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Social Inclusion: A Poverty Reduction Approach



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Abstract

This study, social inclusion: a poverty reduction approach, using descriptive research method, examines the relationship between social exclusion, social inclusion and poverty. It is amongst the findings of this study that social exclusion is not just a major cause of poverty but a key factor in poverty severity. However, social inclusion, as a means to ending poverty in Nigeria, can be achieved through creation of employment opportunities, access to education and skills acquisition as well as minimizing social exclusion.

Keywords: Poverty, Reduction, Social, Inclusion, and Exclusion.

Introduction

Poverty has remained a threat and challenge to humanity over the years. It is multidimensional with manifestations in every realm of human existence, hence poverty is a major obstacle to economic development in Nigeria which needs to be resolved to ensure economic growth and development (Danaan, 2018). Majority of

Nigerians are living in extreme poverty and are excluded from full participation in political, social and economic activities in the society despite the level of economic growth and transition of the country to democracy since 1999 (Kelly, 2019). Based on the aforementioned, Nigeria was declared the poverty headquarters of the world in June 2018 with an estimated 86.9 million (44.2%) of her population living in extreme poverty which increased to around 93.7 million (47.7%) in 2019 (Dauda, 2019). Scholars have suggested social inclusion as an antidote to poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth and development (Strobel & Forget, 2015).

Social inclusion according to Dugarova (2015) is multispectral in nature and has many questions to answer. These questions range from whom to include, what to include, how to include and on what terms to include them in the decision making and participation in the society. According to Kelly (2019), social inclusion is the process of improving the terms and opportunities for individuals and groups especially the disadvantaged and the vulnerable to participate and take part in decision making and key activities in the society. Further, the author stated that social inclusion is achieved through programs that aim at including excluded groups in the employment market and education as well as building the capacity of government and community based organizations to lobby for excluded groups and help them participate in decision making in the society. Social inclusion is the basis for mutual success that symbolizes the process of improving abilities, opportunities and dignity of the disadvantaged through access to markets, services and societal participation (World Bank, 2013). United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] (2010) submits that social inclusion is the endpoint of overcoming social exclusion which is characterized by involuntary exclusion of individuals and groups from society's political, economic and social practices which prevent their full participation in the society.

Various governments in the Nigeria have adopted different strategies like Operation Feed the Nation in 1978, the Green Revolution in 1982, the Directorate of Foods Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFFRI), the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP), the National Poverty Eradication Program, (NAPEP) to ensure social inclusion of all her citizens especially the vulnerable in order to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development (Mustapha, 2014). Other programs include; the Subsidy Reinvestment Program (SURE-P), the Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN), the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), Community Based Vocational Rehabilitation (CBVR), Education Sector Support Program in Nigeria (ESSPIN), Coalitions for Change (C4C), State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI), Mobilization for Change (M4C) (Kelly, 2019 & Meagher, 2015). These programs were structured to train informal workers in agriculture and ICT, train and employ persons with disabilities, train more female teachers and increase the school enrollment of girl child, easy access to credit, and inclusion of the vulnerable and excluded in the participation of social, economic and political activities in the society.

Despite all these programs put in place by the government to tackle poverty, greater percentage of Nigerian citizens are still living in extreme poverty and social exclusion. This is a paradox given that the poverty level in the country contradicts all these efforts by the government and the country's abundant wealth of human and natural resources (Ewubare & Okpani, 2018). This situation is expected to be worsened in coming years due to the recent lockdown in the country following the corona virus pandemic which has crippled economic activities not just in Nigeria but world over. As a result the Nigerian economy requires an all-inclusive restructuring in order to be set on the path of economic growth and sustainable development. Hence, the need to look into the use of social inclusion as a means of reducing the poverty level in Nigeria. This study is in line with Dugarova (2015) who argues that development can only be sustainable if it is inclusive.

Statement of the Problem

It is no longer news that Nigeria has overtaken India as the poverty capital of the world (Ifijeh, 2018). Almost half of Nigerian population lives below the poverty line. This is more worrisome as Nigeria an oil rich country and Africa's biggest economy by GDP. The paradox of this situation is that Nigeria is a wealthy nation with poor citizens.

The high level of poverty in the country is not unconnected with high level of unemployment and inflation in the country, poorly implemented poverty alleviation programs, social exclusion, amongst other factors. This situation must be reversed if Nigeria must tread the path of sustainable development.

This paper is therefore an examination of social inclusion as a means of ending poverty in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to

1. Determine the relationship between social exclusion and poverty.
2. Identify how social inclusion can help in poverty reduction.
3. Assess how social inclusion can be achieved in Nigeria.
4. Access how social inclusion can be measured.

Literature Review

The Concepts of Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Social Inclusion

Social exclusion is a process in which an individual or a group of people in a community or society are not allowed full participation in the activities of the community or society especially as it concerns them. An individual or a group of people is said to be socially excluded from a society if they cannot be involved in the activities of the community where they live despite their willingness to participate in such activities. According to Francis (2000) cited in Berafe (2017), social exclusion is a practice by which people are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, employment status, health status, race, caste, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, migrant status or where they live. According to Berafe (2017) social exclusion arises as a result of residents of a particular community being denied some social rights or all of it in the community due to reasons beyond their control. It can be likened to discrimination against the less privileged that occurs in public institutions such as health services, education, legal systems and also social institutions. De Haan (1999) sees social exclusion as a process through which people or a group is excluded wholly or in part from participating fully in the society where they live. The concept of social exclusion is multi-dimensional and it takes place at every level of the society where people can be excluded from economic, political and social activities by landlords, political groups, labour unions, etc at the same time (De Haan, 1999). According to Percy-Smith (2000) social exclusion is societal deprivation of residents of a community. The individuals excluded are helpless since the circumstance is beyond their control and this is perpetual and two sided as it is passed from society to individual and individual back to society (Mohanty, 2004).

Social exclusion affects the society negatively as it perpetuates poverty and underdevelopment in an economy through segregation and division. It puts a knife into what holds a people together leading to unhealthy competition, violent conflicts, poor public cooperation, and unequal opportunity especially in the area of education, employment and health care services (Le Grand, 2003). Singh and Chudasama (2020) and Berafe (2017) are of the opinion that social exclusion is a key factor for poverty severity which results to a vicious circle of poverty that runs from generation to generation which trickles down to the masses in form of extreme hunger, absolute poverty, deprivation of capabilities and poor standard of living.

Poverty on the other hand connotes lack and the inability of an individual or household to acquire the basic needs of life which makes it impossible or difficult for them to live the life they want. Mustapha (2014) agreed with this while describing poverty as a situation in which an individual is incapable as a result of economic, social, political and psychological incapacitation, to provide himself and his household the simplest basic requirements of life. Berafe (2017) described poverty as being much more than inadequate income, it includes a sense of exhaustion, powerlessness and also being excluded from decision making. According to World Bank (2019), a person is considered poor if his or her income level falls below some minimum level (\$1.90 a day) necessary to meet basic needs. However, one can be poor without being socially excluded while one can be socially excluded without being poor. As stated by Berafe (2017) one can be socially excluded even with income above poverty line while another with income below poverty line is not excluded socially. In line with this argument, Duffy (1995) cited in Berafe (2017) states that social exclusion is a more encompassing concept than poverty; it encompasses low material means, and inability for effective participation in social, economic, cultural and political life. Tilly (2007) and Sivonen (2017) therefore agree that since social exclusion leads to poverty, then eliminating its usual effects by adopting policy actions targeted at social inclusion of the disadvantaged groups can end poverty.

The effects of social exclusion in a society can be eliminated if policy measures targeted at social inclusion is implemented. Social inclusion is the end of social exclusion. It is all about becoming a part of a society. A social inclusive society is a society for all. It is a society where the rights and responsibilities of every individual or resident are realized, and individuals play active roles in matters affecting them. Social inclusion is a process that enables citizens to participate in decision making activities on matters that affect their livelihood, it ensures reduction in inequality, eliminates exclusion in any form, reduces discrimination, and promotes social justice and

unity (Dugarova, 2015). According to ThistlePraxis (2018) social inclusion is a process in which those that are at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources required for a full participation in societal activities and in the process, employment and adequate income are treated as key factors to tackling social exclusion, poverty and inequality.

Social inclusion is about being a member of a society that is supportive and protective of good health and well-being of its members. A social inclusive society is a society where all members have a feeling of being valued, differences are respected and basic needs are provided so that members can live in dignity (Likeminds.org). It is a community where every member is provided with an equal opportunity for resources and power sharing, where members meet their needs and reach out to others to help them meet their own needs too. People participate in a society through markets (labour, land and housing), services (electricity, health, education, water) and spaces (political, cultural, physical, social) and an improvement in the terms of people's participation in a society means an enhancement in their ability, dignity, and opportunity.

Methodology

The descriptive statistical design method was adopted by the researchers for this study. The data used for the study is secondary data obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Nigerian Living Standard Survey (NLSS) report 2019.

Nigerian Poverty Profile

Nigeria is a major economy in West Africa, with an estimated population of about 202 million people (World Bank, 2019). It is a multi-ethnic country with different cultures. It is endowed with natural resources and Africa's largest exporter of crude oil. Unfortunately, the Nigerian economic growth is too low to lift the almost half of its population out of poverty.

The agricultural sector, which was a major source of government revenue before the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity, has been abandoned by the government. Being the major occupation of the rural poor and still at the subsistence level has not been able to impact on the living standard of the rural poor. On the other hand, high cost of food in the urban centers has also worsened the living standard of the urban poor.

With a large and increasing population of youth, a labour force that is fast growing, there exists a high level of unemployment and underemployment in the country. World Bank (2019) put the unemployment rate at 23% in 2018 and underemployment at 20% in the same year. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), the Northern region of the country has the highest incidence of poverty. This is not unconnected with the high level of instability and insecurity in the region with its resultant displacement of people.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its Nigeria Living Standard Survey (NLSS) report for 2019 classified 40.1% of Nigerians, an estimated 82.9 million Nigerians, as poor. According to the report, the Northern states are the top poorest states with 9 out of the 10 poorest states coming from the North. Of the 9 poorest Northern states, Sokoto State is ranked first closely followed by Taraba and Jigawa States on second and third positions, respectively.

The report also indicates that 52.1% of the poor population resides in the rural areas while 18.04% are urban dwellers.

Table 1 below shows the breakdown of the poverty headcount rate by states in Nigeria. The table shows Lagos State as the state with the lowest incidence of poverty followed by Delta, Osun, Ogun, and Oyo States in that order while the states with the highest incidence of poverty are Sokoto, Taraba, Jigawa and Ebonyi States. It should be noted that Borno State is excluded from the survey; this could be as a result of high level of insecurity in the state due to the activities of bandits.

Table 1: Poverty Headcount Rate in Nigeria by States 2019

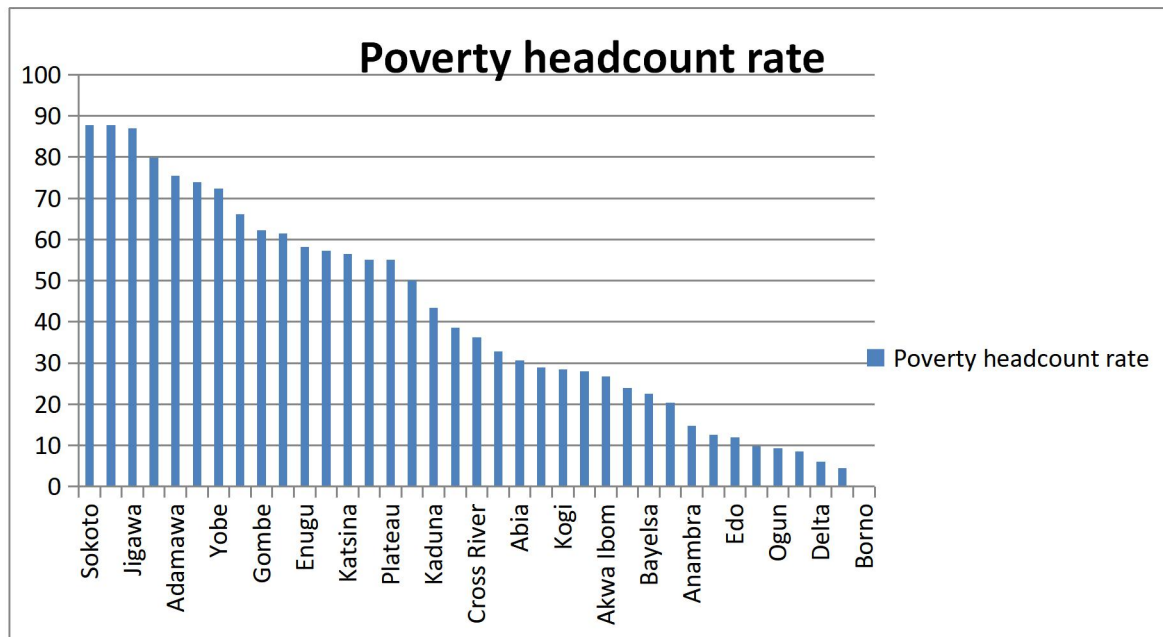
STATE	POVERTY HEADCOUNT RATE
Abia	30.67
Adamawa	75.41
Akwa Ibom	26.82
Anambra	14.78
Bauchi	61.53
Bayelsa	22.61
Benue	32.90
Borno	-

Cross River	36.29
Delta	6.02
Ebonyi	79.76
Edo	11.99
Ekiti	28.04
Enugu	58.13
Gombe	62.31
Imo	28.86
Jigawa	87.02
Kaduna	43.48
Kano	55.08
Katsina	56.42
Kebbi	50.17
Kogi	28.51
Kwara	20.35
Lagos	4.50
Nasarawa	57.30
Niger	66.11
Ogun	9.32
Ondo	12.52
Osun	8.52
Oyo	9.83
Plateau	55.05
Rivers	23.91
Sokoto	87.73
Taraba	87.72
Yobe	72.34
Zamfara	73.98
FCT	38.66

Source: Nigerian Living Standards Survey, 2018-2019.

Note: Borno State is excluded from the survey.

Figure 1: Poverty headcount rate in Nigeria (percentage of population)



Source: Authors' compilation using data from Nigeria Bureau of Statistics NLSS report 2019.

Adopting Social Inclusion As a Strategy for Poverty Reduction

Social exclusion as discussed above is a key factor in poverty severity, therefore adopting policies that can enhance social inclusion can help in poverty reduction. Some of these measures are discussed below:

- **Social welfare:** The social inclusion of the vulnerable is a key factor for poverty reduction and enhancing shared prosperity. It is therefore important that government, especially in less developed countries, should prioritize social welfare in order to resolve the issue of poverty in their respective countries. Social welfare provides protective environments for the well-being of the people by tackling poverty, enhancing healthy development, reducing discrimination and inequality, promoting social justice, and providing the services required to care for the vulnerable.

- **Access to employment opportunities to all citizens**

Creation of employment opportunities and ensuring its accessibility to the disadvantaged is another social inclusive strategy to ending poverty. Employment is the best way out of poverty for the teeming population of working age in most developing countries. Access to work should be provided to those that can work while support is given to those who cannot work; this support could come from the government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and or wealthy individuals. Besides, child poverty should be given serious attention; this is in order to eradicate the vicious circle of poverty where poverty is handed down from one generation to another. Child relative income poverty is the proportion or number of children who live in households below the income poverty line in each year (ThistlePraxis, 2018).

- **Access to quality education and educational materials**

Access to quality education will increase total factor productivity hence creation of more employment opportunities and will also reduce poverty. Most often, people with disabilities have lower access to education than people without disability which could lead to stigmatization and discrimination. It is therefore important that government provides opportunities for skill development for the disadvantaged to enable them to acquire the right skills to compete for jobs. Access to a good job and adequate income are major factors in tackling poverty, inequality and social exclusion (Dugarova, 2015).

- **Access to technology**

Development and access to technology is another means of lifting the disadvantaged and vulnerable out of poverty. Innovation and entrepreneurial spirit can further contribute to lifting the vulnerable out of poverty and exclusion. According to World Bank (2017), African technology startups raised funding in excess of USD 129 million in 2016, with the number of startups securing funding up by 16.8% compared to the previous year. More so, access to micro-finance while encouraging entrepreneurial spirit, reduces vulnerability and also supports activities that generate income. The effectiveness of micro-finance requires that the beneficiaries are trained on skill development and are supported technologically.

- **Provision and access to quality health care**

Improvement and access to health care will increase the life expectancy and reduce the mortality rate of the vulnerable and disadvantaged. This will also increase their opportunity to earn a good living and lift them out of poverty. Access to maternal health will also reduce the incidence of maternal death due to child birth. Women will also have a voice in decision making as it concerns their affairs due to social inclusion.

How Social Inclusion Can be Achieved in Nigeria

The measures to achieving social inclusion in Nigeria include identifying the poor. This is a key factor in ending social exclusion and achieving social inclusion. In order to identify the poor, reliable data is required so that resources can be targeted to the poor. Besides, identifying the poor could help ensure that resources targeted to them get to them. This has become necessary as most often anti-poverty programs do not get to the poorest households in most developing countries (Abdullahi, 2019). A case at hand is the on-going distribution of palliative to the poor in Nigeria due to the corona virus pandemic induced lockdown which has sparked so much controversy in the country.

Another measure to achieve social inclusion in Nigeria is to promote creation and accessibility of employment opportunities. An unemployed person is like an outcaste in the society where he lives. No one calls or visits him; it is as if no one cares about his welfare. Unemployment is not only about income but also about self-worth and social networks. Social exclusion is clearly more than income poverty (Saith, 2001). Creating employment opportunities and making it accessible to the vulnerable is a means of ending social exclusion and poverty. Employment is a key

factor to social inclusion and poverty reduction. Employment provides people with the resources they need to meet their basic needs, and also social contacts. It makes life meaningful and purposeful. People are said to be excluded not only because they are unemployed at the moment but also because their prospects of getting employed in future is limited (Atkinson, 1998 cited in Saith, 2001). This could be as a result of lack of access to quality education or poor education. In order to end social exclusion in Nigeria, jobs should not only be created but it should also be made accessible to the vulnerable in the society.

Access to quality education can also help disadvantaged individuals to fully participate in the community where they reside. Hence, to achieve social inclusion, the Nigerian government should promote access to education and skills acquisition. This will not only help the vulnerable to acquire the right skills to compete for jobs, it will also help to bring attitudinal changes which will bring an end to stigmatization and discrimination thereby encouraging social inclusion and poverty reduction.

Moreover, since agriculture and other farm activities are the major sources of income to rural dwellers in Nigeria, promoting active participation of the rural dwellers in these activities can offer a lead way to economic growth. This is possible through the emergence of value-chain induced micro-enterprises and market systems which increase productivity and profitability. This is necessary for rural poor income generation and social inclusive poverty reduction.

Besides, in order to improve the living standard of the vulnerable and the poor, and to reduce poverty in Nigeria, a transparent, accountable and strong participatory government is a necessity. This is also a precondition for receiving financial aid, which enhances productivity, from international donors.

How To Measure the Success of Social Inclusion

The success of social inclusion can be measured by

- A significant reduction in the incidence of jobless families and jobless households amongst the vulnerable especially in the rural communities.
- A significant reduction in the proportion of working age population that is unemployed or underemployed amongst the vulnerable.
- Existence of stronger communities that create more opportunities for social, economic and political participation.
- A significant increase in the number of people especially the disadvantaged with access to good and affordable healthcare, clean water, electricity, and housing.
- A significant reduction in crime rates both in the urban and rural communities.

Conclusion

The successful eradication of poverty through social inclusion requires that employment opportunities be created, discrimination be eliminated, and participation and peaceful social relationships with groups and societies be created. It also requires a transformative social relation that promotes an inclusive society supported by institutions and systems to enable people to participate in economic, social, and political activities in the society where they reside.

Recommendations

After examining the effects of social exclusion on the society and its relationship with poverty, the importance of social inclusion in poverty reduction, the study recommends as follows:

- Government at all levels in Nigeria (and other less developed countries) should prioritize the welfare of her citizens and involve them in policy formulation and implementation.
- Policies aimed at inclusion should focus on reintegrating the vulnerable into the society.
- Emphasis should be placed on community-driven and participative processes to ensure a voice for the vulnerable and citizen engagement as key channels for inclusion.
- The Nigerian government should engage the services of social workers especially in the rural areas and urban slums to identify the needs of these communities as well as seek their opinion in nation building. This would consequently help in addressing issues of social exclusion that has contributed to the high level of poverty in Nigeria.

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