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Ekpeyong, Paul

University of Ibadan, Global Econometric clinic

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# **Public Policy Strategies for Poverty Alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Inclusive Approach**

*Paul Gabriel Ekpeyong*

## **Abstract**

In retrospect, the poverty problem has deepened in many Sub-Saharan African countries in the last several decades, underpinning the region's inability to sustain peace and stability, and in the process threatening years of development post-independence. This worsening situation is reflected in the HDI of the sub-continent which is on the lowest bracket in the global league. Subsequently, most of the countries have formulated and embarked on poverty reduction strategies in order to eradicate the status of "extremely poor" and also to receive debt forgiveness from the multi-lateral as well as bilateral organizations. Nevertheless, the effects of these endeavors have been mixed. This paper aims at identifying the status of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and qualitatively look at the modern policies that keep the problem alive today. What it enshrines is an elaborate strategy for poverty eradication, which puts emphasis on a consultative process for addressing the plight of extreme poverty in the region.

Key word: poverty, sub-Saharan, Africa, Policies,

## **1. Introduction**

Thus, today poverty continues in only certain regions, for instance, most regions of the Third World, having become an array of the phenomenon in the course of the World War II. Nevertheless, Africa still has some troubling socio-economic issues of poverty, which, on the contrary to the economic progress in certain countries after adopting economic liberalization and structural adjustment postures, increased in the continent (Wilson, Kanji, & Braathen, 2001). Thus, poverty in Africa can be described as multidimensional poverty involving factors like low purchasing power; majority dwell in rural areas; high rates of sensitivity to climatic effects; restricted access to basic social and economic facilities; and minuscule possibility for the kinds of employment that exist in the formal sector, from which the great many derive their livelihoods (Hanmer, Pyatt, & White, 1999). Moreover, other critical factors like diseases and illnesses, famines, ill-health, housing, and political repression, illiteracy add more straights to the poverty cart on the continent.

It is therefore a complex problem that degrades a person or a group's capacity to attain fundamental needs. Despite the lack of a widely accepted definition of poverty, it is quite easy to define its common characteristics in different societies (Baker, 2000). In the same manner as development, poverty is not a simple issue free from controversies and contradictions; it can neither be adequately quantified, nor can it be understood as a single, pathological process. However, poverty is a complex phenomenon and depends on the physical and social well-being of the people, context of cultural and geographical areas, and historical epoch (United Nations, 2000). Understanding the phenomena of poverty is important to build right strategies to eliminate extreme poverty in the world.

The standard of living, as well as general well-being, have considerably worsened in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, particularly since the 1980s, and ruminating extreme poverty as one of the paramount issues confronting the region. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the only region where poverty rates are on the rise and at a very dangerous rate (Chant 2003; UNCTAD 2013; Anetor, Esho. & Verhoef 2020). In an attempt to tackle this crisis, the United came up with a Special Initiative for Africa (UNSIA) in 1996 of dealing with poverty in the region. The global society has increasingly acknowledged inherent and emerging poverty crises in Africa and the clear and present danger the poverty crisis presents to the political, social and economic fabrics of African societies. As a result, many national, sub-regional and international

organizations have come up with and put into practice poverty reduction policies in most countries within Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of such strategies has not been stable, meaning that the results of these strategies have been rather mixed (Zahonogo, 2017).

Overall in many Sub-Saharan African nations the poor are accorded very little say to government's on policies meant to help better their lives. It is a widely seen that poverty reduction policies are based on top-down strategies, where power and decision making lies mainly within the central authorities, including local government at the expense of other sub-national governments and communities (Chinkin, C. , 2001). These local entities are where the poor most directly engage with perceived capability. This imbalance partly answers why, many of the government-led poverty alleviation programs in the region have been counterproductive, posing as a waste of scarce resources and, in certain circumstances, having a negative effect on some of the society's neediest members (Gohou, & Soumaré, 2012).

Understanding this as a critical issue, this paper will endeavor to present an analysis of some of the causes of poverty in the region and then suggest some measures that maybe used to inform policies that will support poverty eradication efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa in the future. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: While Section II assesses poverty in the present, Section III describes past poverty reduction strategies of the region and Section IV presents recommendations and critical remarks.

## 2.0 The Context of Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa

### 2.1 The Menace of Mass poverty in Africa

Thus, the problem of mass poverty is one the most urgent and acute in the present-day Africa (UNECA, 1999; 1999a; World Bank, 2000). In addition to South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa remains home to the greatest number of poor people in the entire world. For instance, it is also a region where poverty is on the increase unlike in the other developing regions where efforts to eradicate poverty have born fruits (World Bank, 2000a).

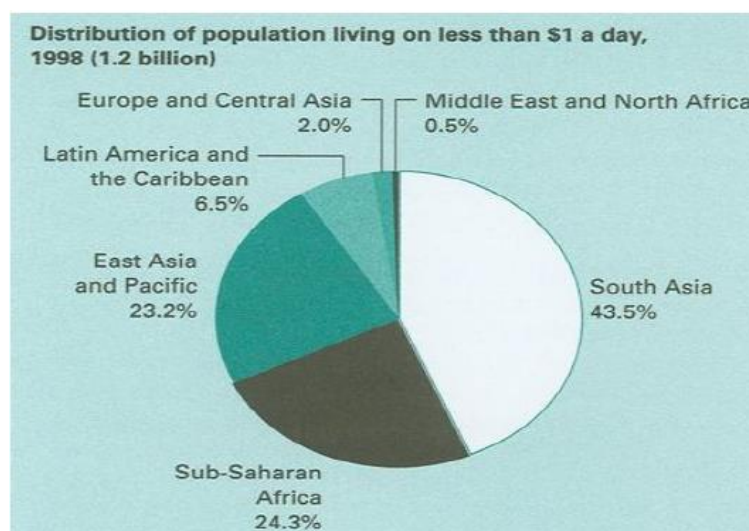


Figure 1: Display of the population distribution in poverty globally at the New Millennium era (World Bank 2000a.)

As shown in the world map in figure 1, Sub-Saharan Africa had a considerable proportion of the world's poor population at the end of the twentieth century; 24.3 %. Extreme poor population in relation to the global population. The only region with this simulated percentage was South Asia, 43 percent are believed to be living extreme poverty. Sub-Saharan African's new poverty index by 2012 put the ratio of people surviving on \$1 per day at 41 percent (Igbinedion & Abusomwan, 2014). It was established, for instance, that more than 40% of people in Sub-Saharan Africa, 45—50%, to be precise, live below their national poverty rate, a figure considered higher than that of any other region in the world. This region combined with South Asia boast of some of the poorest citizens in the world today. Yet poverty incidence is decreasing in South Asia while in Sub-Saharan Africa its incidence has been increasing. The poverty gap (the concentration of poverty by comparing the poverty line with the income of the poor) is acute in SSA, which presently has an index of 15 per cent for 1981 - 95 and 16 per cent for 1997 (OECD, 1998; UNECA, 2014).

The available data indicate that up to 47% of Sub-Saharan Africans earn less than \$1 per day with more than half of such populace in East Africa and Nigeria (World Bank, 2001). The estimated income for a poor African daily was only \$0 during the period of the late 1990s. (Bread for the World Institute, 1997). The standard poverty line is the \$1 per day set by the World Bank as a line of comparison of the poverty levels across countries. Also, the Human Poverty Index developed by the UNDP deals with human poverty which is defined in terms of restriction in the basic capabilities in areas like longevity, knowledge and decent standard of living which are deemed as wider dimensions of human development (Yusuf, 2008). High income poverty will also tend to be highly related to high human poverty, and vice versa. But these two types of poverty are not always linked. For instance, while Kenya records high income poverty; it has registered a decline in human poverty for the same time as countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania have registered a higher income poverty but a higher human poverty too (Ogujiuba, & Jumare, 2012). This is the case since the reduction of income poverty does not always correlate with enhancements in remaining human development (UNDP, 1998).

Poverty in SSA can therefore be described in various dimension. Given the status of the majority of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) population lives in conditions that seem to be severely deprived, and these indicators include levels of hunger, illiteracy, mortality rates, and life expectancy at birth (Yahie, 2000). This extremely low level of funding in Sub-Saharan Africa has distorted development initiatives, potential and poses a danger of reversing country's gains after independence. It also poses major challenges to attaining the MDGs developmental goals on sustainable eradication of poverty in the upcoming decade with the target of cutting world poverty in half by year 2015. Based on the recent estimations, it is expected that in the year 2040, the population that will be living below \$1. About 25 per day in Sub Saharan Africa could rise to over twice of South Asia's rate unless major policy initiatives are taken immediately (refer Table 1).

Table 1: Projections on Extreme Poverty by Region, 2010-2050 (Millions)

<i>Region</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2030</i>	<i>2040</i>	<i>2050</i> <i>(base case)</i>	<i>(base 2050,accelerated progress)</i>
<i>Arab states</i>	25	19	17	16	17	1
<i>East Asia and the pacific</i>	211	74	42	29	29	9
<i>China</i>	94	13	5	1	1	0
<i>Europe and central Asia</i>	14	2	3	3	4	1
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	34	29	26	27	32	13

<i>South Asia</i>	557	382	243	135	81	13
<i>India</i>	416	270	134	53	21	2
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	371	333	297	275	267	60
<i>World</i>	1212	841	627	485	430	96

Source: *Human Development Report, 2013, pp. 103*

The presence of poverty in both rural and urban locations in Sub-Saharan Africa is known to be widespread. As stated in a UNECA publication, this issue is more pronounced in rural areas where, on average, 59% of the population lives on less than \$26.00 per month. Among the nations investigated, Ghana stands out with the lowest rates at only 35%. On the contrary, Central African Republic has the highest rates with 78% of its rural inhabitants surviving under \$251.00 each year or about \$21.00 each month.

*Table 2: Summary of poverty across sector in sub-Sahara Africa*

<i>Poverty Indicator</i>	<i>Rural Sector</i>	<i>Urban Sector</i>	<i>National</i>
<i>Mean Expenditure (\$)</i>	31.67*	69.08	42.75
<i>Poverty Line(\$)</i>		43.42	31.43
<i>Average Expenditure of the Poor (\$)</i>	25.92*	26.93	17.64

Source: UNEGA 1999

Unemployment has therefore emerged as a monumental issue especially in African cities, and more so in the post structural adjustment and economic liberalization era. Wrong policies such as the privatization of inefficient public enterprises and the downsizing of the public sector also led to mass layoffs. With Guinea, Mali, Uganda for instance having reduced civil service by over 10% within the period 1985/96 (Hope Sr, 2008). This coupled with speedy urbanization due to influx of people from the rural areas looking for job opportunities has increased unemployment in the urban areas. However, rural poverty is more extensive, and 70% of the continent's poor lived in rural areas during mid-1990s; urban poverty is consequently increasingly as there is insufficient formal employment in cities. Some of the southern African countries including Swaziland, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Angola had in the 1990s urban poverty rates of more than forty percent most of which resulted from influx of rural-urban migration (Griffone, , 2010).

Credit delivery to the poor has not been well provided for by the orthodox formal financial institutions which has resulted to the development of the IFNs which are financial networks that are based on local culture and are closely associated with their customers. Such networks have demonstrated real growth rate as revealed in Benin where during 1990-95, the number of IFNs membership increase by 360% with proportional increases in deposit, loans and capital (Davies, 2006). Likewise, the poor's market access has increased through economic liberalisation but it is still restricted. Government interference with key crop prices and poor working capital funds are some of the knockdown factors as highlighted by continuing political discussions in Malawi and Zambia (Chirwa et al., 2008). Thirdly, the investment on infrastructure has been concentrated on urban areas which has left the rural producers out of reach of markets, inputs, and equipment (Seppala, 1997).

Even basic service infrastructure is still a problem in SS Africa especially where there are still large proportions of rural dwellers in the countries. For example, recent survey have shown that more than two thirds of the population of the region were without access to safe water in 2000, not to mention the situation

with health services and sanitation facilities (World Bank, 2002). In social service delivery and poverty, the ranking of the countries is as follows: Botswana, Gabon, Mauritius, and South Africa; however, due to urban growth bias or growth without inclusion, rural/urban disparities are marked (Chinwa et al., 2008).

Another crucial factor that has contributed to this vice and in extension affected poverty in Africa is the HIV/AIDS epidemic. AIDS epidemic affects communities tremendously, especially those in Africa which has three-quarters of the cumulate HIV-positive population; that is why the situation in Botswana is critical: more than a quarter of adults are HIV positive. HIV/AIDS on its own is a source of poverty through the premature removal of income earners, hence diminishing household income, and increasing deprivation (Griffore, 2010; Hope Sr, 2008). This has now taken a turn since the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, poverty increases, for examples in Zambia, two-third of the urban households whose breadwinner has been sucked by the disease has facing 80% decline in incomes, UNAIDS (2002a). This situation also has national implications; Botswana for example is estimated to lose 20 percent of its public revenue by the year 2010 because of productivity losses resulting from AIDS (UNAIDS, 2002b).

## **2.2 Current Challenges and Widespread Poverty**

For Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty is a complex problem that has remained persistent over years and which has policy implications. Some of the antecedents that underlie poverty in the area include a low employment level, investment in and market access to physical capital resources, and human capital, geographical isolation, and structure, rural infrastructure and development (World Bank, 1996). This is compounded by depletion of natural resources, non-provision of social justice for the needy and poor and minimal inclusion in the decision making process. These aspects have led to what Rowlands terms a cycle of dependency which seeks to negate endeavors towards the attainment of the age of sustainable development and prosperity in the African continent (UNDP, 1997).

Perhaps one of the more significant questions of development when thinking about poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa is a question of chasing the curve. Despite these progresses made in the reduction of poverty around the world, African economy has from time stagnated or has been extremely slow in its growth thus challenging poverty alleviation on the continent. Moreover, the region is also marked by very sharp differential in economic development and these are between countries and within countries especially along the gender, ethnic and rural-urban divide (UNDP, 1997). This reality undermines attempts to synch economic growth and human development as the foundation the fight against poverty and better lives for the poorest people of Africa.

New dimensions to poverty also emerged in Sub-Saharan Africa because of the globalization process, HIV/AIDS pandemic, environment degradation and endemic conflicts. The region has still retained a peripheral status in the international economy share of exports in GDP remains low compare to other developing regions such as East Asia (World Bank, 1996). In this regard, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS has led to increased poverty and forms a cycle of poverty as most of the affected community loses their means of incomes. Pollution of the environment as a result of population and urbanization pressure has caused destruction of some of the most important natural resources and as a result increased poverty both in the rural and urban sectors. Also, violence destroys social and physical assets and makes millions of people at risk from diseases, famine and severe poverty (UNDP, 1997). These issues are multidimensional and interconnected; the challenges that they pose are therefore huge for poverty reduction and sustainable development in the region.

### **3.1 The Policy Imperative for Poverty Reduction in Africa**

It is now well understood that statism has not helped to reduce poverty in Africa. Also statism failed to eradicate poverty; in fact it stunted private sector growth and incentive, resulting in deterioration of performance, embezzlement and sub-optimality (Griffore, 2010). But replacing statism with economic liberalization in developing countries and especially in Africa has not only not eradicated this problem, but has first aggravated poverty. This has led to worsening of the economic hardships of vulnerable persons who form the working poor in the society with no social security to support them when shifting from a protected structure to an openly liberalized one.

Therefore, an important imperative for development policies in Africa becomes that of incorporating the poor into the wider socio-economic entity. This can be obtained by policies that spur economic growth and employment among the poor. However, extraordinary emphasis need to be placed on economic development for the poor to benefit from the socio-economic development. As used herein, autonomy means urging the poor to take an active role in economic activities without which they cannot survive rather than turning to the state for help. In creating an environment that enables the poor of the state to better their conditions, it has the responsibility of being the central provider of the solutions (Ogujiuba & Jumare, 2012). Growth really plays a central role in lifting living standards and eradicating poverty within a nation. Thus, to halve poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the growth rate has to be stepped up. As for sub-Saharan Africa, such sources as the World Bank (1998) and UNDP (1997) suggest that to make a positive shift in poverty's trend, let alone maintain the positive results, the region has to grow at least 7% per annum. Even where there has been a small growth in Africa's real GDP in the 1990s the rates of growth are inadequate to generate improved poverty levels (African Development Bank, 1998; World Bank, 2002:7). Hence, there is a need for enhancing the process of economic reforms to speed up the growth rate in the region.

Policy-wise, there are four interrelated issues on which focused and coherent effort is needed to include the poor in economic advancement. First, the growth that generates employment is necessary, especially in the informal sector that has already paved its way into many African countries' economies. In particular, the informal business organizations that exercise little control and regulation over their operations play an important role in African economies generating significant share of the gross domestic product and providing numerous jobs (Igbinedion, & Abusomwan, 2014). According to Hope (2001), Schneider (2002) it is believed that by the year 2020 the informal sector will be the one contributing 66% of GNP in Africa and is being practiced by most of the people. This sector must be identified and encouraged so as to contribute towards poverty alleviation and development.

Second, it is important to make credit available for the poor since this is a sure way of ensuring that they engage in income generating activities. The poor particularly the women can be locked out of the formal financial market structures. There is evidence that giving credit to the poor can work as the example of success – the Grameen Bank case in Bangladesh (Hajdu et al., 2011). Hence, it becomes important to develop credit programs with fairly low transaction costs coupled with flexibility to enable the poor increase their economic activities. In addition, the formulation of national policies to address issues to do with SMMEs can also go a long way in this respect (Ssewamala et al., 2010).

Third, human capital development is important in the poverty reduction process in the long run. Education and health services are the two areas that, if directed primarily to women and children in the poor sectors, will greatly enhance the health of the poor. These are key areas that Governments have to allocate more social expenditure, rearrange budgets to eliminate the unnecessary spending and concentrate on education and health. Increased investment in people as a factor of production can result to increased output, economic growth and more so, reduced income gap (Fisher et al., 2003).

Due to the failure of the African states to receive social services in a harmonized manner, countries that meet the provisions of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) scheme have been compelled to prepare and implement their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These papers which were launched in 1999 by the World Bank and the IMF, present and discuss the commitments of a country to Macroeconomic, Structural and Social policies required for growth and Poverty reduction over a period of more than three years. The PRSPs are arrived at through consultations with the government, civil society, and development partners, and it is through the PRSPs that the debt relief ought to be utilized. Nevertheless, the HIPC process has been experiencing some difficulties, the African Finance Ministers demanding higher and quicker volume of debt relief and support tools to address the creditor inconsistencies (World Bank, 1996a). The

The use of PRSPs has been one way of dealing with inequity in the provision of social services, but shortcomings still exist in the quest for the intended results. Besides, there is necessity in the formation of social protection systems. These safety nets often take the form of direct income transfers, which serve multiple purposes: as a tool which aimed at equalizing the income, sustaining social order, improving the conditions of the labor market and offering the hedge against the risks that free market does not consider. Through deficiency payments, income redistribution seeks to shield people from unemployment, secure for them a steady income throughout their life cycle and make certain that anybody unable to work or look after their own needs will have a minimum income (Fisher et al., 2003; World Bank, 1996a).

It can be concluded that income transfer systems introduced by each African country should be as differently designed as the countries' specific contexts, at the same time, reflecting the tendencies of a liberalizing economy. As with all revenue transfers aimed at a target group, the goal is to target efficiently and not incur more than the benefits yielded in the process of making the transfers. The specifications have to be set as to guarantee sufficient support for the involved systems without creating the overwhelming number of problems for the administration or requesting more than employers are ready to invest. By doing so, the African nations can go around the needs of the vulnerable populations and improve the effectiveness of the various poverty reduction processes (Ssewamala et al., 2010).

### **3.2 Future Outlook on Poverty and Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Nevertheless, Sub-Saharan Africa, which has lately posted some development strides, has not been able to shed off its poverty and hunger indices. On the basis of such projections made in the late 1990s, people living in poverty were pegged at 315 million in 1999, while by 2015 the figures were projected to rise to about 404 million. However, as the above noted figures depict such a picture, there are encouraging trends. As of 2003, 24 countries in the region registered average growth rates of 5 percent and above; poverty decline has been most strongly associated with economic growth (UNECA, 2005).

But these dynamics of economic growth have not been translated into changes of income or employment status for the poor in the same proportion. Some of the economies that have grown in the sub-Saharan region have grown because of industries such as the oil sector which by its nature is capital-intensive, and therefore cannot provide employment opportunities for the poor. This is well supported by the period 1998-2004 whereby Sub-Saharan Africa registered growth of real GDP but a diminishing growth in employment (UNECA, 2005). Therefore, poverty reduction in the context of the region will entail a transition to labor-intensive techniques that impact the poor more cloilly. Indeed, some countries are already moving in this direction in what can only be described as positive development. For example, Senegal has increased its fish and fish products exports and Mali as increased in export of rice due to proper irrigation methods (CFA, 2005). On balance, expectations of the future point to the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa has prospects of



delivering considerable enhancements in growth attributable to progress in the areas of agriculture, mining, foreign investment as well as tourism (UNECA, 2005).

### **3.3. Concluding Remarks**

Poverty continues to be rife in the African continent and this is still remains the most significant developmental issue facing the continent. The poverty rate has been constantly rising in the sub Saharan Africa, and therefore, it is considered to have the highest poverty rate within the world. Prevalence of absolute poverty, defined as the proportion of people earning less than \$1 a day, is approximately 17% higher in this region than in the next poorest region, that is, South Asia (AEMFI, 2001). The most interesting thing about poverty in Sub Sahara Africa today is that poverty has risen while there has been some economic growth. This is a paradox that calls for a reconsideration of the poverty employment and growth nexus because the model of growth has not achieved poverty reduction.

The main problem of the region is a high level of poverty due to the previous and longstanding economic decline, war, diseases, and lack of resources. For policymakers to address the enormity of the tasks of eradicating both the incidence and intensity of poverty with a view to meeting the Copenhagen Social Summit of 1995 pledge to halve poverty by 2015, there is the need to 'engage the resources' of all stakeholders. Reducing poverty will also require coordination in effort, meaning a large amount of funding will have to be directed to the task so as to bring about a life change for the poor (AEMFI, 2001).

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