

## **World Bank Assisted Community and Social Development Programme as Poverty Reduction Strategy: A Study of Rural Communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** This study interrogates the World Bank Assisted Community and Social Development programme as poverty Reduction strategy in Ebonyi State, Nigeria through inter-textuality that is rooted on critical discourse analysis. The principal objective of the study was to ascertain the extent to which Community and Social Development programme championed by the World Bank has reduced poverty in the rural communities of Ebonyi State. To achieve the objective of the study, the researchers employed ex-post-facto design and content analytical method in the analysis of data drawn from secondary sources, while the study was anchored on Progressive Utilization and Social-Political and Economic theories. Findings of the study revealed among other things that EB-CSDA (World Bank Assisted) has to a large extent, impacted positively on the socio-economic lives of the rural population living below poverty level in the state through numerous projects executed. The position of this study is that a lot still need to be done in the areas of enlightenment and sensitization campaign with a view to educating the rural populace on the philosophies of the subsequent World Bank Assisted programmes since EB-CSDA has winded up. This is because perennial problem of poverty has not been adequately addressed.

**Key words:** World Bank • Community • Rural Communities • Social Development • Poverty Reduction • Strategy • Ebonyi State and Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years particularly at the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, many Nigerians were told that poverty alleviation shall be the hallmark of government. Actually, the government embarked on poverty reduction programmes such as: Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Ebonyi State Community and Poverty Reduction Agency (EBCPRA) and later, Ebonyi State Community and Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA), to mention but a few.

The government in realizing the serial nature of poverty in the land conceptualized and implemented the foregoing and other various targeted poverty reduction measures as palliatives and in most cases, in conflict with some development partners such as: UNDP, World Bank, USAID, and DFID, in an effort to analyze and proffer solutions to the menace.

What puzzles one is that over the years that these various attempts were made or implemented by different governments in the country, the level of poverty is still

very high that Nigeria is still described by [1], as one of the twenty (20) most impoverished nations in the world. Ebonyi state is not different as the state is rated the third poorest state in Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), [2].

While it cannot be denied that Nigeria over the years has made varied attempts to stem the tide of poverty and has been described according to World Bank through the Nigeria Economic Report released in July 2014, as having one of the world's highest economic growth rate averaging 7.4%, wide-spread poverty has continued to rear its ugly head. Unfortunately too, the alarming rate of poverty in various communities across Ebonyi state today has become a major problem eating deep into the fabric of the state and an ill wind that blows no one any good. Poverty in Ebonyi State today, is a phenomenon that is better described than defined because of its amoebic nature.

In the words of [3] "poverty is an economic state of being and not as a result of any character deficiency. Being poor means lacking a means of subsistence that will

be capable of providing what could be considered as a secure and good standard of living. [4], argued that most of the forces that cause poverty are social since according to him, they reflect the system of resources allocation that are made by societies and as such, can be reserved.

Before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in late 1960's, the area known as Ebonyi State today, produced yams, cassavas, coco yams and rice so abundant that they were exported outside the shores of Igbo land. In fact, the yam bans served as tourist centres, an evidence of doggedness and craftsmanship of the people. Unarguably and regrettably, Ebonyi people in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria which though heterogeneous, are well integrated socially, culturally and economically, have suffered the worst social degradation as a result of the alarming poverty in the area. This brings to fore, a lot of contradictions as to why the people which were hitherto described as "the food basket of the eastern and southern Nigeria" as a result of their being the leading producer of rice, yam, cassava and other arable crops, can be as poor that many families cannot afford their 3 square meals daily.

Although evidences have shown that there is no nation or community that is absolutely free from poverty, the main difference is probably, the intensity and prevalence of this malaise. In line with that, [5], views poverty as:

A state where an individual or community is not able to cater adequately for his/its basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations; lacks gainful employment, skills; assets and self esteem and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation; and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her/its welfare to the limits of his/her/its capabilities.

Available evidences, statistics and indeed, the trend of events have shown that Nigeria, as a nation, and its component states especially, Ebonyi, is seriously caught in the web of abject poverty.

A close look at the level of socio-economic and physical infrastructural development in Ebonyi state today show that, most communities in the area are seriously hit by lower development, apparently due to their social, political and academic backgrounds which are equivalent to that of deprivation and degradation. For instance, it is a common sight to see women and young people between the ages of 18 and 47 years (from different

communities across the state) with their hoes, cutlasses, shovels and tubs waiting along some major roads and streets within Abakaliki urban centre including, Spera in Deo Junction Along Abakaliki – Ogoja Express Road, Kpiri-Kpiri Opposite Abakaliki Township Stadium, Ogoja Road by Vanco Function, Water Works Road Opposite Mr. Bigg's, Rice Mile by Onuebonyi junction to mention but a few, line up in their numbers patiently waiting for their unsuspecting customers to hire them to make ends meet.

They collect as little as N500 and N1000 as daily pay for their services such as farm/compound clearing, bricklaying, digging or even construction works, with some attendant horror experiences and intimidation by their hirers most of whom are residents in the state but citizens of other states. Most of these jobbers have families of eight (8) or more with other vulnerable dependent relatives to cater for.

However, suffice it to say that successive governments in Nigeria have tried to address the issue of poverty through the enunciation of various poverty reduction or alleviation programmes with less than proportionate results. Feelers have pointed out that, the reasons for these abysmal performances are not farfetched as most of the programmes were not demand and community-driven and as such, have no bearing on the lives of the rural dwellers, funds meant for such programmes were usually hijacked upon release by greedy and wealthy individuals, most of the completed projects are greeted with lack of maintenance culture but the worst is the non-sustainability of such programmes [6].

Nevertheless, available statistics in the subject of poverty and poverty reduction agencies in Nigeria indicate that considerable gap existed between the target objective of alleviating, eradicating or reducing poverty and the actual achievements of the various institutions. The performances of the past poverty reduction institutions seem to suggest that the efforts of various governments in the past to reduce poverty in the country were grossly inadequate or lacked focus.

At present, the poor people's perception of formal poverty reduction institutions is largely that of ineffectiveness and irrelevance to their lives as they contributed little or nothing in their strategies to survive and rarely help them to escape poverty, this is despite the huge sums of naira sunk into these programmes.

Having subscribed to the United Nations inspired Millennium Development Goals, one of whose objectives is eradicating poverty by 2015, Nigeria in 2001 embraced the process of outlining its own Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP). One of these strategies is the

United Nations sponsored Community and Social Development Programme. In Nigeria, the programme was in two phases, the phase one of the covered such states as Abia, Cross River, Ekiti, Kebbi, Kogi, and Yobe. On the other hand, the phase two of the programme covered such states as; Ebonyi, Edo, Gombe, Kwara, Osun and Zamfara. In each of these states where the programme took place, an agency known and addressed as the State's Community and Social Development Agency was usually established to carry out the underlying task of poverty reduction.

In Ebonyi state, the Agency was established in 2008. It is known and addressed as the Ebonyi State Community and Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA). Upon arrival, EB-CSDA was welcomed with a big sigh of relief to the poverty stricken people of Ebonyi State. The extent to which this strategy has helped to reduce the high-rate of poverty in Ebonyi is a source of worry.

The Federal Office of Statistics has reported that the poverty level in Ebonyi state has risen from 52.6% in 1996 to 59.75% in 2014. According to the report, the indication for social sector development is unfavourable for Ebonyi state in general and worse for the poor in the state [2].

Poverty manifests in worsening degrees and severity in Ebonyi communities despite the vast natural resources and economic potentials the areas are endowed with [7]. A direct effect of poverty in the hinterland is seen in the virtual collapse of basic infrastructure and lack of or near absence of basic social amenities such as electricity, portable water, good roads, adequate health services delivery, educational institutions, to mention but a few.

Specifically, observation reveals that the development policies formulated by past regimes since the creation of the state in 1996 have not completely elicited the desired impact on the people with regards to poverty reduction. Thus, such policies did little to foster a strong sense of integration and commitment to overcome the numerous and multi-faceted poverty problems of the state [7]. More so, it is a truism that past poverty reduction programmes adopted non-participatory approach during project planning, formulation and implementation. More so, they were neither demand-driven nor well-targeted, seriously lacked origination from the people, and were often, not sustained.

While the Ebonyi State Government through media announcements and publications has claimed to have released the sum of N87.1 million as one year counterpart fund as at 2014 to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to boost rice production as a way of reducing hunger, reports are still agog on the poverty level in the state. According to the [8], Ebonyi State is one

of the ten (10) states in Nigeria with 73.6 percent poverty rate. Continuing, the report indicate that Ebonyi State indigenes constitute the highest number of hawkers, house helps and other demeaning jobs across the states in the country.

Perhaps, it may be against these backgrounds that Ebonyi state was selected by the Federal Ministry of Finance and the National Planning Commission as one of the six pilot states in Nigeria for the phase II UNDP – Sponsored Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), thus, the existence of the Ebonyi State Community and Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA) as the body in charge of the reduction of poverty in the state. The extent to which the presence of this agency has helped in reducing poverty in Ebonyi State communities, necessitate this research.

**Aims and Objectives of the Agency:** Section 6 paragraphs (a-g) of the (EB-CSDA World Bank Assisted and Related Matters Law 2009), outline the aims and objectives of the agency to include among others;

- Improve the living conditions of the people in communities and address their demands not satisfied by current society programme in Ebonyi State.
- Empower rural communities so that they can play a role in reducing poverty in their communities.
- Provide small, labour intensive economic and social infrastructures and amenities to communities in the state.
- Help to saturate high poverty communities with a comprehensive array of social services that are capable of mitigating the effects of poverty.

According to the [9], the functions of the agency include:

- Support policies and utilize effective strategies for the effective implementation of projects in benefiting communities, directed at poverty reduction in Ebonyi state.
- Disburse funds provided to it by donors in support of poverty reduction to the benefiting communities of the state among others.

**Theoretical Framework/Methodology:** This study adopted the Progressive Utilization Theory (PROUT), propounded by an Indian philosopher, [10] and Social-Political and Economic Theory by [11] cited in [12], as its frameworks of analysis. PROUT which is a collection of socio-economic and political ideas, according to a description by Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill, envisages a decentralized, community-based world economy of self-

sufficiency for the poor; economic democracy; small business; and limits on the accumulation of wealth. This theory as a model of socio-economic development, no doubt, attempts to holistically balance the needs for societies to create wealth and grow with the requirements for distribution. PROUT is a socialist theory that recognizes all material goods as common property and seeks the rational and equitable distribution of the property to maximize the physical, social and economic development of the people.

Most of the so called poverty reduction projects or programmes have always been superimposed by the national or state government to the people irrespective of their felt needs, and so, PROUT is relevant for this study in that it advocates for participatory, community-based poverty reduction programmes that must be a reflection of the people's felt needs.

Socio-Political and Economic Theory on the other hand, has its origin in the work of Adam Smith's inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations (1776) cited in [12]. According to Adam Smith and other exponents of this theory, the theory investigates how observed differences in status, esteem, geography and institutions affect the economic, social and political life of a given society or people. The theory draws heavily from economics, political science, law, history and sociology to explain the socio-economic and political behaviour in a given geography [12].

This theory if properly applied can lead to the solution of issues such as unending poverty in Ebonyi state rural communities, environmental degradation and rural-urban migration. Therefore, this theory becomes very relevant as it revealed that EB-CSDA requires both political will and sound economy to achieve their broad objective. This is because, once poverty dominates a particular people, it creates a cumulative set of problems that requires varieties of strategies to address. The lack of employment for instance, may lead to lack of consumption and spending due to inadequate incomes and to inadequate savings. Such people or group may not meaningfully invest and which can lead to deteriorating self confidence, weak motivation and depression.

Ex-post-Facto research design was employed in the study. The *raison d'eta* for ex-post-facto design is essentially pigeonholed on the fact that it is a systematic empirical study in which the independent variables cannot in any way be manipulated or controlled simply because the situation of the study has already taken place. The establishment of EB-CSDA was made in 2009 and eventually wended up in 2015. Data was sourced from secondary sources basically from books, journals, World

Bank Publications, internet materials, seminar papers, periodicals as well as other documents related to Community and Social Development and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria. Content analytical approach was employed in the analysis generated accordingly.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the course of our investigation, we discovered the following as thus discussed.

- Most of the efforts/programmes towards poverty reduction are infrastructurally based, that is, building on social infrastructure rather than human capacity building. This on the long run does not reduce poverty.
- Most of the projects executed by EB-CSDA are neither demand driven nor a reflection of the peoples' felt need, rather, most of them were completed to enable the operating stakeholders retire their expected gains in cash.
- There has been reoccurring habit of poor maintenance culture among the people which more often than, do not allow the completed projects to last beyond its completion year.
- Wrong location which are always as a result of the undue interference from both community and government stakeholders.
- We discovered that poverty reduction programmes/projects are poorly monitored and are most often, not sustained and in most cases, projects to be executed are channeled to the community with the highest bargaining powers as most communities find it very difficult to pay their counterpart funds.
- Most of the projects/programmes are abandoned at the expiration of any democratic dispensation leading to waste of public funds.

The implication of the foregoing is that poverty reduction efforts in Ebonyi State will continue to be a mirage as the matter is far from being tackled.

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

The reduction of poverty seems to be the most difficult challenge facing Nigeria as a country and Ebonyi state in particular. This is because the average majority of the population is considered poor. Although a lot of rural development and poverty reduction strategies/programmes/activities which differed in nomenclature and organizational procedure including EB-CSDA have been implemented in Nigeria and Ebonyi State

in particular, evidences have shown that the number of those living in poverty has continued to be on the increase.

Poverty has become so intractable in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular that even the government is confused on what should be done. A visit to some rural communities in Ebonyi State shows that there are near absence of human capital development as most of their basic primary and secondary schools are in deplorable states: No teachers, dilapidated classrooms and no equipments for practicals. Also, the people still live in mosquito prone thatch houses, no portable drinking water and no electricity or no motor able roads, and there is no sign either from the government or individuals that the situation will soon be checked. It is therefore timely that the following recommendations should not be flushed under the carpet.

- There should be a new direction of development plan in the form of rural-urban integration. Thus the government can start by relocating ministries to different rural communities, at least one ministry in each of the 13 local government areas and civil servants in each ministry must live within the localities or have their appointment terminated. This will immediately reduce rural-urban migration.
- Government should embark on aggressive rural infrastructural development including electricity, good road networks and schools. This will reinvigorate the entrepreneurship spirit among the populace.
- Vandalizers of government infrastructure should be sentenced without an option of fine.
- Ebonyi State through agricultural and other commercial and community banks should provide a micro-credit loan scheme that should be accessible by the residents of the State. This can help reduce the high incidences of job waiters at various locations in the capital city. This should be treated with a true national spirit to redeem the state of the poverty image.
- Poverty reduction projects or programmes must adopt a holistic approach including:
  - \* Productive employment in the rural areas
  - \* Capacity building/skill development
  - \* Creation of a viable incentive structures
  - \* Participatory approach (people-centred)
  - \* At least, basic education, portable drinking water and adequate sanitation.

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