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**POVERTY IN NIGERIA: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND SOLUTIONS.**

Poverty is not having enough material possessions or income for a person’s needs. According to the United Nations, poverty is the inability of having choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. Poverty can be measured in two ways; absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty, extreme poverty, or abject poverty is a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. On the other hand, relative poverty is a measure of income inequality, it occurs when a person cannot meet a minimum level of living standards, compared to others in the same time and place.

Statistics has shown that in Nigeria, a country that has Africa’s biggest economy, about forty percent of her citizens live in abject poverty. Nigeria is the top oil exporter in Africa which amounts for most of her wealth and is very rich in natural resources, but a failure to diversify the economy has hindered growth and the spread of wealth beyond a rich elite. Nigeria is also overpopulated with a population of 195.9 million as of 2018, more than 82 million Nigerians are believed to live on less than a dollar a day with the highest poverty levels in the northern parts of the country. The three main causes of poverty are income inequality, conflict and political instability and corruption. Other causes of poverty include; poor education, unemployment, poor utilization of resources, debt and overpopulation.

Income inequality can be defined as an extreme disparity of income distributions with a high concentration of income usually in the hands of a small percentage of a population. In Nigeria there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor, this is compounded by the fact that oil revenue is poorly distributed among the population, with higher government spending in urban areas than rurally, there is also high rate of unemployment which renders personal income more divergent. Poor education and unemployment also contribute to income inequality due to the fact that if one doesn’t have access to quality education in the long run he/she will be unemployed leading to a wider gap between rich and poor. Majority of Nigeria’s better paying jobs are in capital intensive sectors, which are very scarce and limited. Lagos is the commercial capital of Nigeria with a very low rate of poverty compared to other parts of the country because unlike Lagos which is capital intensive and the commercial hub many other parts are labour intensive leading to higher rates of poverty in such parts.

Nigeria has experienced many conflicts, ranging from ethnic conflicts to even religious conflicts but little do we know that violent conflicts causes and intensifies poverty. It contributes to poverty by causing damage to infrastructures, destruction of assets, and breakup of communities, forced displacements, increased unemployment and inflation. Displaced households with widows, orphans, elderly and disabled are more vulnerable to falling into conflict as a result of conflict. In the case of an ethnic conflict, even well-off families can fall into poverty. The most conflict affected areas always have the highest levels of poverty. Using the northern parts as a case study, due to numerous attacks of the Boko Haram, a well know Islamic sect, the rate of poverty is very high. Many people have been displaced, facilities destroyed and a lot of people killed. Nigeria is yet to recover from all the damages conflicts have caused that is why there is still a very high rate of poverty and if the conflicts don’t stop, the situation will only worsen.

Corruption is the biggest problem we have as a country, corruption has eaten deep into the roots our nation. The lack of regulatory system has allowed for rampant corruption. This has hindered past poverty alleviation programmes because the funds allocated for creating employment opportunities for citizens, housing and infrastructures have been embezzled by corrupt government officials. When looking at human development, Nigeria is at the bottom of the scale but unarguably one of the most corrupt countries. A main reason for continued poverty is encouragement from the government, the government shows tolerance towards corruption, harsh punishments are not meted out to perpetrators so no one is frightened. Nigerian corruption and poverty are interrelated and encourages each other, taking care of corruption is taking care of poverty. The government are responsible for the wellbeing of the people and the people in power make false promises during their campaign but when they get into power forget the promises and the people who voted them in.

The effects of poverty on a country, especially the economy are immense but it affects the individuals way more than we can imagine. On the society, it is a major cause of social tensions and threatens to divide a nation because of inequalities, it can destabilize a country. In Nigeria today, the economy has been greatly impacted by poverty, causing a decline in the country’s GDP and inflation. The effects of poverty on children’s development leads them to build an antisocial behaviour that acts as psychological defence against their hostile environment. It causes lack of education, child labour, malnutrition and diseases and children are the leaders of tomorrow. Poverty also plays a large part in Terrorism by creating a state of misery and frustration that pushes people to join terrorist organizations. It also affects the health of individuals, due to poor housing and living conditions, little or no food to eat and unsafe drinking water which leads to different diseases. It also affects in many ways mental health. On average the poor live shorter lives than the rich.

Poverty alleviation or poverty reduction, is a set of measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. Simply put, it is lifting the highest possible number of people above the poverty line. There are solutions to reducing poverty, alleviation programs can be set up by the government to alleviate poverty. The best thing is to create jobs, the pathway out of poverty is a well-paying job. Government should encourage and promote entrepreneurship in youths, this can be through provision of grants, micro-financing to help start-ups and provision of vocational training centres to learn skills such as plumbing, masonry, tailoring and catering to enable those that don’t have any tertiary education to make a living.

The government should also invest in quality child care, education and also health care. The educational system should be reengineered and every child should have access to quality education. A child should be able to survive in the outside with just a secondary school living certificate. Funds should also be put into the healthcare sector, every citizen should be entitled to quality health care and free regular check-ups, there should also be funds to help struggling families especially those with little children, to enable them to have a brighter future and to break the cycle of poverty, after all, we are the leaders of tomorrow. The Nigerian economy should also be diversified, we are blessed with so much natural resources but rely just on oil, and we can be great in agriculture and mining if only we focus on diversifying the economy.

Corruption is the major problem in Nigeria. If those in authority can come together and decide to stop corruption, the country will move forward and the resources of the nation will be used for the benefit for the entire populace. If funds are not stolen but instead used for the purpose they were meant for, the kind of change we need will be materialized. The funds should be used for the infrastructure of good roads from rural areas that will aid smooth transportation of farm good from rural areas that will aid smooth transportation of farm goods from rural areas to cities. Developing amenities in rural areas will encourage people to stay in rural areas to farm and not rush to cities for non-existent jobs. This will have a positive effect on the economy. Government can support agriculture by providing grants, loans, extension services, training and machineries to farmers to upgrade their farming system.

It is sad to see so many people living in poverty, everyone should be able to live a comfortable life, and no one deserves to beg for bread. Poverty many never be fully eradicated in Nigeria but it is possible to reduce the rate of poverty. Nigeria is blessed with so much natural resources and if put to good use, the rate of poverty will surely decline. Nigeria, the giant of Africa, has to take back its place, her citizens deserve better and the government can surely do better.