty Lines; the minimum income question; Head Count Ratio; The poverty gap/income shortfall; Composite poverty measures; The physical quality of life index; The human development index; Relative poverty measures; Composite measure approach (Olatomide, 2012). Some of these tools use monetary indicators while some adopt non-monetary (welfare) indicators. Each of these instruments has its strengths and weakness nevertheless they are essential for determining the degree of human poverty in the society (Thirwall, 2003). There is consensus that no single approach is sufficient for monitoring poverty at the national and regional levels. The results obtained from different approaches thus have to be communicated clearly, to allow correct interpretation of the different measures (UNECE, 2017).

Killick, (1981) posits that poverty should be defined in absolute qualitative ways that are relevant and valid for analysis and policy making in that given time and space (Uniamikogbo, 1997). It means that the poverty lines be defined on the basis of absolute needs (the cost of a minimum food basket plus an allowance for basic non-food basic needs), or on relative social standards that prevail in a given society at a given time (UNECE, 2017). Absolute poverty refers to a minimum level that the family should not be expected to live below (Schaefer, 2006) or levels below which families are unable to meet the necessity for subsistence (Scott and Marshall, 2005; Pass, et. al., 2005). Similarly, absolute poverty connotes the inability to possess the minimum level of income necessary for survival and physical efficiency (Killick, 1981) or the incapacity to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs (Todaro and Smith, 2005). Absolute poverty is susceptible to the influence of economic growth; it can alleviate poverty if such growth set off the mean income to rise on a sustainable basis and it is neutral to income distribution or reduce income inequality (Khan, 2000). Most rich countries use poverty lines defined as a certain percentage of national

median income to measure poverty (UNECE, 2017). Determining the right level of income necessary for physical efficiency raises makes it a complex matter (Killick, 1981). This because consumption is constrained by taste factor which makes programming of a cost-maximizing consumption line difficult; as taste constraints apply to both individual and the society at large (Englama and Bamidele, 1997). Specifically, there is because the influence of culture and conventions. Religious beliefs, superstitions, a preference for the familiar, a wish to conform to, and a desire for dignity, all affect the consumption standards of even the poorest people. It will be unhelpful to define minimum standards without taking these factors into account. But to do so is to take a large step away from an objective definition of poverty, for their effect cannot be quantified, their impacts vary from one social group to another, and they will change over time (Killick, 1981:113-114).

These are real issues which cannot be ignored and that the assumption of drawing a uniform poverty line for a given society distorts reality seems reasonably certain (Englama and Bamidele, 1997). This is particularly true: in times of crisis, changes in the percentage of people living under such poverty line may lead to counterintuitive results, because the median income to which the line relates may fall by more than the incomes of the poorest households. Counterintuitive results could also be observed in times of economic growth when the benefits of growth are distributed unequally towards the rich, in which case the higher median would show increase in the number of poor (UNECE, 2017).

Despite this problem, it has been suggested that the 'line' should be drawn based on basic needs below which people do not have the necessary minimum (Killick, 1981) essentials for efficient living. The income dimension is necessary because it is at the core of most poverty -related problems. Evidently, poverty may arise from changes in average in-come, or changes in the distributed income. Equitably distributed income increases the chance of the poor to have access to basic services that enhances wellbeing (Olatomide, 2012). The income 'defining line' however remains contestable as considerable researches have produced little or no agreement on where to draw the poverty line (Killick, 1981) that sets the boundary for determining the number of the poor (Scott and Marshall, 2005). More so, the poverty lines sometimes give a static story of how individuals and households fare compared to the (subjective) threshold of the poverty line below which people and households are counted as poor (Development Initiative, 2016). This yardstick is not dissimilar to that of the UNDP human development index which measures three areas of deprivation-life expectancy, education, and economic provision (Todaro and Smith, 2005). Even though this indicator is described as politically aimed to benchmark the progress on the war on poverty (Bradshaw, 2006), the poverty line is still attractive as it is not limited by national boundaries, it is independent of the national per capital income, and it measures poverty as anyone living on less than \$1 a day (Todaro and Smith, 2005).

Interestingly, poverty cannot be adequately measured by income or even by utility (Oduola, 1997) because what matters for wellbeing is not just the characteristics of commodities consumed, as in utility approach, but what use the consumer can and does make of the commodity (Todaro and Smith, 2005). Applying these indices is challenging, especially, in societies where very precise measure of poverty is hard to obtain and income gives an imprecise indication of access to the means of subsistence (Scott and Marshall, 2005) considering that most family incomes are used for other immaterial goods rather than those necessary for household subsistence. In Nigeria, using this criterion to determine the poor especially in typical rural communities where almost all financial transactions are conducted informally, outside the formal banking system, will only give an inaccurate figure of those that are actually poor. Despite this problem, the less than \$2 benchmark continues to gain currency globally.

Relative poverty nest on comparism between nations, or even between social groups within nations (Killick, 1981) and it derives its meaning from the existing differences in levels of material resource (Scott and Marshall, 2005), capacity, opportunity and endowment. Relative poverty is deprivation from living according to the norms in the society that is generally thought necessary based on shared values of human dignity. This is because of the poor's inability to furnish themselves with a socially acceptable minimum standard of living (Killick, 1981). It connotes a floating standard of deprivation for which people at the bottom of a society, whatever their lifestyles, are judged to be disadvantaged in comparison with the nation as a whole (Schaefer, 2006; Scott and Marshall, 2005). The advantage of measuring poverty relatively is that it reflects changing perceptions of acceptable minimum living standards (Oduola, 1997).

Conceiving poverty in relative terms raises four concerns which are: i) what is necessity to one is not uniformly a necessity to others (Bradshaw, 2006), ii) it breeds a feeling of hopelessness of ever removing poverty; iii) it obscures the qualitative difference between societies; and iv) it is subjective-difficult, if not impossible, to quantify bearing in mind that deprivation relative to the standards enjoyed by others and regarded as normal or typical in a particular time, may not count in other periods.

Whether defined in relative or absolute terms, the core issue is that poverty represents a systematic denial of access or insufficient access to: i) economic and financial means of production and property rights. ii) Service such as health, education, water, electricity. iii) Power and equal rights such as political, social gender issues and iv) adequate and sustainable environment (Onyeagbo and Eziebe, 2008). Stated otherwise, poverty summarily represents: i) the inability to satisfy basic needs of human life due to lack of income or property, ii) a lack of opportunity to generate income or property, and iii) a lack of means to change the situation (Repnick in Tella1997). While poverty may be seen as a static phenomenon, but analysis of the poor in general reveal that they

are not a static social class. The overall composition of the poor changes continually, because some individuals and families near the top the edge of poverty move above the poverty level after a year or two, while others slip below it (Schaefer, 2006).

The effect of poverty is felt by other segments of the society and its immediate causes vary over time and over the life-cycle (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Poverty breeds social disillusionment for the poor due to their inability to meet those needs within the behavioural constraints typical of the society of interest (Englama and Bamidele, 1997) or with respect to what the society objectives are and members' responsibilities toward the attainment of these objectives (Uniamikogbo, 1997). Studies have proven that historically-generated power inequalities (Elizabeth, 2006), individual deficiencies, cultural belief systems that support subcultures of poverty, economic, political and social distortions or discrimination, geographical disparities, cumulative and cyclical interdependencies are the causes of poverty (Bradshaw, 2006). In Nigeria, the rising poverty incidence has been blamed on heavy public debt, bad governance, corruption and poor government policy choices (Onyishi, 2009; Patrick, 2013). It is a dynamic (Henslin, 2004) construct associated with deprivation and insecurity which is expressed through violent means (Nweke, 2012) and it threatens human security. Poverty has multiplier effects and linkages such that lack of access to resources can affect health status, life expectancy, security, education and relationships (Danaan, 2018). It is for this reason that human security has become a fundamental part of the broader development concern (Elizabeth, 2006) integrally connected with enhancing human capabilities (Nweke, 2012) which guarantees individuals access to wealth creating goods thereby protecting the vital core of better wellbeing that makes life more humane. Human security has dual conceptual connotations: the first relates to protection from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression while the second is about empowering people to be able to decide and to do and to participate in all activities in their communities' daily life.

Apparently, not all human threat(s) automatically qualify or constitute human security problems...for a threat(s) to qualify or constitute human security problem, the threat(s) must be such that the adverse effects on the people is such that, if prompt and adequate measures are not taken to ameliorate or eliminate the threat(s), cultures and means of livelihood of the people concerned will be completely eliminated or drastically altered with dire consequences for the existence of the people (Emuedo, 2012:161).

Human security threats cover human physiological and psychological needs. Those needs energize and direct behaviours which strengthen the human will and tendency to persist to achieve one's goal in the face of dissonant and discouraging tunes (Bartol and Martin, 1998). Human security foster the attainment of those needs by prompting the government to enable the people to

develop and utilize their capacities thereby enhancing their access to and exercise control over existing commodities or are able to generate new ones with more equal exchange (Jega, 2007). This is urgently necessary given that among Nigeria's farmers around 88 percent are considered small family farms. They depend on a diverse range of crops, livestock and fishes. Despite their importance for the domestic economy however due to the sector's productivity limitations, more than 72 percent of Nigeria's smallholders live below the poverty line of USD 1.9 a day (FAO, 2018).

FINDING A THEORETICAL ALIGNMENT

In some quarters, the economic structures have been held liable for the existence of poverty and deprivation. This position has not gone without counterpunch from neo-liberals, who posit that capitalism in performing its aged-old economic task of managing demands, determining supplies and avoiding waste and losses with optimal efficiency (Kumar, 2012), has rewarded labour appropriately through a system of incentives for individual effort in relation to talent, skills, and motivations; and that those who end up in poverty lack the appropriate talents and skills (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Conversely, Kumar, (2012) contends that capitalism has perpetuated historical and hereditary hierarchies through the institution of private property, and those disadvantaged have to a large extent, remained disadvantaged within the system irrespective of how hard they work. What if the people's lifestyle and culture are dysfunctional should capitalism be held responsible for their poverty situation? While this question induces self-reflection, it pushes to the fore the theory of the culture of poverty as a likely explanatory foundation for this article.

The theory is rooted in the work of Oscar Lewis (1966). It posits that people are trapped in poverty because of dysfunctional behaviours and their willing attitudes to accept sets of beliefs, values, and skills that are socially generated but individually held (Bradshaw, 2006). The theory unveils an angle of lifestyle defined in terms of habits, attitudes, tastes, moral standards, economic level, etc, that constitutes the mode of living of an individual or group. If these are predicated on unhealthy choices, they account for poverty. Lifestyle is daily expressed behaviorally in the way people work, leisure, activities, attitudes, interest, opinion, values, and allocation of income. On the psychological level, lifestyle reflects a people's self-image or self-concept, the way they see themselves, and the way they perceive they are seen by others. To most, it is seen as a part of culture even though culture is powerfully subjective (Eme, 2014) yet, it is embraced by the younger generation such that with age they are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities (Bourgeois, 2001) to break-free from poverty cycle. The theory assumes that individuals are to be blamed for their poverty, primarily because, it is their attitude, beliefs, and behaviours that are at fault (Scott and Marshall,

2005). These three positions feed-fat a cultural milieu that promotes resignation, and fatalism.

This kind of setting undermines human security and sustainable development because it opposes the spirit of resilience and hard work which aspiration inspire people to strive for higher achievement and better wellbeing. This kind of culture accepts poverty as a 'design for living' (Halarambos and Holborn, 2008) with different characteristics at the individual, family and community levels. At the individual-level, the person is overwhelmed by a strong feeling of marginality, helplessness, dependency and inferiority, a strong present-time orientation with relatively little ability to differ gratification, and a sense of resignation. ii) At the family level-it is evidenced by-family disorder, dysfunctional homes, divorce, absence of birth control, and matrifocal families headed by women. At this level, the community lacks effective participation and integration to the major institutions of the larger society (Halarambos and Holborn, 2008). Such a culture is self-perpetuating and it is responsible for the spread of dependence (Killick, 1981:124) and poverty. The notion of culture implies that the behaviour of the poor is not only internalized but it is resistance to change (Halarambos and Holborn, 2008) until such a time that new values are accepted which can give rise to new belief system and sets of core assumptions (Eme, 2014). The poverty of culture theory can easily apply to people who are lazy and unemployed, ironically however, it is not uncommon for people to have work but they and their families to live in poverty (Killick, 1981). The factors that account for this are cupped in structural constraints; lack of skills and assets and poor family choices. The last demographic factor accentuates poverty, dependency, deprivation, lack and inequality with self-sustaining grip over the individual who has no special skill to offer, or other assets in times of depression but has a large family dependent upon him but his earning may simply be insufficient for their needs (Killick, 1981).

In this case, it is not the absence of employment that is the cause of poverty but the inability to imbibe beneficial values of self-discipline, and the failure to make the right choices that is to be blamed. Even in poverty endemic communities, it is not everyone that permits the psyche of poverty to keep them bond, most do what they can, not to be poor (Henslin, 2004) by adopting a lifestyle that upholds thrift, right choices, capability divestment, right investment and social responsibility (Bradshaw, 2005). It therefore means that overcoming poverty is largely a function of education, knowledge and deliberate action(s). It is not a product of history nor culture that negatively penetrate our consciousness, shaping our limited idea of life and our proper place in the society there by limiting the range of potential experiences that are beneficial in liberating the person. Taking our rightful place in the society requires changing mind-set, the way people think, make choices, and act to overcome those limitations, practices and lifestyles that tend toward poverty. This kind of mind-set is driven by the knowledge that one's niche in life is due to his/her own

efforts and the reason for success-or failure-lies solely with the self and not to anticipate that unpredictable forces will better one's lives (Henslin, 2004).

Since its introduction, the actual existence of a culture of poverty has been questioned (Halarambos and Holborn, 2008) even though through an examination of the extant literature one is hard pressed to find studies that explicitly attempt to test Lewis' generalizations for groups of the poor and the non-poor and examine traits from more than one aspect of Lewis' four basic dimensions of poverty culture in the same research study (Coward, et. al., 1973). While it seems difficult to find communities patterns that correspond to many of subcultural traits often associated with poverty in learned writing about the poor (Halarambos and Holborn, 2008:241), it should not overrule the fact that it exists. The culture of poverty has physical expression in almost all society. Its incidence is however, more evident in some than in others. But why do people accept such cultural content that facilitate poverty? It is simply due to the towering posture of cultural practices that permeate local communities.

Interrogating the Cause(s) of Poverty in Southern Taraba

In almost all traditional communities in Nigeria; rural people belong to an elaborate extended family network. Their needs are intricately intertwined with the generalized needs of members of the extended family (Okpaga, 2013). Specifically in these areas, family farming is the predominant form of agriculture in food production sector (FAO, 2014). This system of farming seems to be of communal settlement in which a household related by blood or by association settle as farming community (Emordi and Albert, 2016). Through this connectivity, individuals are shaped by their community, and communities are also shaped by their individual members (Bradshaw, 2006). This linkage has continued to influence significantly, the individuality in being and action that has generally increased to the degree that the social circle encompassing an individual expands the larger the group the greater the threat to individual freedom and the smaller the group the more likely to control the individual completely (Ritzer, 2008). Such network of relationship permits the acceptance of social practices in the name of culture unquestionably and in less ambivalent ways because of the peoples' presumed trust in and loyalty to the institutions of the society (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Interaction evolving from those roots reflects forces beyond the obvious and immediate as it points people towards certain modes of behaviour, feeling, and thought, intended to influence one's behaviours such that an individual's seemingly unique and personal preferences are affected by such history and culture (Ferrante, 1992); which can either tilt the individual towards a progressive or regressive lifestyle.

In southern Taraba state, there are a number of closely associated factors in the economy and society that combine to create and perpetuate rural poverty; most are internal to the society, but some are external (Khan, 2000). Research has

shown that demographic and social factors are in part responsible for the likelihood of people or households falling into poverty. They include:

- Household demographics-the size of the household (number of people), the age structure, the dependency ratio and the sex of the household head) and geographical location – rural or urban – are known key determinants of household poverty. Individual characteristics-a person's sex, age, employment status, level of educational attainment, property owned and socio-economic profession are key determinants of poverty (Development Initiative, 2016).

Admittedly, cultural practices are a part of the process and those cultural practices and beliefs impact on the individual choices such that the people openly engage in some unhealthy cultural practice as a matter of lifestyle because the practice is familiar and accepted (Tsoaledi and Takayindisa, 2014).

Characteristically, culture is a learned pattern of behaviours; it acts below conscious levels, and reflects in patterns of thoughts and perception. Contrary to popular belief, culture is not divinely derived but a conscious creation of human rationality which prescribes the complex of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, and customs (Scott and Marshall, 2005) that exhibits complex ambiguities (Eme, 2014) if examined critically. Available evidence seems to suggest that unhealthy behaviours tend to be more prevalent among low income groups (NAS, 2013). In this area, the peoples' culture strongly value hard work, have a sense of identity and independence (IDEA, 2001) but, their lifestyle aligns with a dominant culture that ascribes to 'Yakwa' (eat something), 'Makwa' (drink something), 'Kpakwa' (have sex) which is pursued vigorously. Unquestionably, these three items are part of human primary and secondary needs (Anyanwu, 1997) that cannot be ignored because they are vital for life but requires moderation in their use for them to be enjoyed and their utility to be appreciated.

The philosophy has also incited the people's desires for sex which has not only incited most male folks to gamble into polygamy but entangled in extra-marital sex with 'Angbyan-Kwase' or 'woman friend'. This illicit relationship outside marriage is generally accepted and practiced openly, so much so that legally married wives have accepted them as part of the family. This has its socio-economic implications which include co-wife jealousy, competition, and unequal distribution of household and emotional resources, acrimony between co-wives and children, and mental illness among women and children (Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi, 2006). The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS which has oscillated between 7.0% and 5.2% in the state is as a result of high sexual networking among the adolescents and young adults, extra-marital sex and concurrent sex partnerships, polygamy; early marriage, divorce and frequent re-marriages/wife inheritance. Amongst the population, most women are vulnerable through sex because of poverty (Orounye, 2011). Aside from problem of promiscuity which is responsible for the high prevalence rate of STDs and HIV

infections, illness and deaths in the zone, the large family associated with polygamy has its social and economic burden (Tsoaledi and Takayindadisa, 2014).

Polygamy is a state where men increase the number of their off-spring by marrying multiple wives. Polygamy is supported by some for reasons which include power, prestige, labour, and security (Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi, 2006). In southern Taraba state, feeding a large family is not a serious challenge but meeting the personal development needs of members of the family is grossly lacking (Black, et. al., 2005) with consequences for dysfunctional behaviours. One of such is the high dependency problem (Khan, 2000; Dadisa, 2014) for which household income is generally not enough to guarantee the education of the children. This position is supported by the quantity-quality model, which holds that large families have effect on the quality of the children as causal evidence suggest that children from large families have lower average educational levels (Black, et. al., 2005). Worst still, it is evident that children of polygamous families are likely to suffer from emotional, behavioural, and physical problems, negative self-concept, lower school achievement, and greater difficulty in social adjustment than children of monogamous marriages (Slonim-Nevo and Al-Krenawi, 2006; Al-Sharfi Pfeffer, and Miller, 2015; Pervez and Syeda, 2016). Equally too, there exist the sensitivity of the polygamy-child mortality correlation (Arthi and Fenske 2016).

In local communities in southern Taraba, the age brackets between 20 to 29 years are prone to risky behaviour like binge drinking (Dimelu, et. al., 2011; Uchendu, et. al., 2017). The people within these age brackets are the family farm workhorse; so, what affects their health affect farm productivity and the financial stands of the family. Typically, in these peasant agrarian communities burukutu consumption is taken as breakfast in the morning as a source of energy for daily farming activities especially among the male folk is a norm (Uchendu, et. al., 2017). For the majority of the local communities in this zone, Sunday is specifically devoted to alcohol intake throughout the whole day. Every Sunday starts with the consumption of local brew called 'Tashi' popularly referred to as Burukutu. At noon when the local brew is exhausted, they then shift to lager beer and in the evening to late night they turn to local brewed gin popularly referred to as 'ogogoro'. Apart from Sundays, any market day in and around these areas are presumed by locals to be unofficial public holidays in which most of the locals excuse themselves from farm work to go to the market not to trade but mainly to indulge in heavy alcohol consumption. Such drinking goes side by side with drumming, sing and dancing. In rural communities, traditional home made beverages are cheaper than factory made branded beverages, thus ensuring their continuing popularity, especially among poorer population groups (Dimelu, et. al., 2011). While the alcohol sale generates income for those that own the alcohol joints, it is on the other hand responsible for indebtedness given that those who patronize such joints can access alcohol on credit.

Poverty occasion the denial of pleasure (Addae-Korankye, 2014) but over indulgence in pleasure via heavy drinking is detrimental. A heavy drinker is one who consumes 5 or more liters of alcohol (Uchendu, et. al., 2017) daily. Burukutu is widely consumed as food (because it is heavy and thick) by the rural population of central Nigeria as well as poor urban centers due to its affordability compared to commercially brewed Beer (Uchendu, et. al., 2017). Since the younger members of the society have less life chance, they easily adopt the prevailing social lifestyle of their community without knowing the full implication of embracing those practices. Individuals or groups trapped in alcoholism and low income are confronted with social tension, antisocial behaviours, breakdown of moral standards, domestic violence, crime, forced migration (Nweke, 2012). Poor people are vulnerable even to small changes destabilizes their daily hand to mouth economy. Thus for those living under harsh circumstances, alcohol may seem an easy way out, but the social, economic, health and other problems associated with alcoholism are severe and additional burdens on poor people (Dimelu, et. al., 2011). The chronic consumption of burukutu alcoholic beverage and beer has impact on the liver biomarkers but burukutu seems to have severe effect. Studies have shown that chronic heavy drinking of alcohol is detrimental to bone health; and this effect is said to be striking in younger people (Uchendu, et. al., 2017). Illness arising from such behaviour accounts for productivity losses and reduction in income (Mullahy and Sindelar, 1999). Heavy drinking accounts for people's lack of response to normal monetary incentive to work hard (Archibong, 1997), save or invest.

Leisure facilitates socialization and social inclusion (Trussell and Mair, 2010) of people in communities. Obviously, profitable leisure should influence higher productivity; but over indulgence leisure rather continues to undermine productivity due to reduced man hour work that is lost on Monday or any day after a market day because of the after effect of binge drinking (Mullahy and Sindelar, 1999). It is evident that unplanned and uncontrolled leisure or pleasure account for waste of income by propelling people to engage in wasteful consumption (Mood and Jonsson, 2016). The absence of saving for investment poses immense obstacle not only for the rural farmers but for rural development (Echebiri, 1997). Specifically, it restricts participation in local decision making and in civic, social, and cultural life leading to downward spiral of social exclusion (Mood and Jonsson, 2016). These adverse behaviours can be reversed through education that aimed at behavioural adjustment.

In a society where illiteracy is well above 78% of the population, education is critical for liberation, empowerment and rural economic diversification by providing the channel for acquiring skills, attitudes, habits of thought and quality of character that enable the person to perform better (Acheme and Afemikhe, 1997) in different areas. It also improves people's immediate wellbeing by enhancing their capacity to take advantage of newly created

possibilities (WDR, 2001) and improved earnings. An uneducated or poorly educated rural farmer is less likely to know how to keep his family healthy and less able to find alternative employment. As a result, he/she is more vulnerable to external shocks, or failing market prices which generally undermine better wellbeing. The type of education that is envisaged here is that which empowers. Empowerment implies the power to be, to control one's own greed, avarice, and violence, to nurture, heal, care for others, to fight for justice, ethics, morality, to achieve inner growth leading to wisdom and compassion (Achime and Afemikhe, 1997).

This kind of education is essential for inspiring aspiration. Aspiration is defined in terms of the preferences maintained, the belief held, and possibly the constraints acknowledged by an individual about aspects of the future that stimulate forward looking behaviours which is lacking in most poor children (Pasquier-Doumer and Brandon, 2014). Aspiration fuels human desire for wealth creation, education, occupational and better social status. The inability of local poor children in these areas to aspire for high goals is tied to the absence of social interactions with skilled neighbours raised parental aspirations for their children (Pasquier-Doumer and Brandon, 2014). The absence of role model (Jordan, 2004) has given rural children very little incentive to raise their living standards and aspire for greater heights in life. This has effects on their life chances with consequence for poverty as poverty and the failure of aspirations are reciprocally linked in a self-sustaining trap (Pasquier-Doumer and Brandon, 2014).

In this zone, the quest for education and other life skills is not only hampered by lack of aspiration but also by the immediate need of the rural farming families for extra hands to work on the farms so as to increase production in order to provide for their immediate needs and future security. This is supposed to serve as security safety nets at old age (Sachs, et. al., 2004). This is driven by the lack of social security or welfare package coordinated by the state for the elderly in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons that have impelled the need for polygamy and large families among rural communities (Nwazonobi, 2013). This survival instinct inhibit rural parent from communicating to their children the value of education and of productive participation in society (Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, 2017) but rather promotes social values that pressure male and female children to marry as early as 15 years and before they reach the age of 25 years they already have two or more wives with numerous children to fend for. The implication of this are twofold- the first is that children from these backgrounds are deterred from acquiring relevant skills and education that can improve their livelihood (Addae-Korankye, 2014) while the second is associated with the systematic spread of ignorance which maintains poverty and poverty reinforces ignorance (Aku, et. al., 1997).

The need to build strong closely knitted community in order to pass-on traditional practices to future generations also weighs-down local community

children from aspiring to access education with obvious lack of skills, lower income and the likelihood of not escaping the grip of poverty in later life. It is for this reason that people should not be too quick to dismiss the role of value in explaining the educational outcome of the poor; as values specify the ends towards which behaviours is directed (Small, et. al., 2010). The desire to acquire education and other skills which guarantee better income and security from poverty among local communities is also stalled by the fact that personal investment in education entails huge cost and forgone earning, the long period required for training, the availability fewer labour market opportunities after graduation, and starting at very low income are all risk that most poor are not willing to take to forgo present gratification for a more secured future.

Education should not be limited to formal structures of learning alone; it also includes informal arrangements that allow young people to acquire other technical skills that are valuable for generating income. Those technical and none technical trainings include welding, tailoring, automobile repairs, plumbing, masonry, carpentry among others. In Nigeria, opportunities abound mostly in the cities for young people who are willing to spare the time and effort to learn from a master for a specified number of years in order to master it. This will mean leaving their villages to the cities to live and learn such trades mostly under harsh conditions. While it is meant to prepare them for better future and life-chances, it on the other hand, means reduced labour hands for the rural families. And the inability to transfer their traditional practices to those children who might not be willing to come back to their local communities upon successfully completion of training; due to the lack supporting infrastructure to assist them to function well, and the search for better life in the cities where their skills are needed and better income derived from the use of such skills. It should be stated that not until recently, especially in the 1990s, due to the decline in agriculture output and displacement arising from conflicts, the people within these corridors saw education as a kind of punishment and as such, only orphans were sent to school, not to be educated but to die. It is not surprising that compared to other north eastern states, the zone has high rate of illiteracy of about 64.5% according to the 1991 population census result. As at 2011, the total school enrolment in the state was estimated to be 55, 158 (Orounye, 2014).

Agricultural products, because of their bulky and perishable nature, require specialized marketing arrangements that not only reduce transaction costs but are as efficient as possible to encourage production (Atungwu, et. al, 2016). It is in this regard that the role of the market is no less important in affecting the condition of the poor in the rural areas (Khan, 2000:1). For a market to be efficient it requires that transaction costs for movement of goods must be minimal and transfer of ownership must be fast and free from any encumbrance (Atungwu, et. al, 2016). The ability of middlemen to influence market conditions to their advantage has allowed them the space to easily exploit rural farmers in the zone. The short life-cycle of agricultural produce after harvest and the equally

challenging problem of lack of storage facilities to store harvested crops particularly grains for longer period, have given middlemen ample advantage over local farmers who are desperate to sell-off their produces at suppressed prices before they spoil. Low level access to market and high transactional cost are serious constraints for expanding agricultural earning (Handley, 2009).

In this area, the existing functional tarred roads (even then they are not well maintained) are the only ones connecting the local government headquarter to the main federal trunk road that leads to the state capital. All others roads are un-tarred which does not support easy mobility of local farmers produce to the market on time especially during the raining seasons. Given the condition of rural roads and the equally dilapidated nature of trucks that ply the routes, those in the hinterland are worst-off, given that they unable transport their produce to the market for better exchange hence have to rely on middlemen who come to those localities to buy those produce at give-away prices. Enhanced transportation infrastructure will significantly enable smallholders to participate in local or other markets and to overcome the distance of their farm to the nearest road of 14km on average (FAO, 2019).

In southern Taraba state, the rural farmers' incomes are low because of low productivity, low crop yield and declining soil fertility (Vosanka, et. al., 2019). One significant bane of higher agricultural production is the use of physical labour rather than machines by smallholder farmers. The use of such production techniques only perpetuates poverty and hinders development (FAO, 2014). Hence, if the poor farmers are given access to necessary inputs such as tractors, fertilizers, pesticides to expand the productivity of the land, the level of income will increase and poverty will reduce. For now, the cost of acquiring those basic farming consumables are astronomically high and out of reach of most local farmers. Because they cannot afford the capital needed to obtain those inputs to expand production itself remains largely subsistence (Aku, et. al., 1997). From 1960 to 1970, the government promoted the aggressive adoption and use of conventional production systems with emphasis on the increased use of synthetic agrochemicals, including pesticides and mineral fertilizers to maximize agricultural output for self-sufficiency in food production with consequence for accelerated agricultural production (Atungwu, et. al, 2016; Danaan, 2018; Oluseyi, 2019). On a general note, those interventions failed largely because of the sole emphasis on increasing farm production without the corresponding market and value-adding activities' support. In 2012 the federal government implemented the E-wallet programme and its aim is to subsidize the cost of major agricultural inputs like fertilizer and seeds (Abubakar, et. al., 2018). In Taraba state about 40,000 farmers were registered and were able to obtain two bags of discounted fertilizer from the private sector (Vosanka, et. al., 2019). To be specific, the impact of this initiative was insignificant because most of the smallholders need between eight to ten bags instead of the two bags of fertilizers given to the beneficiaries who cultivated between one or two hectares of land.

A related problem is that of the seasonal nature of production due to absence of infrastructures for irrigational farming which enables all year-round farming. On average in Nigeria, as low 2% of crop land is irrigated, resulting in a high reliance on rain-fed agriculture. The meaning of this is that agricultural production is not only seasonal, that is from May to October of each year but output has been low given rural farmers inability to access farm inputs timely. In the dry season the farmers are rendered redundant and occupationally immobile due to lack of employable skills in other sectors. This means that they have to depend on the little that has been produced. This situation is worst for landless agricultural labourers' who rely on employment opportunities (Aku, et. al., 1997) from farming. This situation is worsened by the fact that the agricultural sector is being exploited through taxation by government officials without the corresponding provision of the necessary farming implements that rural farmers need to add value and enhance productivity necessary for generating better income (Olamtomide, 2012). This situation coupled with poor pricing of their produce by middlemen presupposes they have little income that does not support savings or investment to increase farm size.

The preponderance of corruption in government in the late 1980s which led to the neglect of the agricultural sector ensured that access to agricultural inputs by many rural farmers declined and it significantly affected farm output. Currently, it is estimated that only 16% of all small family farms have access to motorized equipment and only 6% of the households benefit from agricultural extension services in form of knowledge and information transfer (FAO, 2018). The massive corruption in the system is reinforcing the deprivation of citizens' right and welfare by the government (Page, 2018). It is also responsible for the diminishing of small scale indigenous enterprises (Gyakari, 2014). It is the major cause of poverty due to the diversions of public funds into private pockets which should have been used to provide basic infrastructure that support local enterprise, employment generation, local agricultural production, improved income and better living conditions. Corruption remains predominant because decisions that affect the poor are often made by informal network of influential people in collaboration with those who have formal position in government according to their highly-personalized logic (Handley, et. al., 2009). Their position permits them to easily divert monies meant to improve the wellbeing of the people (Ani, et. al., 2018). The very fact that the people are not known for violent protest against the government to demand for better governance has occasioned their neglect and deprivation by previous administration that pays more attention to urban areas that protest the loudest (IDEA, 2001).

This depressing picture invokes the desirability of improving the lot of rural dwellers not just because they are deprived of basic public goods and services, but much is expected from the rural farmers to feed the nation (Patrick, 2013). The irony is that past and present governments have been unable to provide rural infrastructure needed to boost agricultural production and provide a

better lease of life to them (Patrick, 2013). Specifically, the absence of social services like health care and the presence of poor road network is a major hindrance to productivity (Echebiri, 1997). Conspicuously absent for the rural people in this corridor is electricity supply, in the local government headquarters where electricity infrastructure is provided the supply is highly epileptic and mostly unavailable for days at a stretch. This has undermined the growth of other trades that are dependent on stable electricity supply such as hair-dressing, barbing saloon, ice block-making, among others.

It has been acknowledged that investing in the health of the poor is economically efficient and a political acceptable strategy for reducing poverty and alleviating its consequences as access to it raises their productivity (Chefe, 1997) capacity. It is disheartening to observe that the whole of Wukari town which is the headquarters of the old native authority from which Ibi and Takum were severed has only one state running hospital that is ill-equipped, poorly manned and the few personnel are inadequately remunerated and not well motivate to work. From Wukari town to Akomkya and the surrounding border settlement near Bali local government, covering a distance of over 70 kilometers, has only two primary healthcare centers; one is located in Gidan-Idi and the other in Gindin-Doruwa. It is apposite to note that staffs of those local health care personnel are not only poorly paid, but, sometimes, have to stay for months without salaries. As such, some of the staff have resorted to search for alternative means of survival which means neglecting the primary duty of providing primary health care. The obvious impact is reflected in the neglect of their primary duty of delivering primary health care to the people.

The dismal situation is not different for those communities located between Wukari town and the headquarter of Ibi local government, a distance of over 50 kilometers, who have no functional health care center to care for the primary health needs of the residences. The story is not different for the people living between Wukari and Akwana covering a distance of about 60 kilometers. The effect of inadequate provision of health facilities is that the people have to depend on self-designated ill-trained and inexperienced local chemists for meeting the health needs of the people for which relieve is never in sight. The deprived health situation has been worsened by the prevalence of fake drugs used by those quack practitioners to treat locals. The situation described above is same for the rural people living in Donga, Ussa, and Takum local government areas. This has driven the people to depend on unreliable traditional medicine men for their health challenges thereby compounding the health condition of the people with increase in avoidable deaths. Increasing productivity from farming on the farm which is labour intensive is a function of sound health. But considering the gross absence of health service in the area, it will not be presumptuous to state that productivity, better income and good living is significantly impaired. For this situation to be changed, and for the poor to have the basic means of acquiring access to education and health services, to enable them to respond to those

opportunities (Aku et al., 1997) demands providing the right socio-economic infrastructures by the government.

Another associated concern is the persistence of ethnic and political conflicts. Whether political instability, civil strife, communal conflicts or insurgency, they are all obviously bad for the economy and their effect on the rural poor are often the most debilitating (Khan, 2000; IPCR 2017) not only for the people's current living condition but also their ability to escape poverty (WDR, 2001) because of the vulnerability, losses and forced migration that these situations generated. Over time, those communities have witnessed the erosion of peaceful inter group relationship due to relentless conflicts (IDEA, 2001). Since 2009, the northeast has been plagued by armed conflict characterized by extreme violence against the population. The conflict has caused widespread displacement and left millions of people in need of food, health services, shelter, water and sanitation. As at 2018, about 1.9 million persons were displaced and 431, 840 houses were destroyed due to military operations occasioned by insurgency in Yobe, Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi and Taraba State (IFRC, 2019). Though, Taraba is ranked among Nigeria's agriculturally rich States, it is unfortunately plagued by the menace of herdsmen killings and maiming of hundreds of farmers. The local economy has been affected in part by a resurgence of terrorist groups (Budgit, 2018) who have caused disruption in agricultural production. In most extreme cases, disturbances in production has led to severe food insecurity since poor farming households have low purchasing power to compensate for loss of income or own production (Heumesser and Kray, 2019).

It is believed that one of the causes of persistent conflict is the struggle for land (Nwokeoma, 2014). The reduced availability of fertile land due to environmental changes (IDEA, 2001) occasion by climate change (Akume and Ankama, 2019) means that farming the lands without the use of fertilizers to strengthen its fertility will result in low agricultural output. Thus, the quest for new fertile land to farm is presumed to be responsible for clashes among farming communities on the one hand and between pastoralist and famers on the other hand. Crises have been fueled by the outright denial by some Jukun oligarchy in Wukari that the Tivs are not indigenes of Wukari local government area and as such, have excluded them from participating in the political activity in the LG along with the denial of rights essential for better wellbeing (Ruth, 2016). Educational and asset-based barriers to participation in society, along with rising levels of economic inequality, mean that poverty is not only an experience of material deprivation, but of relative deprivation, and with it a sense of social exclusion. Research in social psychology indicates that being deprived of a sense of control (self-efficacy) triggers anxious efforts to regain control (Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, 2017). Thus, the struggle by the excluded group to be included and to participate fully in the socio-economic and political activities of the local government has been the cause of unrest in the zone (Akume and Ankama, 2019).

The struggle to control the traditional kingship of Takum between the Kutebs and the Jukuns has remained a sour point of conflict. The apparent lack of trust by the people in the state established institutions for managing conflicts fairly (due to corruption and extortion by public officials) have resulted in the people taking laws into their hands by resorting to violence. While these reasons may in part account for tension between farming communities they are not wholly responsible for the persistent conflicts in the zone. In reality, inter elite political squabbles have raised religion and ethnicity to political prominence in an attempt to gain political and economic advantage (IDEA, 2001). The unhealthy competition for political dominance between different ethnic groups in order to have access to resources which are concentrated at the federal government, state and local government headquarters remains a serious threat to political stability in the area (Aku, et. al., 1997).

Rural development has been distorted in meaning and content in Nigeria. It has been perceived as a strategy mainly related to agricultural productivity and primarily tied to economic growth. The thinking here is that increased agricultural productivity by itself could solve the problems of rural communities and their inhabitants (Oluseyi, 2018). The focus on this dimension to the total neglect of providing the necessary supporting infrastructures only undermined the goal of improving rural productivity and output. For now, the conspicuous neglect of the rural people, the poor income they earn from agricultural production due to market distortions coupled with the impact of corruption that is reflected in the poor state of infrastructure in rural areas negate the principles of good governance which stipulate that the right governability of a modern state depends on achieving results that uplift the people irrespective of their place of residency. It should be borne in mind that the rural poor are highly differentiated and they depend on the three conduits of market, infrastructure and transfers to help the rural economy to grow and the rural poor to benefit from this growth. Accepted that these three do not work in the same way for each group of the rural poor but the joint synergetic effect of these factors can far exceed the sum of their separate effects (Khan, 2000). Ironically however, the inability to provide the right infrastructures that will boost rural development which in turn, will spark improvement in the general wellbeing of the population is a travesty of development (Nwokeoma, 2014). The by-product of this failure is that it has continued to exacerbate the rate of rural poverty such that the most glaring and severe indicators are manifested there more than in any other segment of the society (Jega, 2007).

Pursuing Strategic Social Change: What Path to Follow?

Rural farmers are increasingly exposed to climate variability and climate change-induced natural hazards—mainly droughts, floods, cyclones, and livestock and crop pests and diseases; as well as to market risks such as crop price volatility and shocks; all these forces combine to inflame rural poverty and undermine

wellbeing (Heumesser and Kray, 2019). The search for the set or sets of strategies to curb poverty has thrown up diverse propositions for solving it.

According to Obadan, (1997) economic growth is a necessary condition for poverty reduction, as poverty cannot be reduced if economic growth does not occur (Khan, 2000). Growth in itself is not sufficient for reducing poverty if such growth is not labour-intensive to generate income opportunities for the poor (Aku, et. al., 1997) rural communities, considering that the major resource base is land and agriculture (Nwokeoma, 2014). So improving the quality and use of land is the starting point for attaining the goal of agricultural mass production and national food security and by extension incite growth. Although, the link between growth and poverty reduction is valid but the actual impact of growth on poverty reduction remains controversial because of measurement problems.

Evidently, technology is the answer and not labour-inexpensive inspite of its abundant (Agbu, 1997). Though, technology is vital for improved production and poverty reduction it is however evident that those countries that are most successful in attacking, poverty have encouraged a pattern of growth that makes efficient use of labour. This option gives the poor farmers the opportunity to use their most abundant asset-labour (WDR, 2001). In Taraba, rural farmers are faced with avalanche of problem, one of which is funding. In this zone, most poor farmers are engage in agriculture with almost no modern farming technologies used to aid productivity. Nationally, it is estimated that only 16 percent of all small family farms have access to motorized equipment and only 6 percent of the households benefit from agricultural extension services in form of knowledge and information transfer. High expenses for agricultural inputs, estimated at almost 20 % of the value of production, hinder productivity even further (FAO, 2018). Providing the funds to access those modern production tools will prove vital but the issue however is how to facilitate access to those technologies in a sustainable manner. Even in the face of broad-based growth which for now, in Nigeria, is not significant, for rural farmers to access those technologies, such growth has to be accompanied by government action in specific areas (Okojie, 1997), especially funding and technical support.

Funding assistance is non-negotiable for the rural poor farmer bearing in mind that they have little or no access at all to the formal financial system (Dike, 1997). Providing such assistance to the poor is a key lever to poverty alleviation (Umoh and Itoro, 1997) given that the rural poor undiversified farming households also struggle to recover aftershocks as they have limited savings, production assets, and limited opportunities for generating off-farm income (Heumesser and Kray 2019). Hence, the need for government sincere intervention in specific areas is heightened by the fact that private banks do not have the proclivity to provide such loan facilities to the rural poor for fear of them defaulting on repayment. In this part of the world, the very poor are not considered to be creditworthy because they do not have sufficient savings and so

lending to the poor is not believed to be cost effective (Odejide, 1997). Since, rural farmers have low income and savings, worst still; they have limited access to institutional borrowing means that the potential to expand their productive capacities and escape the poverty trap is rather limited (Dike, 1997).

The rural poor in these communities have long acknowledged the challenge of funding. Hence, have in their own small way, organized to form thrift cooperative societies. But considering their poor income and the equally real problem of repayment defaults by some members, the little weekly monetary contributions of members is grossly insufficient to be used to grant soft loans to members to enable them to purchase some of those agricultural technologies that will increase productivity and enhance better income earning capacity for this group. The past federal and state governments were not unaware of the problem of access to funds by the rural poor. To resolve this problem, the government in 1986 established the directorate for food, roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) and the People's Bank, among others and in recent times the promotion of community banks. Beside the stipulated function of the former which was to provide infrastructure for rural communities, these institutions were strengthened to provide greater and improved assistance to rural farmers. Such help was intended to stimulate higher agricultural productivity and to bring about a balance rural development and poverty alleviation (Ekong, 1997). At the state level, the government among others, provided tractor hire services for allocation to rural farmers, also included on the menu were farm officers who were to go from one rural farming village to another to teach rural farmer how to use new crop varieties and help them solve other farm challenges in order to increase their farm yield. Over the years, the tractor hiring services became non-existent because most of the machinery was stolen by 'armchair farming bureaucrats' while the second programme gradually died due to non-availability of funds to finance the programme.

In 2015 the federal government introduced the Anchor Borrower Scheme (ABS). The loan was targeted at smallholder farmers engaged in the production of identified commodities across the country (Rufia, 2018). Under the scheme, small farm holders are entitled to loans ranging between ₦150,000 and ₦250,000 to assist them in procuring necessary agricultural inputs such as seedlings, fertilizers, pesticides to help agricultural outputs and productivity (Nwangwu, 2019). Through this policy the government believed that its economic diversification drive to achieve a strong and viable agricultural base with more integrated value chains, enhanced food security, fewer imports and higher productivity (Coker, 2018). Despite its importance, evaluative study of the implementation of the ABP indicated close political associates of the political class had hijacked and displaced real farmers' initially registered under the ABS programme. The twisting was possible because credible monitoring and evaluation framework are lacking hence, cases of elite capture is prevalent (Coker, 2018). Hence, the ABS be subjected to periodic review so as to provide

more platforms for poverty alleviation for poor rural farming communities (Badejo and Adekeye, 2018). Specifically, the condition that only those that have farm holding of 1 to 5 hectares are to be enrolled under the ABS programme ultimately excluded the core poor and vulnerable groups including the women whose farm holding is less than 1 hectare. Another observed issue with the ABS is that the distribution of agro-input is haphazard as some farmers were given fertilizers while others were denied (Badejo and Adekeye, 2018). Some of the financial institutions that were part of the part of the disbursing the funds to farmers frustrate the effort and even later withdrew their participation in the programme because it was not profitable to them.

As reasonable and plausible as these institutional policies were, they failed to achieve their goal because they were swallowed-up by corruption which overshadowed them from inception. Basically, these and other poverty alleviation measures implemented by the various regimes showed very little sustainable technological content (Agbu, 1997) to inspire the poor to desire to obtain them. Agricultural growth through technological change is one of the most important ways to reduce rural poverty. But its impact on the rural poor depends on the initial conditions, the structure of institutions, and incentives in place (Khan, 2000). In Nigeria, even where those institutions were established, they were absolutely weak; the incentive is poor and unevenly distributed. Even though such technologies exist, however, since they are not locally produced or domesticated, they are difficult to maintain cheaply. More so, since those MNCs who control production determine the direction of development which includes the determination of what goes into the acquisition, adaptation and development, what resources go into research and development (Agbu, 1997) has it imposing challenge. The changing pattern of those technologies also presupposes that even where by sheer twist of fortune nature permit the poor to access such technologies, the cost of maintaining them to achieve maximum returns is not guaranteed.

Looking to the government for transfers to help the people to access those technologies at a subsidized rate is a hopeless dream because the government is also constrained for agreeing to adopt SAP in 1986. As it now stands, with international pressure on the government to fully implement SAP regime coiled around the deepening of market which dictates that the she withdraws fully from subsidies, only mean that the financial and technical support needed by the rural poor from her to access those relevant technologies essential for enhancing agricultural productivity, is significantly compromised. SAP regime had far more deeper implications than just the removal of subsidies, under the term, the government funding for essential infrastructure and services in many African countries has been sharply reduced and Nigeria is not an exception (White, 2006). While the state government still basks at uplifting the rural poor, it is advisable that any current initiative to change the condition of the rural poor must entail but not limited to enhancing employment opportunities for

the poor, investment in human capital with the intent to empower them, increase their access to productive assets, raising the returns on assets, and supplementing resources with transfers and safety nets (Uniamikogbo, 1997) as well as the broad provision of social services, and security (WDR, 2001).

The need for a comprehensive strategy that addresses both individual and community issues relating to poverty is informed by the fact that poverty is a very complex social problem with many variants and different roots, all of which have validity depending on the situation (Bradshaw, 2006). This informed the need for the government to work not only to improve income but to tackle the many other social and political factors that contribute to poverty. These are very difficult to separate and are therefore thought as bundles of factors that result in social exclusion (NEEDS, 2004). It then signifies that what the poor need is not just little money to change those material conditions of the people past poverty alleviation measures only aimed to temporary alleviate without any mechanisms for sustainability (Agbu, 1997). This effort failed to inspire fundamental social changes in the conditions under which they live and work (Archibong, 1997).

Delivering long poverty alleviation solution requires asset mapping to identify the strength the community has and to use them to solve problems in the most effective way rather than to spend time identifying problems for which there may not be adequate answers (Archibong, 1997). Another action area is that efforts should be focused on eliminating all forms of exclusion that: i) prevent people from exercising their rights, ii) a state of social or normative isolation from the wider society due to anomie or problem of social integration, and iii) a situation of extreme marginalization (Scott and Marshall, 2005). Exclusion blocks people from accessing opportunities and disempower them.

This and other efforts require long term investment. But on the immediate short term, effort to change the conditions of the rural poor should begin with social re-orientation that will lead to the acceptance of cultural and behavioural changes that are progressive. This is essential because if one thinks of the culture of poverty as a dysfunctional system of belief and knowledge, the approach will be to replace that culture with a more functional culture that supports rather than undermine productive work (Bradshaw, 2006). It is to strengthen this process and facilitate change that development communication is germane. This kind of change is possible if the people are made aware of those problems before they think of solving them; made aware of some of the facilities before they can use and demand for them (Okpoko, 2010). Considering the people's low literacy level short-lived quick fix advocacy jingles will not do the job of convincing them to change in desired ways easily. It has to be on long term, following the functionalist equilibrium model of change which involves differentiation, adaptive upgrading, inclusion, and value generalization (Schaefer, 2006) deemed socially desirable (Sott and Marshall, 2005). This process is tied to a twofold development action which are: (i) implementing poverty reduction

strategy that is sustainable and that will spur growth and functioning of strong, autonomous organization that represent the people who are poor. (ii) Inspiring them to collaborate and form other social structures within which they exert themselves and pursue their interest (Jega, 2007) peacefully and orderly.

These processes have to be crafted around a rural development approach that supports the provision of physical structures that are supportive of this objective(s) (Patrick, 2013). The starting point then should be on providing rural farmers with appropriate information relating to market, price, credit facilities, and the right sources of inputs. This is vital because Information is becoming a major input in agriculture, whilst, knowledge and information plays a central role for farmers to respond to opportunities that could improve their agricultural productivity. Essentially, agricultural information is a key component in improving small-scale agricultural production and linking increased production to remunerative markets, thus leading to improved rural livelihoods, food security and national economics (Mbagwu, et. al., 2018). It should include engaging the people in planning at their local levels (Okpaga, 2013) in ways that inspire trust as they organize around those structures. Social re-orientation should draw attention to the need for change, the opportunities inviting change, the methods and means to change; and if possible their aspiration for themselves and their communities must be raised (Okpoko, 2010).

Entrenched and sustained social re-orientation and conscientization will not only help to erase the prevailing apathy, low self-esteem and fatalistic resignation in local communities (Jega, 2007), but will slowly and steadily eradicate discriminations and divisions that bolster social exclusion and poverty. It should be acknowledged that the culture of a society is difficult to influence (Graaf, 2007), as such, it should be expected that change may not be easily accepted by local communities considering that some of these behaviours are crawled around cultural factors that is historical and it is those cultural factors that shape resistance often in the pretext of protecting property values or vested interests (Schaefer, 2006). This is particularly true for non-material culture or adaptive culture such as ideas, norms, communications, and social organization. Given this challenge, patience is needed in the change process because of the constraint resulting from 'culture lag' (Scott and Marshall, 2005), that is, the period when nonmaterial culture is still struggling to adapt to new material conditions (Schaefer, 2006) in order not to offset but facilitate social stability.

CONCLUSION

The prevailing arguments in learned literatures are divided as to the real causes of prevalent poverty in the society. While, some direct the cause of the poverty at the individual as claimed by the culture of poverty theory, although the explanatory space provided by them opens a vital window of insight for policy makers on how best to tackle the issue of rural poverty from the bottom-up with

utmost efficiency it is not all encompassing to wholly explain for all the reasons for poverty in southern Taraba state. It is evident that the risk, vulnerability, low productive capacity, inequality, exclusion, limited opportunities and the shocks generated by conflicts and other noted factors have triggered serious decline in consumption of the rural people, bringing it down below subsistence levels and exerting a detrimental effect (Kanayo, et. al., 2011) on living condition. These issues explain why the relational and existential condition of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the area is very poor (IDEA, 2001). Sifting through the literature, it is evident that the people's lifestyle is a major factor for poverty, poverty is also symptomatic of the absence of investment in people and the society, as such, structural constraints combine with the culture of poverty to reinforce the poverty situation in the zone.

It is for this reason that this paper recommends that the starting point in remediating the poverty problem should begin with implementing policies that take into account the diversity of conditions in which farmers operate, if they are to nudge them towards resilience and nutritional diversity. Government's policy action should aim at creating an enabling environment for agriculture where diversification and specialization are complementary, and where resilience and nutrition are considered alongside greater economic efficiency (Heumesser and Kray 2019). Thus, reducing rural will mean providing and guaranteeing adequate level of strategically targeted investment in agriculture, that will upgrade rural infrastructure, boost productivity, and increase competitiveness of the farm output, and mitigate corruption. Another step is to engage in social re-orientation via social marketing to induce the people to imbibe the values of thrift, self-restraint, entrepreneurship, education, while at the same time, removing those obstacles that encourage behaviours that covertly or overtly hamper creativity and productivity. Creating such consciousness in the people will improve their self-esteem essential for promoting community interdependence, social mobilization, and the building of social capital that will facilitate the creation of local entrepreneurial communities. This will also strengthen the spirit of collaboration among ethnically diverse rural communities to reverse the spiral of decent into poverty as they become resilient in meeting and overcoming local challenges in the future. This has cascading impact on the people's life chance necessary for boosting better living conditions and favourable life experiences that meet development expectations.

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