

AFRREV IJAH
An International Journal of Arts and Humanities
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Vol. 2 (1), Serial 5, February, 2013:180-200
ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

Profiling Poverty in West Africa: A Sub-Regional Survey

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Abstract

The thrust of this project is informed by the fact that, most times, the statistical figures presented by Governments and its agencies do not tell the

whole story of the state of poverty of citizens; this is more so in regard the sixteen countries that constitute West African. The paper is also premised on the argument that the level of poverty amongst the citizens of a country is a big threat to democracy hence, in most of the countries, what we see is what has been aptly dubbed “democracy without Elections.” This is because the people who should be the defenders of democracy are too hungry and preoccupied by bread and butter issues. The issue of poverty is even worse in the resource rich nations in West Africa such as Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia etc. This is because most of the strategic mineral resources encourage secrecy, unaccountability and corruption in the exploration and exploitation process. Hence, in a “do or die” fashion, the political elites seek to control the levers of power with which they can be in a better position to steal the resources in collaboration with foreign multinational corporations. Since the resources disappear into individual pockets, hunger, poverty and squalor become the dividends of democracy for the citizens. It is concluded that future insecurity and instability will be prevented in the West African sub-region if we rein in the frontiers of poverty beginning with the guarantee of food security; and if the relevant policies are pursued from the exogenous perspective, the process will generate employment and enhance the GDP to the greater good of the society.

Introduction

Africa has been described as the poorest of the poor. Vidal (2003) offers that an estimated one-sixth of people world-wide live in squalid areas or slums, and are denied adequate water supply, sanitation, and legal public services and that worldwide, Africa has the highest proportion of slum dwellers (20%); this is bounced against the situation in Latin America (14), and 30 most affluent countries that have only two percent of their population living in slums. Poverty has been intensified by war conflict. Wadri (2004) pointed out that wars, conflicts, poor human rights records, ethnographic degradation and disease have impacted severely on poverty. Okoli (2012:93) offers that “war and armed conflicts continually arise from socioeconomic differences [and] they go on for years.) In Africa, poverty has also been intensified by forces of globalization as put in place in the 1990s by the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). All over Africa, Asia, Caribbean, the Middle-East and Latin America, the impact of SAP has been terrible. Worse still, the rapid population growth without equitable economic policies exacerbates the intensification of poverty.

Perkins (2004) offers that most of the statistics churned out about the condition of the Third World are usually doctored to hide the actual situation. The same applies to most of the poverty statistics in West Africa. Hence this endeavor is undertaken to present the true existing poverty profile of the citizens of West Africa. According to Perkins, economic hitmen are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S Agency for international development (USAID) and other foreign “aid” organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet’s natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, statistical manipulations, rigged elections, pay offs, extortions, sex and murder. They play a game as old as the empire but one that has taken on new terrifying dimensions during this time of globalization.

In the view of Derego et al (2004) most people believe that a statistic stated in print must be the truth. This is wrong because people can be mistaken in their verbal statements or written works or they may purposely lie with statistics. Odewale (2003) has described poverty as a volcanic threat to democracy, and that leaders are sitting on a keg of gunpowder if they fail to decisively tackle the systematic downward plunge in the quality of lives of West African citizens. Poverty is indeed a time bomb waiting to explode. The problem of poverty in the West African Sub-region is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In a cost of living survey by Mercer Human Resource consulting in 2006, the former Federal Capital City of Nigeria, Lagos, took the second spot as the most expensive city in Africa.

In view of the need to achieve a better poverty profile, we hereby undertake a country by country poverty profile presentation in alphabetical order before we proffer some solutions for the amelioration of poverty. In all the profiles the approach used to set the poverty line is the absolute poverty line, which involves cost of basic needs, food, energy intake and one dollar a day; as unfortunate as the use of dollar as the bench mark may be, it remains, inevitably, the globally accepted reference point in that regard.

Benin Republic

A country of 6.8m citizens, based on their 2002 census, Benin was ranked 163rd out of 177 countries by the Human Development Index. (UNDP, 2006) Since its economic crisis in the 1980s the issue of poverty has become a matter of concern for the country’s authorities. The system for monitoring

poverty in Benin is called the social change observatory, which was established in the 1990s; this has helped policy makers with information on household living conditions and their response to changes in the socioeconomic environment. The poverty profile shows that poverty decreased in urban areas but increased in rural areas. In urban areas, the head count index declined from 29% in 1996 to 23% in 1999 while in rural areas the headcount index rose from 25% in 1994/95 to 33% in 1999/2000; similar trends were observed for other poverty measures. Poverty depth and severity of poverty declined in urban areas and increased in rural areas. Therefore, poverty disparities between urban and rural areas increased over the period.

With regard to the geographical disparities in poverty, in 1999/2000 in rural areas, all of the departments in the north of the country (Borgu, Alibori, Atacora and Donga) and to a lesser degree, those in the Atlantique and Couffo regions showed levels of poverty that were markedly higher than the average in the urban areas, the towns/citizens in the departments of Cuoffo, Atacora and Oueme and to a lesser degree those of Atlantique Borgou and Donga, were the poorest.

Estimates from ECOWAS (2000) showed that poverty remained about the same at the National level, 29% in 1999/2000 and in 2003. During the period, the rural poverty rates decreased from 33% to 32% while urban poverty rates increased slightly from 23% to 24%. However, poverty depth and severity increased at the national level as well as in urban and rural areas. Arguably, if the above trend in poverty rates continues, the millennium development goals target of reducing the incidence of poverty by half by 2015 would not be achieved. It should be noted that the World Bank and IMF have been administering their Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative (PRSPI). Over sixty-five percent of the citizens live below the poverty line.

Burkina Faso

With an estimated population of 12.8m as at 2005 according to the United Nations publication in 2007, Burkina Faso is ranked 174 out of 177 countries in the UNDP Human Development index (UNDP 2006). The country organized a poverty reduction initiative with active support and loan commitments from the World Bank and IMF under the poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF). The absolute poverty levies used to measure poverty in Burkina Faso were derived from the cost of basic needs approach. To calculate the food poverty line, the minimum nutritional requirement was established at 2,283 calories per day per person. The food basket contained

four essential items – millet, sorghum, corn and rice. The non-food poverty line was determined by using the ratio of food expenditure to non-food expenditure.

The 1994/95 survey set the poverty line at 41,099 CFA Francs per persons per year. In 1998, the threshold was 72,690 CFA Francs and in 2003 82,672 CFA Francs. Hence, the 2003 poverty threshold represented approximately one fourth of the minimum wage in the country, which is 345,732 CFA per year and approximately two fifths of the international poverty line of one US dollar per day per person.

In terms of poverty trends, the World Bank estimates showed a decline in the poverty rate in Burkina Faso between 1998 and 2003 from 55% to 46%. In 2003, the country had a headcount index of 46%, a poverty depth of 0.156 and a severity of poverty of 0.071. According to the National estimates, the poverty rate had barely increased from 45% in 1994 to 46% in 2003. However, both poverty depth and severity of poverty increased over the period. People living in rural areas were poorer than those living in urban areas. In the same year, more than half of the rural population was poor compared to about a fifth of the urban population. The share of the rural poor in the total poor decreased from 96% in 1994 to 94% in 1998 and to 92% in 2003. Geographical disparities in poverty had a high incidence of poverty exceeding 55 percent – Boucle du Mouhoun South West, Central Plateau, North, East and South central.

People living in households headed by a person working in Agriculture had the highest poverty rates particularly if the household head was a food crop farmer. In 2003, the head court index was 56% when the household head was a food crop farmer and 46 percent when the head was a cash crop farmer. By contrast, people living in households headed by wage earners were less likely to be poor. The headcount was as low as 4% for people living in households headed by an employee at the public sector. People living in households headed by women were less likely to be poor compared to those living in households headed by men. The headcount index for people living in female headed households in 2003 was 37% while those headed by men was 47%. The higher poverty for people living in male-headed households may be due to the fact that they tended to have more members, which may be a reflection of polygamy. More than 50% of the citizens were living under poverty line.

Cape Verde

At the 2000 census, Cape Verde's population was 436,863; more than 50% of the population lives in urban areas. The country is spread over 10 mountainous islands with only 10% arable land and has few exploitable natural resources; it was ranked 106th out of 177 countries in the UNDP 2004 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006), the highest among the ECOWAS countries. The real GDP per capita (in 2000 US Dollars) increased significantly from 852 in 1990 to 1292 in 2004. (World Bank, 2006) Cape Verde considers the development of human capital (education, training and health) as cardinal venture; the country has already achieved some of the millennium development goals - universal primary education and improving maternal health. It is however far from achieving poverty reduction. In September 2004, a growth and poverty reduction strategy platform was put in place aimed at integrating poverty reduction strategies with economic growth.

Based on a relative poverty line approach in 2001/02, the upper poverty line that defines the overall poor was set at 43,250 Cape Verde Escudo per year per capita, representing 60% of the average per capita expenditure. The lower poverty line (defining the extreme poor) was 40% of the average per capita expenditure that is 28,833 Cape Verde Escudo per capital per year. Based on the 2001/02 poverty lines, the overall poverty rate decreased between 1988/89 from 49% to 37%. The extreme poverty rate dropped from 32% to 21%. Poverty depth and severity of poverty also declined over the period. As almost normal all over West Africa, rural households were much poorer than urban households.

In terms of population, the headcount index for rural areas was twice as high as for urban areas (51 percent compared to 25 percent and for households), the poverty incidence was 2.5 times as high in rural areas as in urban areas, (42 percent compared to 17 percent). Poverty depth and severity of poverty were also higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. There was also disparity in terms of poverty amongst the islands. Anatóly recorded the highest poverty rate while Sal Island had the lowest rate of poverty. Large households had a higher risk of poverty than small ones; poverty was also associated with low level of education. In 2001/02, 42 percent of the households headed by a person with no education were poor compared to 28 percent when the head had integrated basic education and 6 percent when the head had secondary education.

The incidence of poverty was as low as 4 percent for households headed by executives, specialists and technicians and 13 percent for those headed by people in the armed forces, administrative staff and machinery and service workers. In contrast, the incidence of poverty was 41 percent upper for households headed by a low skilled worker. Households headed by a person working in the primary sector had the highest incidence (41 percent) and the highest poverty depth (0.15) and severity of poverty (0.08). By differences, households headed by persons occupied in the tertiary sector had the lowest incidence of poverty (19 percent), as well as the lowest poverty depth and severity of poverty.

Households headed by women had a higher poverty incidence than those headed by men in 2001/02, 31 percent compared to 26 percent respectively. 45 percent of the citizens live below the poverty line.

Cote d'Ivoire

According to the United Nations 2007 survey, Cote D'Ivoire which was ranked 164 (out of 177 countries) in the 2004 Human Development Index (UNDP 2006) had an estimated population of 19,096,988 in 2006. Agricultural products cocoa, palm oil, coffee, pineapple sugar cane, cotton, banana etc have been its economic mainstay. The country put in place an anti-poverty program in 1997 with the active support of the World Bank. In 1985, 10 percent of the population in Cote D'Ivoire was living below the established poverty line.

Rural poverty is estimated to be 50 percent in 1995 and 52 percent in 2002 within urban areas. The headcount index for Abidjan, the capital city, was about half the value of the headcount index for the other urban areas (15 percent compared to 32 percent). Between 1985 and 2002, headcount index increased sharply from 10 to 39 percent. About half of the rural populations are poor. People living in female headed households were less likely to be poor compared to the male headed ones. 35 percent of the people in female headed homes were poor compared to 39 of male headed households.

Generally, poverty was associated with large households. In 2002, the national average household size was 5.3 persons. The average household size was 4.6 persons for non-poor households, 7.0 for the poor and 7.3 for the extremely poor. The average household size of the poor varied from one region to another, reaching values as high as 10.5 in the rural Central West region. 67 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Gambia

According to the Gambian central statistics department report of 2006, three quarters of its citizens live in rural areas and it has a population of 1,364,507 following a 2003 census. It is ranked 155 (out of 177 countries) in the UNDP's Human Development Index (UNDP 2006). The economy of Gambia is based on agriculture and tourism. The rural GDP per capita (2000 dollars) increased from 304 in 1998 to 328 in 2001. In any case, it decreased to 308 in 2002 and increased again to 327 in 2004. (World Bank, 2006)

In 1992, a strategy for poverty alleviation was initiated and launched. In 1998, 70 percent of the population was poor and 51 percent was extremely poor. Based on further adjustment of the 1992/93 poverty line in 1998, 47 percent of the population of Gambia was poor while 30 percent was extremely poor that is food poor.

The disparities by type of location and region were also substantial. For instance, 61 percent of the population was poor in the rural areas compared to 21 percent in Banjul, the capital city and 48 percent in other urban areas. Workers in agriculture were poor and extremely (food) poor. In 1998, 64 percent of people working in agriculture were poor and 47 percent were food poor. These levels were 30 percentage points higher than the headcount index of workers in any other type of industry. On the other hand, workers employed in activities of the tertiary sector had the lowest poverty rates. People employed in hotel and restaurants industry and those workers in public administration and defense had less than 20 percent poverty rates.

Ghana

Ghana has 18,912,079 citizens as at its 2000 census figures (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). It was ranked 136th (out of 177 countries) in the UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006). The country depends on cocoa, timber, and gold for economic survival. Ghana also embraced the IMF induced poverty reduction strategy initiative, which culminated in the Ghana growth and poverty reduction strategy.

The absolute poverty line, which was constructed in 1998/99 was based on a minimum nutrition requirement of 2,900 calories per day per adult equivalent. To set the food poverty line, the average consumption basket of the 50 percent population with the lowest expenditure was examined. In the last 15 years, poverty declined considerably in Ghana. Based on the upper poverty line, the decline was from 52 percent in 1991/92 to 29 percent in

2005/06. Base on the lower poverty line, the headcount index decreased by half from 37 percent in 1991/92 to 18 percent in 2005/2006. Improvement in the standard of living of the people also manifested through noticeable decline of poverty depth and severity of poverty.

The decline in poverty took place simultaneously in urban and rural areas. But there were regional and zonal disparities. Rural Savannah, the poorest rural zone in 1992 and urban Savannah the poorest urban zone in 1998 were characterized by a slow process of poverty reduction. In 2005/06, 60 percent of the people from rural savannah and 28 percent of those from urban Savannah were living below the upper poverty line. In contrast, rural forest and urban forest improved tremendously. By 2005/06 28 percent of the rural population and 7 percent of the urban population in forest zone were living below the upper poverty line.

As a result of disparities in poverty decline, the share of the poor living in rural Savannah increased significantly over the period. The Northern part of the country (Northern Upper East and Upper West) had the highest rate of poverty in 2005/06 of over 50 percent. The headcount was over 70 percent in the Upper East and as high as 88 percent in the Upper West. The poor from these 3 regions accounted for about 45 percent of Ghana's poor. People living in male headed households have had higher poverty rates than those living in female-headed ones. In 2005/06, 31 percent of those living in male-headed households were poor compared to 19 percent of those with women heads. Over the 15-year period, the gap in poverty between these two groups diminished in urban areas while it increased in rural areas.

Guinea

Guinea's population as at 2004 was estimated at 9,214,072 and was placed 160th position (out of 177 countries) in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index. (UNDP 2006) Its economy is centered around the rural sector and mining of minerals such as bauxite, gold, diamond and iron. The country also went the way of the IMF by implementing in 2006 a full-blown poverty reduction strategy program. Overall poverty declined from 63 percent in 1994/95 to 49 percent in 2002/03. Within this period, the headcount index increased in urban areas from 18 percent to 24 percent and decreased in rural areas from 82 percent to 60 percent. In 2002/03 the rural population was poorer than the urban population by all poverty measures.

Upper Guinea, middle Guinea and forest Guinea were the poorest regions of the country with more than half of their population living below the overall poverty line in 2002/03. Together, the 3 regions accounted for more than three quarters of the total number of poor in Guinea. 69 percent of the population lives under the poverty line.

Guinea Bissau

In a 2007 estimate by the United Nations, Guinea Bissau population was put at 1,295,841 and it took 173th position (out of 177 countries) in the UNDP's Human Development Index (UNDP 2006). Its economy is based on agriculture and fishing which accounts for about 63 percent of total GDP and general livelihood for the great majority of the people. The country also took the IMF path by initiating a poverty reduction strategy platform.

The approach used in estimating poverty in 2002 was based on the international thresholds of one US dollar and two US dollars per person per day in 1985 prices. In 2002 nearly two thirds of the population of Guinea Bissau was living on less than two dollars a day and about a fifth on less than one-dollar a day. Bissau had 52 percent of its population living on less than two dollars a day the (upper poverty line) representing 21 percent of the total number of poor in the country. The rest of the country had 70 percent of the inhabitants living on less than two dollars a day. The disparity in poverty between Bissau and the other regions also reflected in the poverty depth and severity of poverty. All the regions in Guinea Bissau had more than half of their population living below two US dollars a day. Households headed by men were poor than those headed by women while households with large size were poorer than those with smaller size.

Liberia

The main stay of Liberian economy is commodities such as rubber, timber, iron and diamond. The country has an estimated population of 3,096,55 as at 2003. The real GDP per capita in (2000 US dollar), which had declined sharply from 744 in 1980 to 134 in 1998 increased to 187 in 2002 and then declined again to 130 in 2004. (World Bank 2006) The upper poverty line was set at one US dollar a day per person and the lower poverty line at half a US dollar a day per person. The poverty rates estimated by the 2001 UNDP study on Liberia were not expressed on per capita basis but only household based.

In 2000, 76 percent of the population in Liberia was living on less than one US dollar a day and 52 percent of households on less than half a US dollar a day per person. (UNDP, 2001) From the Liberian millennium development goals report of 2004, it is obvious that the first millennium development goal (to reduce by half by the year 2015 the percentage of people living on less than one US dollar a day) will not be reached. All types of localities were critically affected by poverty in Liberia. In 2000, Monrovia, the capital city, had more than half of the populace living on less than one dollar a day. Households with women heads had lower poverty rate, 69 percent in comparison with 78 percent for these headed by men. An estimated 81 percent of households whose heads had no education were living on less than one dollar a day. Majority of the households regardless of the household head was living on less than one dollar a day per person.

Mali

The population of Mali is 9,790,492 as at its 1998 census. It is ranked 175th (out of 177 countries) in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index. The economy is centered on agriculture, stock breeding, fishing and mining, which accounts for 44 percent of the GDP and provides livelihood for the great majority of the active population. The real GDP per capita in (2000 US dollars) decreased from 220 in 1980 to 183 in 1990 but had a positive trend thereafter reaching 239 in 2003.

Mali also adopted an IMF inspired poverty reduction strategy in 2000. Between 1988/89 and 2001/02 the level of poverty in Mali remained high at 73 percent and 66 percent respectively. The little decline recorded for the whole country was a result of significant poverty decline in Barnako, the capital, and in other urban areas. The decline in Barnako was 10 percentage points while the decline in other urban areas was higher at 23 percentage points. The poverty rate in rural areas, however, remained about the same. Thus, the difference between the urban and rural areas was substantial in 2001/02. In fact, 81 percent of the rural population was poor compared to 33 percent of the urban population. (Du Development Human Durable, 2006) Just as it is with the rural and urban divide, there were also wide regional disparities in poverty between 2001/02.

People living in households headed by farmers, stockbreeders or fishermen had the highest poverty rate in 2001/02, 84 percent of them were living below the upper poverty line, representing 79 percent of the total poor. The next two categories of households with high poverty rates are those headed

by self employed craftsmen 53 percent and those headed by retirees and other non-working persons, 52 percent. In contrast, those people living in households headed by employees in the public sector had the lowest poverty rate; the same held true for employees in the private sector and traders. In 2001/02, female-headed households were less likely to be poor than male headed ones in Mali, 52 percent of the female headed households were poor compared to 59 percent for the male.

Niger

In the 2001 census, Niger recorded a population of 11,060,291 out of which half live in the rural communities. It is considered the poorest country as it ranked 177th (out of 177 countries) in the UNDP 2004 Human Development Index. (UNDP 2006) The country also followed the poverty reduction strategy framework of the IMF. In 2005, 62 percent of Niger's population was poor. The headcount index was highest in rural areas while about two thirds of the population was poor and lowest in Niamey where slightly more than a quarter of the population was poor.

In the eight regions of Niger in addition to the capital, four (Maradi, Zinder, Tilberi and Dosso) had populations in which more than two third was poor. In 2005 Niger, male-headed households had the highest poverty rate than female headed households. The National Institute of Statistics and the World Bank (2000) gave each 54 percent compared to 43 percent respectively. People living in large households had higher poverty rate than those living in small households.

Nigeria

As the most populous Nation in the whole of Africa, the 2006 provisional census figure gave the country's population as 140,033,542 (UN 2007). It was ranked as one of the poorest countries as it ranked 159th position out of 177 countries in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006).

Its main economic good is crude oil and gas though it originally had an agricultural economic base in the early sixties. The real GDP per capita (in 2000 US dollars) decreased from 425 in 1980 to 358 in 1990, remained slightly over 350 up to 2002 then increased to 387 in 2003 and 402 in 2004. (World Bank, 2004) Nigeria also went into the vice grip of the World Bank by tinkering with the National economic development and empowerment strategy NEEDS.

Three types of poverty lines were used to estimate poverty for 2003/04.

- (a) Poverty lines derived from the food energy intake method.
- (b) Relative poverty method
- (c) One dollar a day poverty line.

All three set of monetary poverty estimates (based on the food energy approach, relative poverty line and one dollar a day poverty line) showed that more than half of Nigerian population was poor in 2003/04. Also all three approaches showed the disadvantage of the rural areas and of especially the northern states of Nigeria. The 2003/04 estimates are part of a transition from relative poverty lines used for previous surveys in Nigeria towards absolute poverty lines based on the cost of basic needs approach.

A total of 55 percent of the population was estimated to be poor in 2003/04. Rural areas were disadvantaged with a poverty rate of 64 percent compared to 43 percent in urban areas. About two thirds of the poor (65 percent) were rural residents. The northern part of the country is considerably poorer than the southern part. The three geopolitical zones of the North had the highest poverty rate (at least 63 percent) and together they contained almost two-thirds of Nigeria's poor. Also, in three out of the 36 states of Nigeria, Jigawa, Kogi and Kebbi about 90 percent of the population are poor and in another four states, Kwara, Yobe, Bauchi and Zamfara over three quarters of the population was poor. We can contrast this with two states (Ogun and Oyo) that has less than one quarter of the population poor and another five states (Bayelsa, Abia, Anambra, Ogun and Imo) has less than one third of their population poor. (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005)

Poverty depth and severity of poverty are 1.5 times as high in rural areas as in urban areas. Also the values recorded for the two measures of poverty were much higher in the northern zones than in the south of the country. People living in larger households automatically have higher poverty rates than those living in smaller households. Again, people living in female-headed households have lower poverty rates than those with male heads. In 2003/04 the headcount index was 44 percent in female-headed households compared to 58 percent for males. According to Aigbokhan (2000) female headed households in Nigeria were smaller in size and generally the women head had a higher level of education, two of the factors associated with lower poverty levels.

Senegal

At the last census in 2002, Senegal's population was put at 9,956,202 and was ranked 156th (out of 177 countries) in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index. Agricultural production of peanuts, cereals, cotton and fishing has dominated its economy. The real GDP per capita (in 2000 US dollars) was slightly over 400 in the 1980s and 1990s and increased from 407 in 1998 to 433 in 2001 and 463 in 2004 according to the World Bank. The country has also embraced the western fashioned poverty reduction strategy initiative. Between 1994/95 and 2001/02, the rate of poverty in Senegal declined from 68 percent to 57 percent of the population. For households, the decrease was from 6 percent to 49 percent. Reduction in poverty rate was higher in urban areas than in rural areas for both households and persons. Hence, within the period, the gap between urban and rural areas widened. For instance, in 1994/95 the headcount index was 71 percent in rural areas as well as in urban areas excluding the capital, Dakar.

In 2001/02 the headcount index decreased to 50 percent in other urban areas excluding Dakar but only to 65 percent in rural areas. A similar pattern of change was observed for other measures of poverty. Poverty depth and severity of poverty declined more in urban areas than in rural areas, leading to an increased poverty disparity between towns and villages. Poverty levels varied considerably across administrative regions. In 2001/02 the lowest poverty incidence was found in the Dakar region and Louga where about one third of the households was poor. At the other extreme were the regions of Sunchorikolda and Kaolack with two thirds of the households beings poor. Female-headed households had better poverty levels than those headed by males. Households headed by people with lower education level are poor. The percentage is 54 percent and 46 percent for no formal education or with primary education respectively.

Sierra Leone

The findings of the United Nations population fund and the statistics office in Sierra Leone and according to the 2004 Census figure, Sierra Leone has a population of 4,963,298 and as one of the poorest Nations is ranked 176th (out of 177 countries) in UNDP 2004 Human Development Index. (UNDP, 2006) The real GDP per capita (in 2000 US dollars) decreased from 233 in 1980 to 202 in 1990 and further declined to 126 in 2001. This negative trend was reversed after 2001 and the real GDP per capita increased to 170 in 2004 according to the World Bank.

As a band wagon effect, Sierra-Leone also entered the poverty reduction strategy initiative. The 2003/04 poverty estimates were based on the cost of basic needs approach. To calculate the food poverty line, a 20 item food basket was selected reflecting the consumption pattern of the 20 percent population with the lowest expenditure per adult equivalent. The minimum caloric requirement was set at 2,700 calories per day per adult equivalent. The food poverty line was estimated at 1,033 Leone's per day per adult equivalent at 377,045 Leone's per year per adult equivalent using May 2000 prices.

In 2003/04, 70 percent of the population was living below the overall poverty line and 26 percent below the food poverty line. The poverty depth and the severity of poverty were 0.29 and 0.16 respectively for the overall poverty line. Both rural and urban areas except Freetown suffered high rate of poverty. The headcount index for the overall poverty line was 79 percent in rural areas and 70 percent in urban, areas minus Freetown, which had only 15 percent. All districts in Sierra Leone, except the Western district, had rates of poverty exceeding 50 percent in 2003/04.

The headcount index was particularly high in the districts of Kailahun (92%) Bombali (89%) and Kenema (88%) and people living in male-headed households had 70 percent poverty rate in comparison with 68 percent for female-headed households. In 2003/04, more than three quarters of the people living in households headed by those working in agriculture related jobs were poor in contrast to households headed by persons employed in the private sector or in parastatals/non-governmental organizations. There were large disparities in poverty based on the level of education of the head of the household.

Togo

By the census of 2005, Togo has an estimated population of 5,337,000 and is ranked 147th (out of 177 countries) in UNDP's 2004 Human Development Index. (UNDP, 2006) The real GDP per capita (in 2000 US dollars) declined from 346 in 1980 to 270 in 1990 and 248 in 2000 and has remained in the range of 240-244 since 2001. (World Bank, 2006) Between 1987 and 1989, 32 percent of the population was estimated to live below the overall poverty line and 17 percent below the food poverty line. The headcount index is highest in rural areas, lower in secondary urban centers and lowest in the urban cities. Among the main cities of Togo the index varied from 12 percent in Atakpame to 24 percent in Dapaong. The poorest regions were Savanes

(where more than two thirds of the rural population are poor) and Kara (where more than half of the rural population and about a quarter of the urban population are poor). The Plateau region was better off according to all three measures of poverty.

Based on an overall poverty threshold of 90,000 CFA Francs per year per capita and a food poverty threshold of 70,000 CFA Francs per year per capita in 1995, almost three quarters of the Togolese population (73 percent) was estimated to be poor and more than half (57 percent) extremely poor. (Republique Togolese, 2004) According to the 1995 UNDP analysis, the crisis of 1991–1993 had the effect of equalizing income, plunging all regions of the country into a serious situation of extreme poverty.

Analysis

We shall commence this analysis with a tabular presentation of the rating of ECOWAS countries on the poverty index from the perspective of UNDP Human Development Index of 2006; unlike what obtained in the profile, which is presented in alphabetical order, the presentation in the following table is in order of rating and this is to enhance easy appreciation. Thereafter, we shall discuss the commonalities:

ECOWAS Human Development Index

S#	Country	Rating
1	Cape Verde	106
2	Ghana	136
3	Togo	147
4	Gambia	155
5	Senegal	156
6	Nigeria	159
7	Guinea	160
8	Benin	163
9	Cote d'Ivoire	164
10	Guinea Bissau	173
11	Burkina Faso	174
12	Mali	175
13	Sierra Leone	176
14	Niger	177

Adapted and developed from UNDP Human Development Index, 2006

From the above table, we note as follows:

- Liberia and Mauritania are, unfortunately, not reflected on this table as a result of lack of the relevant statistics; therefore, any generalization here does not include these two countries,
- No ECOWAS country fell within the first one hundred countries; in other words, every country in the sub-region fell below the first one hundred; this also means that none fell within the first and second quarter brackets, 1st – 44th and 45th - 89th respectively,
- Only Cape Verde (at 106th position) fell within the third quarter (90th – 134th) bracket,
- The other nations, which reflect a worrisomely whopping 93% of ECOWAS, fell within the last quarter (135th – 177th),
- Within the last bracket, ECOWAS countries (Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sierra Leone and Niger) took the last five positions—173, 174, 175, 176 and 177, respectively; in a manner of speaking, ECOWAS provided the five-layer foundation for the index.

On further scrutiny of the index based on the details of the country-by-country presentation above, we note some consistent commonalities in the poverty profile of all the countries; these commonalities are: 1) the urban-rural poverty differentia 2) female-headed and male-headed families 3) agriculture-employed and public/private sector-employed and 4) educated and illiterate-headed households and 5) the presence of foreign interventionist agencies.

Urban-Rural Poverty Differentia

From country to country, poverty rate and severity of poverty were consistently higher in rural areas as against urban areas. While this is a global phenomenon, the point remains that the disparity in the case of West African Countries is relatively high.

Female-headed and Male-headed Families

We also note that the family size in male-headed households is generally higher than female-headed household. This may not be unconnected with the effects of polygamy in which the male-headed household has many “pot-holds” reflecting the number of wives; this contrasts with the female-headed households, which equates to one pot-hold. It is therefore natural that, every

other thing being equal, households headed by men are poorer than those headed by women; this fits into the general trend of households with large size being poorer than those with smaller size.

Agriculture-employed and Public/private Sector-employed,

Generally, the agricultural sector is perceived as not generating much income beyond subsistence hence there is the stereotype that people employed in that sector are generally poor. While the US experience presents a departure from this, it is still a valid position especially in the Third World. In the case of ECOWAS, we note that people engaged in the agricultural sector are, generally, poorer than those in other sectors of the economy. This may not be unconnected to the fact that agriculture in the Third World is not mechanized and so yields minimal income as against what obtains in the developed countries like the US.

Educated and Illiterate Heads of Household

It is a natural supposition the an educated person stands a better chance of obtaining a well-paying job than the illiterate who, more often than not, is limited to menial job of labor or the lower rung of any organizational ladder.

Presence of Foreign Interventionist Agencies

In all the countries, the IMF and other Western sister organizations (like USAID) are prescribing policies, conditions and statistical parameters that are bandied to salvage the economies but seem, from all indications, to further aggravate poverty, crisis and instability in the region.

It should be noted that beyond the statistical evidence of poverty and the analysis, a few questions are aroused by the state of poverty in the ECOWAS sub-region; these questions are: What is the state of intra-regional communication network? What is the volume of intra-sub-regional trade? To what extent has the ECOWAS protocol been applied? Why are the efforts of foreign aid organizations not producing the desired effects? And what is the update on the common currency issue. Unfortunately, time and space do not allow a discussion of these, especially given the fact that they do not fall within the purview of the essence of this presentation.

Conclusion

It is said that “a problem identified is seventy-five percent solved.” The basic objective of this effort is the conduct of a social survey identifying the root

causes of poverty and its severity in West Africa and the problems associated with the phenomenon. Illiteracy, agriculture as the economic mainstay and family size vis-à-vis meager income are identified as the root of this phenomenon; this is exacerbated by pervasive corruption, which has been globally identified as being responsible for the decay in infrastructure, failure of social service delivery and all the social malaise that characterize the Third World; given the element of corruption, every effort by international organizations at reducing poverty falls into the cesspit of corruption thereby accentuating the socioeconomic disparity in the system. Doubtlessly, from the statistics and analysis, poverty is pervading in West African countries and the citizens are suffering from acute poverty syndrome resulting from the negative multiplier effect of poverty over a lengthy timeframe.

Another factor is the advent of democracy and the wave of authoritarian regimes that manoeuvre the democratic process towards perpetuation in office. This provokes the following questions: Can people wallowing in poverty sustain democracy? Do beggars have any choice than to do the bidding of their oppressive and exploitative masters? Will a pauperized people not easily compromise their already decimated principles and values for cash-and-carry democracy? Taken alongside prolonged military administration and/or civil war in ECOWAS countries, the implantation of democracy faces a Herculean task; this translates to sit-tight authoritarian regimes whose oligarchic disposition perpetuates the vicious circle of poverty, which can only be broken by a patriotic and creative leadership that is conscious of the endogenous realities of the development. .

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