

(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Prospect of forestry in poverty alleviation in Nigeria

T. O. Ibrahim ^{1,*}, A. O. Ogunsiji ¹, O. I. Bolanle-Ojo ² and A. A. Jayeola ¹

¹ Department of Sustainable Forest Management, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), P.M.B. 5054, Jericho Hill, Ibadan, Nigeria.

² Biotechnology Research Centre, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), P.M.B. 5054, Jericho Hill, Ibadan, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The subject of poverty alleviation cannot be over emphasized, this is because its incidence is rampant worldwide and most importantly in the developing countries such as Nigeria. A significant number of the populace, both in the rural and urban centers of the country is affected by poverty. Different scholars have defined poverty and a simple, succinct and encompassing definition is that it is a condition where an individual is not able to adequately cater for his/her basic needs or lacks minimum standard of living. There are many causes of poverty and they all have immediate and future effect on the group of people affected. Many attempts have been made to lessen poverty in Nigeria by successive administration but failed due to one reason or the other. Nigeria has been described by many people as a blessed country and “a land flowing with milk and honey”, this is because of the natural resources that the country has among which Forest is. Forests consist of trees, shrubs and diverse animals living in them. Careful and sustainable management of these natural and artificial forests has hope of drastically reducing poverty to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty; Nigeria; Poverty alleviation; Forestry, sustainable management

1. Introduction

The incidence of poverty is rampant worldwide but mostly common in the developing countries of the world, such as Nigeria [Taiwo and Agwu, 2016]. World Bank [1996b] report released at a United Nations summit rated Nigeria as the second poorest country in the world where most Nigerians are living below the poverty line. Recently, Nigeria has been tagged the poverty capital of the world, overtaking India which is a country with seven times the population of Nigeria. Unfortunately, Nigeria still found herself in this situation despite the various poverty alleviation programmes adopted by successive governments in Nigeria. Over 93 million Nigerians are living in poverty, with about three million who have gone into extreme poverty between November 2018 and February 2019 [Olayinka, 2019]. Poverty can be structural (chronic) or transient. Structural poverty is defined as persistent or permanent socio-economic deprivations and it can be caused by factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skills for gainful employment and endemic socio-political and cultural factors. Transient poverty on the other hand, is temporary and it is caused by natural and man-made disasters [Olowa, 2012]. Transient poverty can be reversed but can become structural and irreversible if it persists [Olowa, 2012]. Poverty causes stress and it changes brain development in young children. Children growing up in poverty experience several stressful events such as neighborhood crime and drug use, divorce, parental conflict, mental health problems of one or more family members and other family problems [Grusky and Wimer, 2011]. It has also been noted by two scholars that poverty-induced stress can be mentally challenging and if it is experienced in early childhood, it can get ‘under the skin’ and change the way the body copes with the environment and the way in which the brain develops [Grusky and Wimer, 2011]. In order to save the present and the upcoming generation from the risk and effect of poverty, there is the need to tackle the problem of poverty in Nigeria. This review paper discusses poverty, its causes, its effects on the people and the prospect of Forestry in alleviating poverty.

*Corresponding author: TO Ibrahim

Department of Sustainable Forest Management, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), P.M.B. 5054, Jericho Hill, Ibadan, Nigeria.

2. Definition of poverty

Several attempts have been made over the years to define poverty and as such, there are several and different perspective to defining poverty. The definitions of poverty include: “It is the inability of a person to attain minimum standard of living and high status in a society [World Bank, 1990]”. Ravallion, [1994b] defined it as the lack of command over basic consumption needs. “It is a pronounced deprivation in well being, in terms of material, education and health services. It involves vulnerability and exposure to risk, lack of opportunity to be heard, and powerlessness [World Bank 2000].” It was defined by Taiwo and Agwu, [2016] as “a condition where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs, unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure, and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her welfare to the limit of his/her potentials and capabilities.” According to Fasoranti [2010], ones perception of poverty is a function of his present experience, the condition of his environment, the aim of his definition, his vocation and his definition of good life. It has been argued recently that poverty is a major determinant/cause of the current insecurity problem in Nigeria. Therefore, from the above definitions, it can be concluded that poverty directly or indirectly affects every facet of life (social, health, education, etc) and can cause serious damage to the people living in it.

3. Causes of poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is multidimensional therefore its causes are the combination of several complex factors. Some of the selected causes of poverty in Nigeria are discussed below.

- **Environmental Degradation:** this is one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria, and on the other hand, poverty itself can be a cause of environmental degradation. This is because in a poverty stricken country such as Nigeria, environmental resources are complementary to other goods and services in terms of production and consumption, also, resources from the environment serve as supplement to other income sources, most especially in time of acute economic stress [Falconer and Arnold, 1989]. Over the years, inaccessibility of the less privileged to credit and resource inputs have made them to result to natural resources such as forests, woodlands and rivers as their means of survival [Dasgupta, 1993]. The consequence of their continuous exploitation of the resources is further depletion of environmental resources thereby making victims of such unsatisfactory ecological practices poor.
- **Migration:** In an attempt to look for greener pasture, many of the working class group in Nigeria has migrated to other countries. This drains on skills and reduces the pace of economic growth and affects the long-run development potential in a country.
- **Unemployment and underemployment:** Gainful employment is important for an individual to earn income and escape from poverty. Lack of skills or extremely low educational levels, medical problems, geographical isolation, discrimination based on race or other attributes and slow economic growth have made a number of people in Nigeria structurally unemployed and poor. High unemployment particularly affects youths, women urban dwellers, and those “queuing” for good jobs in the formal sector [Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 1999].
- **Low economic growth performance:** In developing countries such as Nigeria, growth that generates employment and that is export based is desirable in order to achieve growth that is poverty reducing with equity. Rapid economic growth has been directly linked to poverty reduction [World Bank 1990]. For example, in Indonesia and Thailand, there was about 30 to 40 percent reduction in poverty during a twenty-year period in which annual growth rates were approximately 3 percent and the countries that had the least reduction in poverty (India and Sri Lanka) had growth rates of less than 1 percent [Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 1999]. Growth can reduce poverty through rising employment, increased labour productivity and higher real wages it generates.
- **Governance:** The persistence of poverty in several countries such as Nigeria has been linked to the lack of accepted participation in governance and decision-making as well as weak institutional base. This has contributed to poor accountability, transparency in resource allocation, weak programme implementation and monitoring.
- **Corruption:** There is corruption in absolutely all level of governance in Nigeria and this to a large extent has contributed to poverty. Government officials often take the funds that are supposed to go into public trusts and instead siphon that money into their own personal bank accounts [Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 1999].

- Labour markets deficiencies: In most countries of the world, the majority of poor households participate in the labour market in one way or the other, and thus poverty is a problem of low wages, low labour returns to rural self-employment activities, underemployment, and in some cases, protracted unemployment. When there are deficiencies in labour market, the poor are affected by limited job growth and absorption capacity in the formal sector.
- Human resource development: Investment in people can boost the standard of living of households by expanding opportunities, raising productivity, attracting capital investment, and increasing earning power. This is key for human capital development and capability to escape from poverty. Continued investment in human capital with improvements in efficiency is necessary to sustain reduction in poverty.
- Diseases: Diseases restrict the affected population in the labour market to earn income. When a country has a high disease incidence (rate), absenteeism is high, productivity is low and less wealth is created. Apart from the misery, discomfort and death that result from disease, it is also a major factor that causes poverty in any community. Good health is basic to human welfare and a fundamental objective of social and economic development. Poor health affects human capital, impedes entrepreneurial activities and holds back growth and economic development.
- Crime and Violence: A steady increase in crime and violence has degraded the quality of life in Nigeria and other counties of the world. Because of the diverse nature of the poor, it may be hard to link poverty and crime and violence directly, but the adverse social consequences of crime has been closely associated with poverty, for example, loss of lives at productive age and quantum loss of properties.

4. Poverty level in Nigeria

As of 2019, an individual living in Nigeria with less than 137,430 Naira (roughly 361 U.S. dollars) per year was considered poor. Similarly, a person having under 87,800 thousand Naira (about 215 U.S. dollars) in a year available for food was considered to be living below the poverty line according to Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS) reported by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in May 2020.

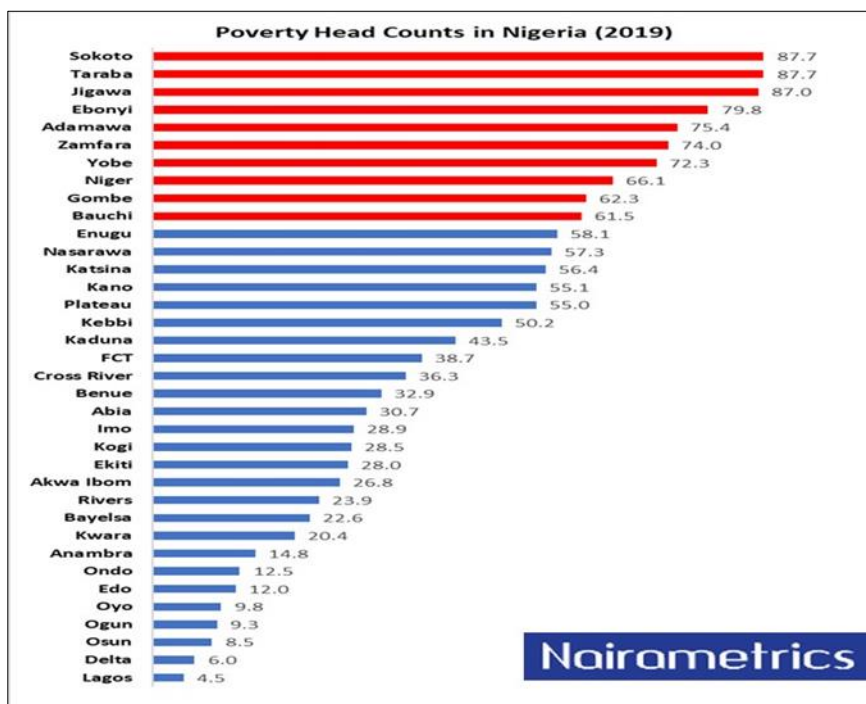


Figure 1 2019 poverty headcount rate (percentage of population) in Nigeria; [Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2019]

Consequently, 40.1 percent of the country’s population estimated to be 82.9 million people is classified as poor. In other words, an average of 4 out of 10 individuals in Nigeria is living below the poverty line [NBS, 2019]. It should be noted

that this number excludes Borno state because only households from accessible areas were interviewed. Thus, the Borno sample is considered non-random and non-representative.

Figure 1 shows the poverty head counts in Nigeria in 2019, It presents Sokoto and Taraba to be the most poverty stricken states in Nigeria with 87.7% of their population living below the poverty line and Lagos state has the least percentage (4.5%) of people living below the poverty line.

5. Effects of poverty in Nigeria

Regardless of the causes of poverty, it has devastating consequences on the people who live in it. Much research conducted by different scholars, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations has documented the effects of poverty on the lives of the poor [Moore, *et. al.*, 2009; Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2010; Sanders, 2011]. Some of the effects are discussed below:

- **Family Problems:** The poor are at greater risk for family problems, including divorce and domestic violence. A major reason for many of the problems families experience is stress [Sanders, 2011]. Even in rich families, running a household can cause stress, children can cause stress, and paying the bills can cause stress. Families that are poor have more stress because of their poverty, and the ordinary stresses of family life become even more intense in poor families. The various kinds of family problems thus happen more commonly in poor families than in wealthier families. To compound the problem, the poor families have fewer resources to deal with these problems when they occur [Moore, *et. al.*, 2009].
- **Health, Illness, and Medical Care:** Health problems, including infant mortality, earlier adulthood mortality, and mental illness are more common and intense among the poor, and due to lack or limited fund, they more likely to receive inadequate medical care [Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2010]. Poor children are more likely to have inadequate nutrition and, partly for this reason, to suffer health, behavioral, and cognitive problems. These problems in turn impair their ability to do well in school and have stable employment as adults thus making poverty to persist across generations.
- **Education:** Poor children typically go to schools that are below standard and have inadequate facilities. They are at greater risk of not graduating from high school than the children of the wealthy and some do not go to college at all [Sanders, 2011]. Their lack of education in turn restricts them and their own children to poverty, thus causing further vicious cycle of poverty across generations.
- **Housing and Homelessness:** The poor are more likely to be homeless than the rich and average citizens and they are also more likely to live in dilapidated houses. They are unable to buy or build their own houses, many poor families spend more than half their income on rent, and they tend to live in poor neighborhoods where there are no job opportunities, good schools, and other features of modern life that wealthier people benefit from [Moore, *et. al.*, 2009]. The lack of adequate housing for the poor remains a major national problem. Even worse is outright homelessness.
- **Crime and Victimization:** The poor (and near poor) people account for the bulk of the street crime (homicide, robbery, burglary, etc.). This is partly because of deep frustration and stress of living in poverty and the fact that many poor people live in high-crime neighborhoods [Sanders, 2011]. In such neighborhoods, children are more likely to grow and interact with older peers who are already in gangs or otherwise committing crime. Moreover, because the poor are more likely to commit street crime, they are mostly arrested, convicted and imprisoned for street crime.

6. Past poverty alleviation programmes

From the inception of Nigeria, there has been various poverty alleviation programmes that has been put in place but do not succeed as their long term impacts were not felt. Below are some of the programmes according to Taiwo and Agwu [2016]:

- Farm settlement option was introduced in the 1960s to develop both the export and cash crops but collapse in 1972.

- Agriculture Development Project (ADP) was established in 1973 after the collapse of farm settlement to provide credit facilities for the development of agricultural projects. It was partly financed and executed by the World Bank in order to promote integrated rural developments.
- Operation Feed the Nation came on board in 1976, its purpose is to stir up the habit of cultivating food and cash crops so as to be self-reliant, and also to teach the rural farmers how to use modern farming tools.
- In 1977 the Rural Banking Scheme was designed to bring banking nearer to the people at the grassroots through granting of credit facilities.
- Austerity Measures: this was introduced by Federal Military Government in 1978 by banning the importation of some goods and placing others on license. Government expenditure was greatly reduced and emphasis was placed on the consumption of made-in-Nigeria goods. But the measures were relaxed in 1979.
- Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) was another poverty alleviation programme targeted at the rural areas. It was sustained through the provision of feeder roads, rural water supplies and rural electrification. DFRRI was formed for community development and social mobilization, community self-help projects, adult education, home economics, rural development, data collection and analysis, and the provision of rural housing and infrastructures.
- Better Life Programme (BLP): introduced in 1987 was targeted at the rural women; the thrust of the programme was self-help and rural development programmes, skill acquisition and health care.
- The Family Support Programme (FSP): this was another poverty alleviation programme, launched in 1994 and targeted at the families in the rural areas. It was supported with health care delivery, child welfare, and youth development.
- Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was another of the series of poverty alleviation programmes introduced in 1997. It was targeted at the rural areas through granting of credit facilities to support the establishment of small industries.
- In 1999, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was introduced. It focuses on the provision of strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria. NAPEP is complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) which is to coordinate poverty reduction related activities of all the relevant Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. The poverty reduction-related activities of the institutions under NAPEP have been classified into four - Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) and Natural Resources Development and Conservative Scheme (NRDCS).

7. Way forward: prospect of forestry

Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa, [2012] stated that in spite of the vast resources committed to poverty alleviation by every successive administration; no obvious achievement has been accomplished in this direction. Thus, the need to look into other ways by which the issue of poverty can be addressed in Nigeria arises. Since there are different causes of poverty, there are also different approaches to alleviating poverty in Nigeria. Harnessing forest resources in a sustainable way is therefore one of the approaches to lessen poverty.

In spite of industrialization and the various alternative employment options available in the twenty-first century, natural resources provide the biggest livelihood opportunities to a large population in the world. In underdeveloped and developing countries, two-thirds to three-quarters of the human population is dependent on land and the forest for their livelihood [Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa, 2012]. Agriculture has always been a major source of livelihood but population increase has limited further farm expansion and the land under use are losing fertility rapidly due to continual cultivation. Ogunsijet *al.*, [2020] concluded that the agricultural sector in the country needs sustainable growth which will benefit rural farmers and also help alleviate rural poverty and food insecurity, therefore, deliberate attempts should be made to initiate scientific approaches to growing of trees on farmland. The act of growing trees on farmland with arable crops is Agroforestry and it is an important branch of forestry. It allows farmers to produce several goods and services on the same unit of land in an integrated manner to address a broader array of demands [Jermal and Callo-concha, 2017]. It guarantees the possibility of having several products both for consumption and income purposes on the same piece of land. Forest resources therefore become the source that together with agriculture and animal husbandry can provide major livelihood opportunities to the rural communities.

Forests protect our valuable soil and prevent erosion, thereby addressing the problem of land degradation as a cause of poverty in Nigeria. They provide clear air and also provide a strong basis for agriculture and industrial progress. Forest dwellers and people living near forest areas depend on natural forests for their nutritional requirements, agricultural implements, raw material for cottage industries and fodder for livestock.

Basically, there are three ways among others by which forests contribute to poverty reduction (FAO, 2003):

- It provides the forest resources that are important for maintaining well-being (e.g. medicinal plants, food resources, erosion control)
- Through continued access to forest resources and rents (e.g. access rights, income from forest products) and
- It increases forest production values (e.g. payment for environmental services, recreational uses).

Commercial forestry offers opportunities to address poverty as identified by the World Bank. Material deprivation can be addressed directly by increasing income through improved access to timber harvesting and processing activities (the timber species must however be replaced to avoid deforestation). This requires increased involvement of forest-dependent poor in the timber-value chain. Increased income at the household or community level can in turn improve access to educational and health services, which enhance economic opportunities and well-being, as well as reducing vulnerability in the face of rapid social change and environmental stresses such as drought or flooding.

8. Conclusion

Generally, forests provide a wide range of economic and social benefits to man. The benefits include contribution to the overall economy (through employment, processing and trade of forest products), investments in the forest sector, protection of sites and landscapes of high cultural, spiritual or recreational value among others. Considering the prospect of forest in reducing poverty incidence in Nigeria, it is important to sustainably manage the existing forest and bring more land under forest cover. Since several measures directed to the reduction of poverty in Nigeria have failed, opportunities in forestry should be explored by government, nongovernmental organizations and individuals so as to pull the nation out of abject poverty.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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