

RURAL COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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ABSTRACT

Poverty usually conjures terrifying and sometimes confusing images which are imposed mostly from outside. Ideally, images of poverty should be ethnographically constructed within particular cultures by particular people. It is the discovery of these images, the underlying processes and reasons for their creation that pose enormous global challenge to researchers and policy makers. Drawing from an ethnographic research in two plural rural communities inhabited by Efik and Ibibio ethnic groups in Nigeria, the paper reveals that in both communities culture bearers made a distinction between community and individual poverty. Both ethnic groups in each community agreed on common indicators, which if lacking failed to promote general socio-economic well-being or welfare of the inhabitants. Individual poverty was a more personal matter and differently perceived by constituent ethnic groups. While the Efik perceived individual poverty as lack of adequate *itie udia* (asset(s) easily converted into cash), the Ibibio perceived it as the inability to build a modern house in natal home and to feed one's children. Community poverty was addressed through collective efforts whereas individual poverty was tackled differently by constituent ethnic groups and depended maximally on inheritance pattern of the people. The paper seeks to re-echo and strengthen the usefulness of ethnographic understanding in poverty research and poverty alleviation in rural communities of the developing world.

KEYWORDS: Ethnography, Perception, Poverty, Rural Community, Wealth, Immigrants, Development.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty, a social psychological phenomenon, conjures images of hunger and sometimes deprivation. In some situations, these images are framed from our lack of understanding of it. Notwithstanding how the images are concocted, they are often so powerful and terrifying. They are also often taken for granted although they are constructed within particular traditions, cultures and by particular people for particular reasons (Broch-Due, 1995). It is the discovery of these images, the understanding of the processes and the reasons for their creation within these particular traditions and cultures that pose enormous global challenge to researchers, scholars and policy makers.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study:

Ordinarily, the poor are not difficult to find and identify. They off-handedly include those who have little or no basic necessities for survival, scanty or no food, clothing, shelter, the sick who have no means of securing health care beyond what ethno-medical proficiencies could offer, and even "lack of kin and friends" (Booth et al, 1999:11). This explains why the poor are those characterized by low relative welfare index, low food security index and low basic needs index (IFAD, 1994); and the World Bank conceptualizes poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living from consumption, life expectancy, access to clean water and even credit (Askwith: 1994). But, do the poor see themselves in exactly the same way others see them given their peculiar socio-cultural terrains and ecological peculiarities? Soyombo (1987) tacitly answers with a caveat that people be rather cautious in defining poverty or the poor because they are both not only an expression of life situation and a state of mind but also a perception of self in the complex web of social relations.

The frustration in poverty studies is that the perception of images of the poor and poverty are often imposed from outside. These outsiders see themselves as the prophets of poverty and the tutors of the poor. Chambers (1983:1) warns concerning the myth of poverty that "outsiders are often ignorant of rural poverty but do not want to know what they do not know. The less they have direct and

discordant contact and learning, and the less they know, so the easier it is for myth to mask reality". Omari (1997:159) further reminds us that poverty and the poor are related to peculiar socio-cultural settings and warns against the danger in making generalization. An ethnographic example here may make the controversy manageable. The pre-colonial Nuer of Sudan might have been perceived as poor because their economy and dressing pattern were scanty and un-western, their homesteads and technology were wretched compared to Evans-Pritchard's Western culture. Nonetheless, the Nuer themselves did not only see their culture as the richest, they perceived wealth and high status in their cattle and their mode of dressing (Evans-Pritchard: 1940).

Thus far, it is evident that "much of western thought has dominated and almost monopolized poverty thinking" (Oyen 1996:16). With this in mind, the study sought to find out the perception of poverty from socio-ethnic components in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, a plural rural community in Cross River State of Nigeria. Some of the research questions addressed were, how do various rural ethnic groups perceive poverty or wealth vis-à-vis other constituent ethnic groups? What are the institutional structure on ground in these communities to address the problem of rural poverty, and what capacity exists at the community level for undertaking development projects geared towards poverty alleviation? The study intends to offer an alternative paradigm for the study of rural poverty and understanding of rural poor.

Literature Review and Theoretical Search

Poverty is an octopus-like concept with many interpretations. It is seen as inability to have inadequate intake of calories in diet, poor clothing and shelter (Dankekar and Rath: 1971; Galbraith: 1969; Lugalla: 1997). The poor is also seen to have large families or large economically dependent members (Cooksey, 1997).

Causes of poverty are varied like the images of poverty. They include subsistence production, illiteracy, rapid population growth, limited infrastructural facilities and static technology (Olayide and Essang: 1975). The consequences of poverty include powerlessness, isolation, vulnerability, physical weakness and low standard of living (Dixon:1990).

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The poor are isolated from the outside world, they are unable to attract government aids, they are easily exploited by money lenders, landlords, government officials and law enforcement officials such as the police.

They have few buffers against contingencies and disasters and social demands such as famine, crop failure, sickness, funeral or cost of litigation have to be met by becoming poorer. This often means selling or mortgaging of land, livestock, tools or equipment, often on distress sale or usurious terms.

A number of measures have been proffered for ameliorating or reducing poverty. Such measures according to Osuntogun (1978), would require many policy instruments such as social welfare on health, sanitation, nutrition, formulation of policy for the use of new technology, provision of farm credit at reasonable rates, favourable system of land tenure to encourage cultivation by the poor and improved marketing system through producers' cooperatives. Since the poor constitute the bulk of peasant farmers, it is often suggested that specialized institutions should be created by government to enable such farmers attract loans on particularly favourable terms (Adeyokunnu: 1974, Makinwa and Ozo: 1987).

The problem facing poverty studies is not really whether, indeed, rural poverty exists but rather it is the lack of commitment in finding out the nature and extent of poverty, who the poor actually are and what makes them see themselves as poor. In doing this, the poor will have to be located in their various socio-cultural domains. They have to be talked with, listened to, and interacted with in order to gain their confidence (Chambers: 1983). For this to be realized, the political economy must be studied, the various ethnic components and interest groups must be listened to and discussed with in order to uncover, not only their strengths and weaknesses but also the history of their poverty alleviation efforts.

The ethnographic approach entails understanding the people through sustained contact and interaction in their own cultural setting in order to uncover their perspectives of poverty. Participation of the rural poor in rural development projects is inbuilt in the ethnographic approach. Basically, participation is a process which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and their resources (World Bank 1994). In the ethnographic approach, the change agent must interact with the people long enough to be able to appreciate their poverty problem and thereafter facilitate their empowerment through participatory project planning and development. This peoples'-oriented approach is grounded in the dictum, "if you want to change it, get to know fresh from the source".

It is the thesis of this paper that the rural poor will remain poor unless poverty is tackled from the perspective of the poor. Imposition of images on the rural poor and the implementation of programmes conceived, packaged and delivered to the communities as a rational attempt to alleviate their perceived needs and poverty by governmental structures that are usually considered too distant from and too rigid for the poor, would have made the rural poor poorer and more frustrated, even as the programmes were being implemented. It has been asserted that rural programmes and development planning in general have contributed not only to the pauperization of the rural people, but also aggravated problems of malnutrition and hunger (Escobar: 1992).

The undoing of government planning and decision-making is the almost axiomatic belief that social change can only be engineered, directed and produced from the top. This approach argues Chambers (1997), gives no room for decentralization, democracy, diversity and change which are the required ingredients in the ethnographic/participatory rural development planning and decision making process. This view has a blinding effect since the poor are perceived as a

homogeneous whole. There is no bother therefore to define or conceptualize poverty and the poor either "explicitly or implicitly" in their development plans and documents (Madaris, 1997:107).

The generalness and commonness of poverty as a concept seems not to attract specialized theories at the moment. What exists are postulations or perspectives on poverty by interest groups such as functionalists, Marxists, psychologists and economic geographers or natural circumstantialists. For instance, poverty is seen by Marxists in terms of structure of political power in the society which is the determinant of the extent and distribution of poverty among the population. Essentially, power theory is an exploitation theory where the ruling group seeks to legitimize an exploitative poverty system, usually relying on the use of state power. When this power is crude and exploitative, the psychologists maintain that individuals could be psychologically deflated thereby leading to greater poverty, sickness and hopelessness. The functionalists, on the other, hand, argue that power is necessary to maintain cohesion in the society. Such societal cohesion is better achieved, if the poor continues to obey the law by believing that their state would be ameliorated if they remain obedient to the state.

The natural circumstantialists dwell more on policies which intend to deal, as it were, in a piecemeal fashion with the effects of poverty. They do not tackle fundamental causes or proffer lasting solutions to poverty. They work on the assumption that the problem of poverty can be substantially reduced without much change in the larger social, political and economic setting in which it occurs.

The Data

The study used survey research design and participatory research approach. Specifically, the research used semi-structured interview guide, group discussions, observation, institutional diagramming, transect, preference ranking and wealth ranking of projects in the communities under study. This wide range of research tools were adopted and used flexibly according to circumstances which presented themselves in the field. Information collected in the field was cross-checked. The use of a variety of tools and methods facilitated the cross-checking of such information received. This process of triangulation facilitated the verification of information collected in the field without necessarily leaning on heavily loaded statistical tests of the orthodox research methods (Francis, 1995:2).

These various methods made it possible to ascertain local perceptions and indicators of well-being, wealth or poverty, access to and use of social services; local and community institutions and their role towards poverty alleviation. Institutional diagramming provided information on institutions, their relative importance to the community and inter-relation between them; transects gave information about different land use and agro-ecological zones. Ranking enabled priorities to be quickly identified and compared in any particular order of interest by the respondents within the community setting. A total of 150 Ibibio immigrants and 72 Efik hosts were interviewed in each of the two communities. The choice of equal number of respondents was to facilitate comparison between these two communities. Semi structured interviews were manually coded while the FGDS were taped recorded, transcribed and also manually coded for content analysis.

Both the Efiks and Ibibio immigrants were subjected to same interview schedule and focus group discussion guide which, inter-alia, included questions on their ethnocultural perception of poverty and wealth and the ranking of such indices, types of poverty, the various ways in which poverty could be alleviated or managed at individual and community levels. The ranking of indices were done respectively by members of focus groups and key informants interviewed. The total number of respondents who individually supported

specific need or wealth indices informed the ranking given to such indices in the tables. The total number of respondents as indicated in the table, therefore, indicated the weight given to respective indices.

Six poorest communities were compiled by field staff of the Akpabuyo Local Government Council and ranked 1st – 6th as follows: Akwa Ikot Efanga, Ikot Uba, Ifiang Nsung, Ikot Eyo, Idebe and Akwa Ikot Umoh. All the six communities were physically assessed by the research team for clues on socio-economic disadvantages, presence of poverty focused development initiatives and willingness of the villagers to take part in the study. At the end of the assessment exercise, Ikot Uba – a village situated South-east of Akpabuyo with a distance of about fifteen kilometers from Calabar Town, and Akwa Ikot Umoh village situated north-east of Akpabuyo, with a distance of about forty five kilometers from Calabar Town respectively, were picked for the study.

Key members of Ibibio immigrants and Efik hosts such as village heads, youth leaders, district heads, women leaders and religious leaders were interviewed as key informants. In each community, four focus group discussions were held with homogeneous groups among the Efiks and Ibibio immigrants. These groups comprised Efik and Ibibio elders (men and women) and their youths (boys and girls). Snowball sampling method was used to select key informants while members of the focus groups were arranged by contact persons in each community. In each community two contact persons were nominated by the village councils to represent Efik and Ibibio interest. The intention of all this was to generate data that would represent their perception of poverty and wealth and various poverty alleviation initiatives in their specific communities.

Research Findings

(a) Needs Ranking and Perception of Poverty in Ikot Uba Community.

The people of Ikot Uba and Ikot Umoh Communities were asked to list their needs according to their perceived priority and to list wealth indicators in the community. Table 1 and 2 present the responses.

At the time the research was conducted, Ikot Uba was building a poly-clinic initiated by UNICEF. The project was latter handed over to the village which was latter taken over by the local government. It was their hope that a good road network and electricity would be provided by the LGA to the community. The need for a health clinic, good road network and electricity was so pressing and central to all inhabitants, to the extent that both the Efik hosts and Ibibio immigrants mentioned and ranked health centre as number one as presented in Table 1 even though they were interviewed separately. For the Ibibio immigrants, health centre, tarred road, electricity, industry and technical college were ranked first to fifth in that order. Among the Efiks health centre, tarred road, electricity and pipe borne water were equally ranked in the order shown in the table above.

In contrast with Efik hosts, Ibibio immigrants did not emphasize pipe-borne water as a pressing need because they lived near the village stream. Rather, a technical college was emphasized as additional priority need of these immigrants. Their choice was informed by the understanding that Ibibio children from the proposed school would be skilled enough to be self-employed after graduation. Being self-employed would assuage their fears about discriminatory employment policy of the Efik controlled state and local governments in Cross River State. In other words, the children of Ibibio immigrants would not be totally disadvantaged in employment opportunities because of their technically developed skill.

The Efik hosts perceived wealth and prosperity in the ownership of extensive oil palm/groves (94.44%) and

Table 1: Needs Ranking in Ikot Uba Community

Ibibio Immigrants			Efik Hosts			
Ranking	No.	%	Ranking	No.	%	
1	Health Centre	105	100	1. Health Centre	72	100
2	Road (tarred)	95	90.48	2. Road (tarred)	70	97.22
3	Electricity	89	84.76	3. Electricity	69	95.83
4	Industry-Palm Kernel, cracking, piggery and poultry	56	53.33	4. Pipe borne water	65	90.28
5	Technical College	41	39.10			

Table 2: Perception of Prosperity and Wealth in Ikot Uba

Ibibio Immigrants			Efik Hosts			
Ranking	No.	%	Ranking	No.	%	
1	Somebody who has enough to eat with his household	105	100	1. Somebody who owns extensive oil palm plantation (grove)	68	94.44
2	Owns a motor car/motor cycle	91	86.67	2. Owns extensive cassava farm	65	90.28
3	Owns a modern house	90	85.71			
4	Owns extensive oil palm (groves)	85	80.95			
5	Owns extensive cassava farm	84	80.00			

Table 3: Needs Ranking in Akwa Ikot Umoh

Ibibio Immigrants			Efik Hosts			
Ranking	No.	%	Ranking	No.	%	
1	Reduction of steep hill and good road network	105	100	1. Reduction of Steep hill and road repairs in the village	72	100
2	Building of a health centre	101	96.19	2. Building of a health centre	71	98.61
			3. Building of more classrooms in the village primary school	69	95.83	
			4. Building of a modern market in the village	83	87.50	

Table 4: Perception of Prosperity and Wealth in Akwa Ikot Umoh

Ibibio Immigrants			Efik Hosts			
Ranking	No.	%	Ranking	No.	%	
1	Somebody who has an income generating occupation such as cassava farming, oil palm processing	105	100	1. Somebody who has a big and extensive cassava farm	71	98.61
2	Somebody who has built a modern house in his natal village	101	96.19	2. Somebody with an extensive oil palm plantation/grove	70	97.22
3	Somebody who is able to feed and train his children	100	95.24			

extensive cassava farms (90.28%). The Ibibio immigrants, on the other hand, perceived prosperity and wealth and, therefore, well-being in being able to have enough food for members of their households (100%). Other indicators of wealth included ownership of a car (86.67%) and a modern building (85.71%) and ownership of/or ability to rent and exploit extensive oil palm plots and cassava farms (80.00%). These various indicators gave a clue to cultural values of the respondents drawn from the two cultural blocks in the village.

(b) Needs Ranking and Perception of Poverty in Akwa Ikot Umoh

Akwa Ikot Umoh village had needs ranking that was different from that of Ikot Uba village although these two communities were inhabited wholly by same ethnic groups-Efik hosts and Ibibio immigrants. Table 3 and 4 depict these responses from the field.

Apart from the steep and broken hill in the village (with a score of 100 percent) which made movement and the breaking of bulk of farm produce very difficult, the inhabitants were in dire need of a health centre. They lamented how they would always seek modern medical care at St. Joseph's Hospital, located in Ikot Ene, another village about twenty five kilometers away, and the number of loved ones who have died over the decades because of lack of modern medical facilities. The problems of bad roads and broken hill have always compounded their frustration in transportation.

The Efiks were also concerned with the need to re-roof the classroom block blown off by storm and the construction of new classrooms because of increased population of pupils in the school. In addition, they wanted their local market converted into a modern one by the Local Government Administration in order to yield more revenue to the village council.

In Akwa Ikot Umoh, the Efiks mentioned possession of a big and extensive cassava farm and oil palm plantation or grove as major indicators of prosperity and wealth. Ibibio immigrants, on the other hand, saw a wealthy man as somebody who has an occupation that yields sufficient income. In addition, such a person must build a modern zinc house at his natal village, and must be able to feed and also train his children in school or a trade, in that close order (see table 4).

DISCUSSION

From sustained interaction in the field, it was possible to discover that within communities, there was a clear distinction between *Community Poverty/Wealth*, and *individual Poverty/Wealth*. Needs belong to the collective and welfarist perception of poverty. These welfare indicators are what any visitor would easily use as a yardstick for measuring the degree of urbanization and infrastructural well-being or the "good life", and they are perceived in quality/quantity of social amenities and economic infrastructure, the availability of which is symbolic of public wealth; the absence of them is symptomatic of public or community poverty.

Data from the field amplified that community needs seemed to tally irrespective of ethnic composition. Inhabitants knew and mentioned those social amenities, which if provided, would make them compare favourably with their urban counterparts. In Table 1, for example, there was a symmetry of some of these perceived community needs between Ibibio immigrants and their Efik hosts in Ikot Uba. Ibibio immigrants and the Efik hosts consistently ranked health centre, tarred road and electricity as the first three needs of the community.

However, their perception of other needs such as palm kernel cracking industry, piggyery, poultry and pipe borne water were different. These other needs were meant to serve specific ethnic yearnings of either the Ibibios or the Efiks. Ibibio immigrants were eager to increase their economic opportunities by wishing to have such cottage industries that would increase their income. To be able to manage these small businesses, they also needed a college preferably a technical college because of the opportunities for self employment at graduation. This need was strengthened by the discriminatory employment policy in Akpabuyo against children of Ibibio origin. On the other hand, the Efiks needed pipe borne water to service their water needs because they lived at the centre of the village but far away from the village streams. The immigrants built their homes near village streams, and so showed no interest in pipe borne water supply.

In Akwa Ikot Umoh, the needs perception of Ibibio immigrants and the Efiks tallied in the reduction of the steep Ikot Umoh hill and the construction of a health centre. These two needs were emphasized in Akwa Ikot Umoh because their absence negatively affected the economy and health of the community members. Owing to problem of transportation, farm produce were often underpriced and sometimes wasted because buyers were unable to climb the steep and broken hill to the village to haggle competitively with farmers. Inhabitants also had no health facility located in the community to service their health needs except a general hospital located more than twenty five kilometers in Ikot Ene Community. This explains why these needs were emphasized and ranked in same order by the respondents. However, such other needs like the building of a modern market and more class room in the village primary School, were specially the hosts' desire to extort development fees from the immigrant population since they (Ibibio) send more children to school because of their large population. They also constitute the bulk of traders in the community.

The differential perception of poverty and wealth were also noticed when answers were elicited from community members concerning people actually considered poor or wealthy. The ordering of these indicators and the perception of poverty or wealth were tinged by cultural biases and environmental peculiarities of the respondents. To a large extent therefore, nature and culture interplayed in the perception of poverty and prosperity/wealth.

The Efiks in Ikot Ubah, who naturally possessed extensive oil palm plantations/groves and less cassava farms, formed their images of wealth and poverty around ownership or lack of these indicators respectively. The prioritization of these indicators was determined by what nature could provide for them. In this community, oil palm harvesting and palm oil production were main economic pursuits while cassava farming/garri making were minor or subsidiary concerns. Akwa Ikot Umoh is endowed by nature with abundance of fertile farmland for cassava cultivation and oil palm plantation. In this community therefore, cassava farming and garri making were foremost twin primary economic preoccupations of the people. The Efiks, it must be mentioned, are not very good in farming but as 'sons of the soil', their wealth is calculated on the size and number of these farmlands which they individually own which could be converted to cash through freehold sales or leasehold arrangements with the Ibibio immigrants. In other situations, an Efik man or woman, who would not cultivate his or her farmlands could lease them to Ibibio immigrant tenant farmers under share-cropping arrangement. By so doing his or her wealth is stored in the crops planted. In traditional Ibibio society, a man was considered an adult and so qualified to marry his first wife, only when he could prove himself a good farmer and/or an adept palm fruit harvester (Charles, 1993). These are all money generating occupations for the Ibibio immigrants in Efik Communities. Ibibio immigrants, tended to combine their cultural expectation back in Ibibioland with what nature could offer in Akpabuyo, to give their images and

perceptions of poverty and prosperity or wealth.

In addition, an Ibibio immigrant who has no modern home (that is, a house built with cement walls, and zinc roof) in his natal village is often derogatorily described as "one with no head". In order words, he is a senseless person with no needs achievement. He is derided and likened unto a legendary Ibibio immigrant called "Udo Ibanga", who migrated to Efikland in the precolonial era, lavished his money on beautiful women, and prodigally returned to Ibibioland with a torn mat as his only asset (Charles: 1993). In Ibibioland, it is not even enough to own landed property alone, one must be seen to be able to feed one's household also. Individual wealth lies mostly in a man's ability to feed his family. This explains why it is the greatest assault to an Ibibio man to be called or addressed by another as "Uwene" (Pauper). The question which often greets such a degrading challenge is "akanam medi ebenge udia ke ufok fo?" (Have I ever come to your house to beg you for food?).

Perception of poverty and wealth by Ibibio immigrants in the two study communities as presented in tables 2 and 4 concretizes these cultural expectations back in Ibibio land and the peculiar farming environment in Akpabuyo. Although immigrants in Akwa Ikot Umoh mentioned ability to feed ones family, ownership of motor car/motor cycle and a modern house while those in Ikot Uba emphasized income generating occupation, modern home and ability to feed ones children, in that order; the immigrants gave an integrated image of prosperity/wealth. To them prosperity or wealth was not a unidimensional phenomenon but multi-dimensional and integrated. In order words, irrespective of the ranking or ordering of the specific indicators which constitute wealth, all indicators must be present for a person to be accepted as prosperous or wealthy. The closeness in the ranked percentages also reveals the integrated nature of wealth as perceived by the immigrants.

In summary therefore, among Ibibio immigrants in Akpabuyo, wealth is a multidimensional phenomenon and "to beg for food" is considered the worst indicator of poverty. Among the Efik people of Akpabuyo, wealth and poverty are perceived mostly in terms of "having or not having *itie udia* (lit, a place where one could derive one's food from)". *Itie udia*, ethno-philosophically is translated into "landed property" such as cassava or oil palm plantation which is convertible to cash, in situations of need. Somebody with just a little or no *itie udia* is regarded as poor while a person with abundance of this, is regarded as wealthy. The idea of wealth is culturally encapsulated in *itie udia*. Among the Efik in Akpabuyo, therefore, individual wealth, as well as poverty, is perceived as a uni-dimensional phenomenon.

Ethno-Strategies for Poverty Alleviation

From the lenses of modernity as championed by the government, the rural people are, therefore, engulfed in 'unacceptable poverty' because their dwellings are seen as 'miserable huts' and their meals are considered 'not balanced', without realizing the ethnographic truth that "signs of poverty and backwardness for the third world people were often integral components of viable and cultural systems rooted in different system of knowledge" (Escobar, 1992:137). This system of knowledge was demonstrated by Ikot Uba and Akwa Ikot Umoh communities in their rural poverty alleviation programmes.

Inhabitants of the two communities clearly distinguished between individual poverty and community poverty. These two types of poverty were never merged or confused with each other. Individual poverty or prosperity was purely a personal matter and needed no community involvement. Community poverty (or need) was tackled through communal effort and inhabitants of the villages were involved in its alleviation. Although the community needs were intended to benefit the entire community and some

neighbouring communities, what promoted or frustrated such poverty alleviation efforts were lack of accountability and low level of confidence and trust between community members and implementers of such programmes at the local level. The immigrants said "udia okuk ada mfina edi" (embezzlement of funds is the cause of conflict).

Poverty, argues Booth et al (1999:16) "is often treated as meaning a lack of economic or social assets, because these things are seen as keys to the causal process that make people poor or vulnerable". The lack of social assets belong more to the realm of community poverty and not individual poverty because as ethnographically analyzed from present field data, community poverty is not synonymous with individual poverty. Although lack of social assets may pose some obstacles to the comfort of culture bearers, it does not prevent the pursuance of individual economic interest to better individual poverty rating or increase individual wealth position. For instance, Ibibio immigrant farmers will individually rent and cultivate cassava or harvest oil palms to increase their economic standing in spite of lack of access roads or health centre. The Efik hosts also continue to individually rely on family or inherited landed property such as cassava plots/farms and oil palm plantations, which they could cultivate/harvest personally or lease them to Ibibio immigrants for cash payment, even if the village had no rural assets such as classrooms or town hall.

To alleviate community poverty it requires contributory efforts from the community members in form of cash and labour in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Transparency and natural confidence among interacting groups provide the necessary tonic for participation and involvement in community directed projects. However, individual poverty is more difficult to manage or alleviate because poverty alleviation strategies will strictly depend on individual aggressiveness, ingenuity, and the inheritance principle of the people.

Among the Efik people, the aggressiveness and ingenuity of an individual could go along way to impact on the family members to give him additional *itie udia* as a matter of public concern and/or as part of inheritance. A man or woman may decide to seize with violence a farm land, building or rooms in a building, belonging to the parents in deviance of customary moral code and inheritance rights, in order to disproportionately increase his share of *itie udia* against public opinion or other contending interests from his fellow siblings. When this happens, the aggressor could become so diabolical and deviant that other siblings and extended family members would dread him and distance themselves from him, as long as he is adamant.

In the alternative, an Efik man/woman could use his/her ingenuity to explore ways of gaining more *itie udia* from the dual inheritance principle. It is a cultural fact that in Efik land "a child of dual parentage cannot die of hunger" and that "if the father's side does not accept a child, the mother's side would" (Charles, 2001a:84). Since it is acknowledged that a child of two parents cannot suffer any disability or die of hunger, a person is ever free to test the balance between the father's or mother's sides and decide where to lean on for greater economic support and inheritance (Charles, 2001a). In order, therefore, to improve on individual prosperity and lessen the chances of becoming poor among the Efik, the planning must start early in life. For instance, if a child is born into monogamous or polygamous family where he/she encounters stiff competition and rivalry he/she is more likely to shift his/her allegiance to the mother's side where inheritance or economic fortunes may favour him/her (Charles:2001b).

Among the Ibibio, individual poverty is addressed primarily through migration because inheritance pattern in Ibibioland is paternalistic, discriminatory, tension ridden and very oppressive. In a study of Ibibio immigrants in rural Akpabuyo some of the reasons given by the immigrants were to raise capital, no parents, land dispute and to be free from

poverty necessitated by family elders who would not allow younger ones to have access to lineage farms and raffia palm plantations (Charles 1993:257). To alleviate poverty, rural Ibibio migrate to Efik rural farming communities to farm and cultivate extensive farmlands under a more favourable and friendly land tenure arrangements of the Efik. It is from such farming proceeds they could realize and fulfill their cultural meaning of wealth 'to feed the children', "buy a car or motor cycle" and "build a modern house in the natal village".

CONCLUSION

To understand rural poverty, which is a more complex, more confusing and less understood of all "poverties", some ethnographic imperatives must be understood and appreciated. This is only achieved through community-based studies. It is only then rural poverty will get a new focus with well tailored programmes to target the rural poor in attempt to alleviate their state of poverty. An Ibibio proverb alerts us to the fact that "when you see a dead man, tears will roll down your cheeks". This is a global challenge which should be taken seriously. So that, by physically locating the rural poor and interacting with them, more serious and closer collaborative commitments will be made towards their welfare and prosperity. This ethnographic study of perception of poverty and wealth among Ibibio immigrants and Efik hosts in a rural community of Akpabuyo intends to contribute to this global discourse.

The data have shown that no two communities have same needs and that constituent members of same communities also vary in the prioritization of their needs and ranking of indices of poverty and wealth. Indices of poverty and wealth were not only ethnographically determined but were also location and environment specific. Indices of individual poverty or wealth were ethno-philosophical and encapsulated unidimensionally in *itie uida* (lit. landed property or investment) for the Efiks, and integratively and multidimensionally in landed property and ability to feed one's household, for the Ibibio immigrants.

Alleviation of community poverty in the studied plural communities was dependent on ethnic collaboration, mutual trust and financial probity of rural development actors. Individual poverty, on the other hand was managed psychoculturally by the Efiks using ingenuity and inheritance and psycho-sociologically by Ibibio immigrants using hard work and migration. In all, the understanding of poverty and wealth and even strategies for poverty alleviation have both ethnographic and environmental contents.

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