

The Impact Of Poverty On The Crime Rate In Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the impact of poverty on crime rate in Nigeria. The major objectives of the paper are focused on the major causes of poverty in Nigeria; identify the level of crime in Nigeria and to examine the influence of poverty on crime rate in Nigeria. The paper adopts the relative theory to explain how people take action to acquire opportunities and wealth that others possesses and which they believe to also have equal opportunity to acquire. The paper was based on secondary sources of data. The findings of the study revealed that the major cause of poverty in Nigeria is corruption from government officials in form of diversion of funds meant for development, lack of economic activities and illiteracy. The study also discovered that most of the criminal activities are perpetrated as a result of poor economic conditions especially among the low income populace. The paper concluded that poverty is the major cause of high crime rate in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others that Nigerian political leaders who are entrusted with the wealth of the nation should be transparent to ensure that social amenities are provided to the rural people to boost economic activities. More efforts should be made to ensure that most of the rural populace has an education and micro credit schemes should be strengthened to reach the real poor populace in order boost small scale businesses in Nigeria.

Keywords: Impact, poverty, crime rate.

Introduction

Every human being naturally has the desire to achieve the basic needs of life. These basic needs include among others, food, clothing shelter etc. Although due to the nature of unlimited resources and opportunities available to human nature, these needs are not always met by many. It is unfortunate that Nigeria with an estimated population of 200 million people is recently regarded as the poverty capital worth the largest population of people in extreme poverty in the world in 2018 overtaking India and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is unfortunate that Nigeria has. At the end of May 2018, Nigeria had around 87 million people in extreme poverty compare to 73 million people in India.

It is worrisome that at least six people re said to get into extreme poverty every minute in Nigeria, at the end of 2018, amount 3.2 million people were added to the poverty log in Nigeria (Brookings Institution, 2018). With the level of people in extreme Poverty in Nigeria, people must service at any means available to them. This lure many people into involving in criminal activities to make ends meet. This is not an attempt to justify crime but poverty naturally has the potentials to bring out any form of plan that will guarantee survival in human beings.

It is unfortunate that Nigeria as a mono economy depends on oil to survive as a nation. It implies that whatever happen to the oil sector will affect the entire population. Therefore, as a result of the oil price collapse in 2014-2016, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate dropped to 2.7% in 2015. In 2016 during its first recession in 25 years, the economy contracted by 1.6%. Poverty remains significant at 33.1% in Africa's biggest

economy. For a country with massive wealth and a huge population to support commerce, a well-developed economy, and plenty of natural resources such as oil, the level of poverty remains unacceptable. However, poverty may have been overestimated due to the lack of information on the extremely huge [informal sector](#) of the economy, estimated at around 60% more, of the current GDP figures (World Bank 2019).

As of 2018, Population growth rate is higher than economic growth rate, leading to a slow rise in poverty. According to a 2018 report by the World Bank, almost half the population is living below the international poverty line (\$2 per day), and unemployment peaked at 23.1% ¹According to the [most recent estimates](#), in 2015, 10 percent of the world's population lived on less than US\$1.90 a day, compared to 11 percent in 2013. That's down from nearly 36 percent in 1990(World Bank 2019).Nearly 1.1 billion fewer people are living in extreme poverty than in 1990. In 2015, 736 million people lived on less than \$1.90 a day, down from 1.85 billion in 1990(World Bank 2019).

While poverty rates have declined in all regions, progress has been uneven: Two regions, East Asia and Pacific (47 million extreme poor) and Europe and Central Asia (7 million) have reduced extreme poverty to below 3 percent, achieving the 2030 target (World Bank 2019).More than half of the extreme poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, the number of poor in the region increased by 9 million, with 413 million people living on less than US\$1.90 a day in 2015, more than all the other regions combined. If the trend continues, by 2030, nearly 9 out of 10 extreme poor will be in Sub-Saharan Africa(World Bank 2019).The majority of the global poor live in rural areas, are poorly educated, employed in the agricultural sector, and under 18 years of age. It is against this backdrop that the paper examined the effects of poverty on crime in Bayelsa state.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives were to;

1. Determine the major causes of poverty in Bayelsa state
2. Examine the rate of crime in Bayelsa State
3. Examine the impact of poverty on crime in Bayelsa State

Conceptualization

Poverty: Poverty may mean different things to different people. Poverty is about not having enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing and shelter. However, poverty is more, much more than just not having enough money. The most widely held and understood definition of absolute poverty measures poverty strictly in economic terms, earning less than \$1.90 a day. But the World Bank goes beyond the amount of money a person or family earns to expand the definition of poverty. "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom (World Bank cited in Compassion International, 2020).This poverty definition encompasses living conditions, an inability to meet basic needs because food, clean drinking water, proper sanitation, education, health care and other social services are inaccessible. This poverty threshold starts with fear for the future and broadens to include dependence, oppression and even exploitation (Compassion International, 2020).

Crime: A crime is an unlawful act punishable by a [state](#) or other authority. The term crime does not, in modern [criminal law](#), have any simple and universally accepted

definition, though [statutory](#) definitions have been provided for certain purposes. The most popular view is that crime is a [category](#) created by [law](#); in other words, something is a crime if declared as such by the relevant and applicable law (Farmer, 2008). One proposed definition is that a crime or offence (or criminal offence) is an act harmful not only to some individual but also to a community, society, or the state ("a public [wrong](#)"). Such acts are forbidden and punishable by law (Martin, 2003). The notion that acts such as [murder](#), [rape](#), and [theft](#) are to be prohibited exists worldwide. What precisely is a criminal offence is defined by [criminal law](#) of each country. While many have a catalogue of crimes called the [criminal code](#), in some [common law](#) countries no such comprehensive statute exists (Easton, 2010).

Relative Deprivation Theory

The Relative Deprivation is formally defined as an actual or perceived lack of resources required to maintain the quality of life, activities, and material possessions which various [socioeconomic groups](#) or individuals within those groups have grown accustomed, or are considered to be the accepted norm within the group. Relative deprivation has also been cited as a factor driving incidents of social disorder like rioting, looting, terrorism, and civil wars. In this nature, social movements and their associated disorderly acts can often be attributed to the grievances of people who feel they are being denied resources to which they are entitled (Longley 2018). Relative theory is also the condition in which people lack the minimum amount of income needed in order to maintain the average standard of living in the society in which they live. Relative poverty is considered the easiest way to measure the level of poverty in an individual country. Relative poverty is defined relative to the members of a society and, therefore, differs across countries. People are said to be impoverished if they cannot keep up with the standard of living as determined by society. Relative poverty also changes over time. As the wealth of a society increases, so does the amount of income and resources that the society deems necessary for proper conditions of living (Williams, 2003).

The Major Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

The work to end extreme poverty is far from over, and many challenges remain. In much of the world, growth rates are too slow, and investment is too subdued to increase median incomes. For many nations, poverty reduction has slowed or even reversed. The latest projections show that if we continue down a business-as-usual path, the world will not be able to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. That's because it is becoming even more difficult to reach those remaining in extreme poverty, which often live in fragile countries and remote areas (World Bank 2019).

Access to good schools, health care, electricity, safe water, and other critical services remains elusive for many people, often determined by socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and geography. The multidimensional view wherein other aspects such as education, access to basic utilities, health care, and security are included reveals a world in which poverty is a much broader, more entrenched problem. The share of poor according to a multidimensional definition that includes consumption, education, and access to basic utilities is approximately 50 percent higher than when relying solely on monetary poverty (World Bank 2019).

***Income inequality:** As at 2010, the [Gini coefficient](#) of Nigeria is rated medium, at 0.43. However, there are more rural poor than urban poor (World Bank 2011). This is correlated with differential access to infrastructure and amenities. This results from the composition of Nigeria's economy, especially oil and agriculture sectors. Oil exports*

contribute significantly to government revenues; it contributes 9% to the GDP, and employs only a fraction of the population. Agriculture, however, contributes to about 17% of GDP, and employs about 30% of the population (Aigbokhan, 2000).

This incongruence is compounded by the fact that oil revenue is poorly distributed among the population, with higher government spending in urban areas than rurally. High unemployment rate renders personal incomes even more divergent.¹ Moreover, the process of oil extraction has resulted in significant [pollution](#), which further harms the agricultural sector. Additionally, agriculture growth slowed because of farmer-herdsmen clashes, revolts in the north-east, and floods. The majority of Nigeria's better paying jobs are in capital-intensive sectors, but they are very scarce and limited. Only the places striving with economic activity and are very capital-intensive, possess law firms, small local businesses, and the governing powers (Canagarajah, Thomas, 2001)

Ethnic Conflicts and Civil unrests: *Nigeria has historically experienced much ethnic conflict. With the return to civilian rule in 1999, militants from religious and ethnic groups have become markedly more violent. While this unrest has its roots in poverty and economic competition, (BBC News, 2012) its economic and human damages further escalate the problems of poverty (such as increasing the mortality rate). For instance, ethnic unrest and the displeasure to local communities with oil companies has contributed to the conflict over oil trade in the [Niger Delta](#), which threatens the productivity of oil trade. Civil unrest might also have contributed to the adoption of populist policy measures which work in the short-run, but impede poverty alleviation efforts.*

Political instability and corruption: *Nigeria's large population and historic ethnic instability has led to the adoption of a [federal government](#). The resultant fiscal decentralization provides Nigeria's state and local governments considerable autonomy, including control over 50% of government revenues, as well as responsibility for providing public services (Aigbokhan, 2000). The lack of a stringent regulatory and monitoring system has allowed for [rampant corruption](#) (Aigbokhan, 2000). This has hindered past poverty alleviation efforts to a large extent, since resources which could pay for public goods or directed towards investment (and so create employment and other opportunities for citizens) are being misappropriated (Duffield 2010). Nigerian corruption and poverty are interrelated and encourages each other. When looking at human development, Nigeria is at the bottom of the scale and corruption scores highest. Its existence is in all levels in the government Local, State and even in the national departments. As a result of extreme corruption, even the poverty reduction programs suffer from no funding and have failed to give the needed remedy to this country.*

Over Dependent on Oil Revenue: *The management of oil revenues impacted the economy and the level of poverty in Nigeria by a considerable amount, leading up to 1985. As result of the profiting oil businesses, much of the oil revenues were spent expecting that the oil prices would continue to increase. This aggressive spending led to the rise of per capita income from N1,200 in 1972 to nearly N2,900 in 1980, according to 1987 (Canagarajah, Thomas, 2001). So when the oil revenue crumbled the real capital income decreased heavily and Nigeria's economy took a big hit. During this shift to a focus on the oil boom, the agricultural sector, where the majority of people made a living, had a sharp drop occur. Throughout this oil boom period, the value of the naira increased, and agricultural exports dropped by almost half the value and half the volume. Non-agricultural wages dropped massively as the labour workers increased in non-agricultural jobs because of the steady*

migration to more urban areas. As these wages decreased, agriculture thrived temporarily but eventually ended up declining as well. As a result, the gap created by the oil boom of agricultural and non-agricultural profits finally stabilized. The economy began to decline in the 1980s due to a sharp decline in oil prices in 1982 and agriculture continued to deteriorate. As a result wages continued to decline and unemployment grew further in the mid 1980s (Canagarajah and Thomas, 2001)

The Relationship between Poverty and Crime in Bayelsa State

The rate of crime in Bayelsa State is relatively high as compared to some states in Nigeria. For example, in 2016 alone there were 612 offences against persons, 897 offences against property, 91 offences against lawful authority and one offence against local act making a total of 1541 represent 1.3% of total crimes in Nigeria. Offence against persons are those offences against human beings Example, murder, manslaughter, infanticide, concealment of birth, rape and other physical abuse, etc. (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Poverty has been put forward as a decisive motive for crime. Individuals lacking the basic means of subsistence are more likely to become involved in criminal activity when they experience a negative income shock. As income levels decline, engaging in property crime becomes more opportune relative to participating in more “peaceful” economic activities and the stolen property might be regarded as a buffer in alleviating distress (Papaioannou, 2017).

In simple economic theory of crime, originally introduced by Becker (1968) cited in Papaioannou (2017), individuals are more likely to become involved in criminal activity when they experience a negative income shock. This reasoning is framed in terms of an *opportunity cost model*; as income levels decline as a result of unfavourable conditions, engaging in crime becomes more opportune relative to participating in more “peaceful” economic activities (Grossman 1991; Seter 2016 cited in Papaioannou, 2017). Going by the above, the poor environmental conditions caused by oil spillage makes agriculture and fishing activities difficult to strive and this has increased the level of poverty in the state. It is unfortunate that people can go out of their way to make ends meet thereby engaging in criminal activities. Also, with very low level of education especially in the rural communities, most of the people see little or no hope to survive in a competitive society; they decide to engage in nefarious activities to make them to better their living conditions.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study concluded that poverty has a major effect on crime rate in Bayelsa state. It is also important to emphasize that if the roots causes of poverty are not tackled, the level of crime will continue to increase in Nigeria. The study hereby made the following recommendations

1. More efforts should be made to diversify the economy to reduce the over-dependent on oil to as to create employment and improve the standard of living in other sectors.
2. The war against corruption should be intensified to ensure the fair distribution of resources to where they are most needed
3. Youth empowerment programs should be strengthened to discourage criminal activities in Bayelsa State
4. Education should be prioritized to reduce the level of illiteracy as a weapon to fight crime.

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