



# **The Essence and Purpose of Adult Education and Community Development**

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Professor Muhammad Bello Shitu**

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# Exploring National Values Potentials in Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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## **Introduction**

Poverty is one of the serious problems confronting developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Poverty literally is a condition of being poor, lack of something or quality. It is a multi-dimensional conditions manifesting in different aspects of human life physically, morally and psychologically. According to World Bank (1996) poverty is a condition in which individuals are unable to meet “basic needs” (physical; (food, health care, education, shelter. and non-physical; participation, identity,) requirements for a meaningful life. Anger (2010) sees poverty as a human underdevelopment, socio-political isolation, ill-health, absence of functional capability, vulnerability, unsustainable livelihood, absence of basic needs and relative deprivation.

Poverty as a term in Nigeria according to Ephraim (nd) is not new or unpopular. This is because everyone has a pinch of it at any level. He further noted that available statistics indicate that life has become very dangerous for the average Nigerian as each person experiences serious heat in the face of a suffocating heat of poverty. Anger (2010) in his sympathy for Nigerian citizens opined that the country’s situation has become more pathetic especially when compared to other less endowed developing countries in African and other parts of the third world. To buttress this with examples Kayode and Odusola (2010) show that the Nigeria

per capital income of (\$240) in 1990 was below the average of over (\$500) for sub-Saharan Africa. The figure for Nigeria was well below those for Botswana (\$3210), Cote d' Voire (\$6600), Egypt (\$1,080) South Africa (\$3,500). Mauritius (\$3,710). Statistics show that 112.219 million Nigerians (69%) lived in poverty condition (Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

It is important to note that poverty in Nigeria is not due to lack of resources, but to the ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root there is a culture of corruption and rent-seeking combined with political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians (Oxfam International, 2017). This shows that poverty in Nigeria is artificial and therefore when situations that subject people to poverty are removed, then, the poverty is likely to vanish. It can be argued that upholding onto the Nigerian national values that are meant for socio-political stability and for the survival of the nation which have been eroded can go a long way to reduce poverty in our country. According to Isola (2010) value development is the major factor in national development. Any nation not grounded in non-perishable values cannot make progress. The Nigerian dreams of reducing poverty can only come to reality with the internalization of the core national values enshrined in African traditions which reflect the national value of honesty, obedience, loyalty, cooperation and patriotism (Ajere & Oyinloye, 2011) among others. It is on this note that the paper explored the potentials of national values in poverty reduction in Nigeria.

### **Poverty in Nigeria and Its Effects**

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon manifesting in lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment and a lack of security. The window of opportunity remains closed to the poor masses, and this makes them practically inactive in the society. Their lack of empowerment limits their choices in almost everything and their lack of security makes them vulnerable to diseases, violence and so on (Ucha, 2010). In the word of Olowa (2012) a concise and universally accepted definition of poverty is elusive largely because it affects many aspects of the human conditions, including physical, moral and psychological. From social scientists' view particularly economists' poverty can be conceptualized in four ways; these are lack of access to basic needs/goods; a result of lack of or impaired access to productive resources; outcome of inefficient use of common resources; and result of "exclusive mechanisms. Olowa (2012) further noted that poverty as lack of access to basic needs/goods is essentially economic or consumption oriented. It explains poverty in material terms and specifically employs consumption-based categories to explain the extent and depth of poverty, and establish who is and who is not poor. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services. Basic goods are nutrition, shelter/housing, water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skills and tools and political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions. The first three are the basic needs/goods necessary for survival.

Impaired access to productive resources (agricultural land, physical capital and financial assets) leads to absolute low income, unemployment, undernourishment. Inadequate endowment of human capital is also a major cause of poverty. Generally, impaired access to

resources shifts the focus on poverty and it curtails the capability of individual to convert available productive resources to a higher quality of life (Ogwumike, 2002).

In Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality. It is a reality that depicts a lack of food, clothes, education and other basic amenities. Severely poor people lack the most basic necessities of life to a degree that it can be wondered how they manage to survive (Ucha, 2010).

The rate of poverty in Nigeria is so glaring that vision 2010 committee reports reveals that: 50% of Nigerians live below poverty line, only about 40% of Nigerians have access to safe drinking water, about 85% of urban population lives in single houses with more than seven occupants on the average, only about 62% of Nigerians have access to primary health care and most Nigerians take less than one third of the minimum required protein and vitamins (Report committee cited in Anger 2010). Poverty in Nigeria is particularly outrageous because it has been growing in the context of an expanding economy where the benefits have been reaped by a minority of people, and have bypassed the majority of the population. Annual economic growth averaged over 7% in the 2000s, and yet Nigeria is one of the few African countries where both the number and the share of people living below the national poverty line over that period, increased from 69 million in 2004 to 112 in 2010, equivalent to 69% of the population (Oxfam International, 2017). Regional inequality is high in Nigeria, and it translates into higher rates of poverty in the north-western states of the country. For example, in Sokoto State, 81% of the population is poor, while poverty incidence is much lower, at 34% in Niger (Oxfam International, 2017).

There are several effects and deficiencies associated with poverty in Nigeria. One of the main effects of poverty is poor health, as is reflected in Nigeria's high infant mortality and low life expectancy. Poor people in Nigeria face several health issues as they lack basic health amenities and competent medical practitioners. Most children do not have the opportunity of being immunized and this leads to certain physical defects in some of the children. Their health have become low priority and as they have little or no choices, they live with whatever they are provided with, whether healthy or not (Ucha, 2010).

According to the United States Central Intelligence Agency's World Fact book, Nigeria's infant mortality rate has been estimated to be currently 99 per 1000 births, which implies that Nigeria has the thirteenth highest infant mortality rate in the world (CIA Factbook). The infant mortality of children under the age of 5 was 189 per 1000 births in 2007. These high mortality rates are mostly due to mothers not having enough money to take care of their children. Many mothers are also ignorant of some preventive measures such as immunizations and vaccines. The immunization rate against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPT) for children between 12-23 months was about 54 percent in 2007. Many children in Nigeria die as a result of malaria, diarrhea, tetanus and similar diseases. Most of these are preventable and curable diseases, but due to inadequate health care facilities and lack of money far too many children die off from them. Like the grown-up population, many children also lack access to safe water and sanitation, which typically leads to several diseases.

## **Factors Contributing to Poverty in Nigeria**

Poverty in Nigeria is not due to lack of resources as the country is endowed with copious natural, material and human resources that if they are properly, sincerely, and justly appropriated and distributed no one will complain of not having access to meeting basic necessity of life. In line with this submission the following factors are examined as contributory factors to poverty situation in Nigeria.

### **Corruption**

Corruption has been described as one of the important causes of poverty in Africa, Nigeria inclusive (Hong Ng, Farinda, Kan, Lim and Ting, 2013; Oxfam International, 2017). Corruption according to World Bank (2000) weakens public services delivery, misdirects public resources, and holds back the growth that is necessary to pull people out of poverty. It undermines the driving forces behind reform. Vital resources are siphoned off shore. Foreign investors turn away in frustration. It reduces public revenue, undermines public trust, and weakens the credibility of the state. In Nigeria, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC year?) report showed that between 1960 and 2005, about \$20 trillion was stolen from the treasury by public officeholders. This money supposed to have been used to better lives of Nigerian and take them out of poverty.

Corruption in Nigeria manifests in different forms, for example securing jobs in Nigeria today is rarely done on merits. There are cases where people have to bribery their ways. In fact, many civil servants who are in charge of recruitment sell available vacancies to high bidders and leaving those who cannot buy jobs despites meriting it unemployed. This situation further subjects them to artificial poverty which is created by corrupt officers. There is no doubt that loss of upholding to African values of honesty, accountability, transparency and justice has pushed people to take corruption as the order of the day.

### **Governance Problem**

Associated to the problem of corruption is miss-governance. Governance's problem is an aged long one. This is manifested in form of ill-use and allocation of resources, favoritism and nepotism. The cost of governance in Nigeria according to Oxfam International (2017) is extremely high and outrageous. The high cost of governance in Nigeria certainly has prevented the wider population to be provided with basic essential services which ordinarily would have taken them out of poverty. The salaries and allowances of Nigerian lawmakers have always been a "talk show" when opportunities are given to social commentators and general public to comment about inequality in Nigeria. Oxfam (2017) reported that the average annual salary of Nigerian lawmaker is \$118,000, equivalent to 63 times the country's GDP per capita in 2003. Lack of insincerity on the part of those who governance the country and the civil servants as resulted to high cost of maintaining the machinery of government. This is done is in form of excessive inflation of staff numbers, inflated salaries and benefits, arbitrary increase in the number of government agencies and committees, hidden allowances and oversized retirement packages. The high cost of governance according to Oxfam (2017) reinforces inequality because it means that few resources are left to provide basic essential services for the larger society.

## **Crime and Violence**

Crime and violence have been identified as one of the contributory factors to poverty in Africa (Olowa, 2012). A steady increase in crime and violence has degraded the quality of life to a varying extent in many counties of the world, Nigeria inclusive. Although individuals of all socioeconomic groups are affected, the urban poor are particularly vulnerable to these social problems. There are instances of shootings, gang killings; kidnapping, armed banditry etc. Crime and violence have serious economic costs. For instance, an increasing proportion of public resources, which are already limited, is required to strengthen police enforcement, support the growing prison population, finance the demands placed on the judicial system, and provide health care for persons injured by violence. Other costs include the expensive security systems and guards now required by businesses and homes, the loss in potential revenues from foreign investor and tourists who have sought other destinations as a result of the threat of crime, and the migration of the urban middle class. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the poor, it is difficult to link poverty, crime and violence directly. However, the adverse social consequences of crime have been closely associated with poverty. For example, loss of lives at productive age and quantum loss of properties.

It can be inferred that corruption, mis-governance, crimes and violence would be perpetrated by those who have abandoned the African noble values of honesty, fairness, togetherness, brotherliness, justice, equitable distribution of resources and communal attachment. In fact, Bagudo (2018) reiterated this point more clearly that the main issue borders on negligence of basic cultural values in preference for imported values that are antithetical to Nigeria's socio-economic and political milieu are partly responsible for social vices such as corruption and mismanagement of public resources in Nigeria. The concomitant effect of these vices is that large number of Nigerians are willowing in poverty which are artificially created. Certainly something must be done. What comes to one's mind is that how can the Nigerian national values potentials be explored to reduce poverty in Nigeria.

## **Nigerian National Values Potentials for Poverty Reduction**

Value can be described as the worth that is attached to any phenomenon (Bagudo, 2018). Values are standards or principles by which human beings are influenced in their choice among alternative courses of action. Values are cherished and acceptable standards of behaviour, they are the highest ethical parameters and criteria through which individuals, groups and societies order their goals, determine their choice and judge their conducts (Ihedoro, 2006). Values represent ideals which most members of a society have collectively accepted. In short, values are moral principles, standards that one considers important, a collective conception of what is considered good, desirable and proper in a culture (Noah, 2003). In the words of Falade and Falade (2013) national values are the selected standards, rights and cherished pattern of behaviour that are fundamental to developing a stable and progressive nation. In this connection, Ajere and Oyinloye (2011) submit that in every society across the globe, national values are attached prime priority as social ingredients for social transformation, peace, unity, stability, growth and development.

In Nigeria for instance, values such as every individual is his brother's keeper, extended family system, corporate responsibility of upbringing of children, respect for elders, hospitality,

faithfulness, loyalty, honesty, patriotism are classical national values expected for the citizens to absorb into their body system (Division of General Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, n.d). It is believed that if each of these values is adhered to by Nigerians poverty will be reduced drastically.

### **Integrity**

Integrity has to do with being honest and morally upright. A person of integrity will stick to whatever he/she believes is good and right and does not in any way compromise the truth, no matter the situation (Olagunju, Sa'ad, Arisi and Nwadike, 2016). One of the lost values in Nigeria today is integrity. This is reason why people do no longer see corruption, theft, dishonest, bribery and injustice as grievous sins again. The consequence of lack of integrity has actually subjected a number of Nigerians to abject poverty because lack of integrity among many Nigerians has promoted grabbing of resources that are meant for national development by very few Nigerians. It is believed that if Nigerians imbibe integrity as an important part of their values as enshrined in the national values poverty will be reduced. This because, if people are morally upright, according to Olagunju, Sa'ad, Arisi and Nwadike (2016) there will be corruption reduction which is one of the contributory factors to poverty in Nigeria.

### **Honesty**

Honesty is the act of being truthful. An honest person tells the truth, he loves justice and fair play. One of the major causes of undemocratic practices and mismanagement of resources in Nigeria today is dishonesty among the citizens most particularly those who are in position of authority (Falade and Falade, 2013). Dishonesty is displayed in various ways, such as bribery and corruption, sale of adulterated drugs and foods, illegal minting and circulation of currencies, sale of sub-standard spare parts, altering of expiry dates of drug, labeling of low quality goods as original ones and examination malpractice. Dishonesty has certainly made many Nigerians not to be bothered in robbing others what belong to them and leaving them in abject poverty. There is no doubt that if the value of honesty is restored, people's rights will be restored and basic needs of people will be available and accessible and poverty will be reduced. Honesty is a best policy. An honest person holds on to what is right and is not swayed by any situation.

### **Being your Brother's Keeper**

Being one's brother's keeper is one of the cherished national values in Nigeria. This means your brother or neighbour is part of you and he must be guided and assisted. This value is rooted in having spirit of concern and help for those who are in need. In Nigeria if those who have help those who do not have many people would have been brought out from shackle of poverty. This point is succinctly described by Oxfam International (2017) when its report revealed that in one day, the richest Nigerian man can earn from his wealth 8,000 times more than what the poorest 10% of Nigerian spend on average in one year for their basic consumption. This means that if Nigerians see themselves as their brother's keepers those who are endowed with wealth can lift out those who are poor from poverty without feeling reduction in their wealth. Normally, givers never lack says Africa proverb.

### **Communal Attachment**

The value of “we” against “I” has been one of the age long traditions in Africa. This value requires that everyone is an important actor in the development of the community, and the community belongs to all. Communal attachment promotes team work and participation of all in the process of improving the welfare and wellbeing of all in the community. Akinpelu (1983) said that in the traditional African society, the economic arrangements were for the welfare of all the people. Nowadays, they are to enable those who have the access to make as much profit as possible. The welfare of the masses is divorced from the concern of the individual and entrusted to the government which for sheer remoteness and many other weighty reasons just cannot cope. The comparative efforts of the people which used to carry through major developments in the community have been abandoned. Production is longer for human satisfaction and to meet the needs of many, rather it is entirely profit-motivated and profit oriented. According to Bagudo (2018) everything is now centred on self. Since, this is the case what is in vogue begins with self aggrandizement, which leads to total indiscipline. Effort must be made to restore the lost value of communal attachment back into Nigerian communities. This will go a long way to uplift many Nigerians into a greater height economically and help reduce poverty in the land.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of poverty today in Nigeria could be linked to corruption, greed, mismanagement of public resources, “I don’t care attitude” of those who are well to do, violence and crimes among others. These attitudes which have subjected many Nigerian to abject poverty could be linked with eroding of cherished Nigerian national values of honesty, integrity, being one’s brother’s keeper and communal attachment. Hence, these values must be restored. This paper concludes that if Nigeria should be out of shackle of poverty, Nigerians both leaders and followers must imbibe the values that would enable them to put the interest of the nation first before those of self so that what belongs to all would be shared by all and helping hands will be extended to those who do not have by those who have.



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