An Appraisal of Urban Poverty and Measures for its Alleviation in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study was undertaken to appraise urban poverty and measures for its alleviation in Makurdi metropolis. Double-stage random sampling was used to select the sample size of 120 respondents. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to describe the data. The study identified poverty of income and access as the main causes of urban poverty. The results of the study indicated that about 52% of the respondents earned an average income of <₦200,000.00 pa, 59% do not own personal houses and about 56% send their wards to public institutions. Only about 54% have access to pipe borne water; 51% go to public hospitals and about 71% have access to public power supply that is erratic. The study concludes that accessibility of functional public facilities stand out as the key determinants of employment outcome and income earnings. It recommended that the extent to which urban poverty can be alleviated depends on household's access to functional public facilities and subsequent increased income.

Key words: Urban, poverty, measures, poverty alleviation, power supply, income, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in Nigeria is pervasive, although the country is rich in human resources that should translate into better standards. According to the most recent survey (National Living Standard Survey, 2004) presented by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2007), about 69 million people were living in poverty which represents 54.4% of the Nigerian population. The poverty rates in Nigeria go beyond low incomes, savings and growth because these are compounded by the high level of inequality resulting from unequal access to incomes opportunities and basic infrastructure. According to the NBS (2007), Nigeria has a more unequal distribution of income then Ethiopia, Madagascar, India, Niger, United State and Sweden. The Gini coefficient of income inequality for Nigeria was put 56.9% which is among the highest within the class of comparable countries. Incidentally, the importance of equal access to income opportunities and assets cannot be overemphasized as such access plays an important role in reducing poverty and spurring the economy to long-term development.

There is widespread recognition that poverty is predominantly rural and that success in reducing poverty is essential to the achievement of the millennium development goals. The thinking that urban dwellers are not poor is not true as theirs is a question of accessibility of the basic social amenities, employment and low income. Poverty essentially has three interrelated aspects poverty of money, poverty of access and poverty of power (World Bank, 2003). This makes the working, living and social environments of the poor extremely insecure and severely limit the options available to them to improve their lives. Most urban poor live in over-crowded and unsanitary slumps and squatter settlements and often do not have access to basic to basic infrastructure and services. They are forced to live in illegal and informal settlements because they cannot enter formal and housing market.

The informal land and housing market is exploitative and has every negative impact (World Bank, 2003). It explained further that there is often no security of tenure in illegal settlers and the fear of imminent eviction exists, the poor do not invest in improving either their housing or their settlements. The lack of basic environmental infrastructure and locations on marginal land often translate into higher rates of disease and lower life spans. The consequent higher medical bills, lost working days, early demise of incomer earners further expatriate their marginal income and cement their cycle of poverty.

While the issue of poverty has been the direct or indirect focus of development initiatives of many government and institutions saddled with the responsibility of poverty eradication/alleviation not much

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has been done to identify urban dwellers as needy people and therefore, proffer solutions to their problems. Though the poor have much in common with each other wherever they live and there are many interactions between rural and urban economies. For this reason, it is still expedient to examine rural and urban poverty separately.

The minimum population for defining urban areas varies dramatically among countries but urban is typically characterized by density of settlement in a contiguously built-up area by the structure of economic activities and sometimes by administrative attributes (World Bank, 2003). However, Makurdi metropolis which is the administrative capital of Benue state qualifies as an urban area in all ramifications and therefore not free from the problems associated with urban area generally. The broad objective of this study was to appraise the nature and causes of urban poverty and how to alleviate it. The specific objectives were to:

- Describe the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents
- Describe the nature and traits of poverty in Makurdi metropolis
- Describe the causes and effects of poverty in the area
- Examine the local perceptions of measures aimed at fighting poverty in the area

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area of study is Makurdi metropolis, the capital of Benue state, Nigeria. It is located along the banks of River Benue and is the administrative headquarter of the state. Double-stage stratified random sampling was used to select ministries in the metropolis (works and housing, water resources and environment, finance and economic planning, education, agriculture, sports and youth development and women affairs). From each of the seven ministries, senior staff (5) and junior staff (5) were randomly selected. In all, seventy staff were selected from civil service. On the other hand for non-civil service, Makurdi metropolis was stratified into 5 sections (High-level area, North Bank, Achusha area, Wadata and Wurukum).

From each of the 5 areas, $10 \times 5 = 50$ respondents were chosen randomly. A total of $70+50 = 120$ respondents were interviewed. Age was measured as the chronological years from the time of birth to the period the questionnaire were administered. Level of formal education was measured as the highest level of formal education attained in years at the time of the interview. Males were measured by coded as 1 and female coded as 2. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distributions and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that majority 32% of the respondents were in the age range of 41-50 years. About 69% of the respondents were in the age range of 31-60 years. This shows that the population was middle aged and are the work force of the economy hence, they will be able to support an intensive poverty alleviation programmes. About 65% of the respondents are married which means that they have family responsibilities to render to their households. Educationally, the people in the study are not particularly backward. About 68% of the respondents have tertiary education, meaning that they are highly literate. Education aids poverty reduction as it inculcates the need of people to master basic knowledge, values and skills to fight hunger and poverty (Ajani, 2008). Education of the respondents portrays that it is a vital tool for poverty alleviation.

Also, Table 1 shows a dependency ratio obtainable in the area. About 43% had a household size of 6-10 persons and about 64% had children of between 1-5 persons. The analysis shows about 39% of the respondents had between 4-7 dependents about 18% had between 8-11 dependents and about 11% had 11 or more dependents. This situation has negative consequences on the level of comfort obtainable in several household as most of them were civil servants who depend on their salaries as only source of income.

Table 2 shows that the majority 56% of residents of the study area sent their wards to public schools for reasons of either proximity or low cost charges per head. On the other hand, about 41% of the respondents sent their wards to private institutions for the quality of education they offer.

Other difficulties such as distance to such institutions and high cost per head are often over looked because of the quality education guaranteed by such institutions. The incessant strike action by the public school teachers is also cited as one of the reasons why people prefer the private schools. Even those who do not send their ward there have the desire but for financial constraint. This discrepancy, according to the World Bank (2003), depicts poverty of access. When the standards and facilities of the educational institutions available to low income earners are lower than those of high income earners, there is poverty of access and it contributes to entrenchment of poverty. Table 2 also showed about 58% of the respondents were civil servants followed by about 12% of unemployed. The unemployed

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	N = 120 (%)
Age		
≤30	27	22.5
31-40	26	21.7
41-50	38	31.7
51-60	19	15.8
≥61	10	8.3
Total	120	99.9
Sex		
Males	76	63.3
Females	44	36.7
Total	120	100.0
Marital status		
Single	78	65.0
Married	42	35.0
Total	120	100.0
Level of formal education	4	3.3
Primary education	4	8.3
Secondary education	24	20.0
Tertiary education	82	68.4
Total	120	100.0
Dependency ratio		
1-5	43	35.8
6-10	58	43.3
11-15	15	12.5
16-20	2	1.7
Total	120	100.0
No. of children		
1-5	77	64.2
6-10	18	15.0
None	25	20.0
Total	120	100.0
No. of dependents each respondent has extended family		
≤4	39	32.5
4-7	49	39.2
8-11	21	17.5
≥11	13	10.8
Total	120	100.0

Table 2: Distributions of respondents according to economic status

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Kinds of institutions wards attended		
Public institutions	67	55.87
Private institutions	49	40.83
Others	4	3.33
Total	120	100.00
Main occupation		
Farming	8	6.67
Civil service	70	58.33
Trading	11	9.17
Craftsmen	8	6.67
Students	9	7.50
Unemployment	14	11.66
Total	120	100.00
Average income per annum (₦)		
≤50,000.00	7	5.83
51,000.00-100,000.00	17	14.17
101,000.00-150,000.00	12	10.00
151,000.00-200,000	26	21.67
≥201,000.00	58	48.33
Total	120	100.00

Field survey, 2010

are those that migrated from rural to Makurdi metropolis looking for white-colour jobs that are non existence. Such unemployed are poor and contribute to entrenchment of

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to house ownership status

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Owners	49	40.83
Non-owners	71	59.17
Total	120	100.00
No. of houses owned by each respondent (N = 49)		
1	39	79.59
2	8	16.32
3	2	4.08
Total	49	100.00
Non-owners (N = 71)		
Rented apartment	65	91.53
Government owned houses	6	8.45
Total	71	100.00

Field survey, 2010

poverty of access. About 48% of the respondents earned >₦201, 000.00 annum^{-1}. This shows that there is poverty of income in the area as the argument is based on the fact that the poor is not always without an income but lack the ability to accumulate the assets which is a key ingredient to creation of wealth and breaking the cycle of poverty. In Nigeria, like other developing countries, house ownership or otherwise is an indicator of a person's economic class, especially in urban area such as Makurdi. Table 3 shows that about 41% of the respondents own houses while 59% do not. Among the house owners, about 80% own one house each whereas about 16% owned two houses each. About 92% of non-house owners live in rented apartments whereas the remaining 9% live in either public (government owned houses) or squatter apartments. This situation is deplorable and can be improved upon if government housing scheme, i.e., the owner-occupier scheme is reinforced or bolstered for effective service. The majority of respondent also believe that if some of the conditions attached to the scheme is relaxed, it will improve house ownership status of Makurdi metropolis. This is necessary because it is obvious that most resistant of the study area have not been able to meet their basic need for shelter.

Table 4 shows that 36% of the respondents live in two-bedroom flat followed by 23% that live in three bedroom flats. About 20% live in on room apartment. Table 5 shows that the respondents 54% have access to public pipe borne water while 18% drink wells. About 18% also have access to public boreholes. In all, 72% of Makurdi residents have access to portable water. Access to public power supply is erratic. About 71% claim to have access to public power supply that goes only 3-5 h day^{-1}. About 29% do not have access to public power supply. About 59% can only effort lantern and 18% enjoy the comfort of private generators as alternative to public power supply. This situation has adverse effect on businesses and it agrees with the (World Bank, 1996) report on the urban infrastructure in Nigeria which needs

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to the nature of structure they live in

Nature of structure	Frequency	N = 120 (%)
1 room apartment	25	20.85
1 bedroom flat	15	12.50
2 bedroom flat	43	35.83
3 bedroom flat	27	22.50
≥4 bedroom flat	10	8.33
Total	120	00.00

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to social facilities available

Variables	Frequency	N = 120 (%)
Sources of water		
Public pipe borne water	65	54.2
Public boreholes	21	17.5
Private boreholes	6	5.0
Well	22	18.3
River/stream	2	1.7
Flowing surface water	1	0.8
Other sources	3	2.5
Total	120	100.0
Access to public power supply		
Have access	85	70.8
Have no access	35	29.2
Total	120	100.0
Alternatives to public power supply		
Private generators	22	18.3
Lantern	71	59.2
Candles	21	17.5
No alternative	5	4.2
Others	1	0.8
Total	120	100.0
Medical facilities		
Private doctors	14	11.6
Private hospitals	34	28.3
Public hospitals	61	50.8
Traditional medication	2	1.7
Self-medication	9	7.5
Total	120	100.0
Communication/information gadgets		
Television	82	68.0
Telephone	60	50.0
Radio	93	77.5
VCD player	24	20.0
Video player	53	44.2
Satellite	14	11.7
Computer	9	7.5
Total	120	100.0

Field survey, 2010

urgent improvement. Urban productivity and employment could both be strengthened by reforms in the provision of essential services by public enterprises. Currently, there is no trust that electricity, water would be routinely and accessible. As a consequence, alternative sources and supplies appear and everyone ended up paying more for these services. For example, majority of business and houses invested in their private generators, borehole. On the whole, private generators account for >25% of cash firm capital while operating costs increased by the need for fuel and spare parts. The study shows that about 51% make use of public hospitals when sick while the rest about 49% go for medication in private hospitals. This could inferred that the government health programmes and institutions are not seen as meeting the needs of the people.

This dissatisfaction with government facilities has led to increasing reliance on private and traditional health providers as well as self-medication. There seem to be even distribution of communication/entertainment gadgets in Makurdi. About 78% on radios, 68% own television and about 50% owned telephone.

CONCLUSION

Poverty in the study area is categorized into poverty of income and poverty of access. These are interrelated and the traces of one or more of these are noticed in all the households as they applied to individuals. Majority of the people though income earners do not have the ability to accumulate assets which is a key ingredient to the creation of wealth and breaking the poverty of money.

Also the low income, erratic power supply to most parts of Makurdi impoverished many people by crippling economic activities, dearth of facilities in public hospitals as well as poor state of facilities in public schools are all trace of urban poverty of access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government should consider as a mater of urgency the improvement of electricity to Makurdi metropolis. A lot of economic activities are tied to this facility and therefore should not be handled with levity. Lack of electricity also leaves the poor without electronic communication linkages to the outside world. Potentially exacerbating the digital divide

- Majority send their wards to public schools, the government should invest more to improve the facilities. There is the need to examine its priorities in the sector and make necessary adjustments to ensure that the increased spending be efficient. Funding for primary education is especially critical and must be maintained at all levels

- In health, the programmes are not seen as meeting the people's needs. To improve the services, the objectives of the National Health Policy will need to be translated into a detailed implementation strategy that addresses the problem of inadequate access to services, poor quality of healthcare, lack of drugs,

unpredictable budgetary allocation, a non-functioning referral systems and inappropriate resource distribution

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