

A Comparative Political Analysis of Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria and Britain

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Abstract

This paper on a comparative political analysis of poverty and inequality in Nigeria and Britain cautions that the issues of poverty and inequality and the policies to address them should not be ignored in the reallocation of public resources. All over the world, poverty and inequality have continued to increase rapidly in relative terms over the last decade. In Nigeria, there has been a polarization between the rich and the poor along neo-colonial capitalist lines. For over fifty-four years of political independence, Nigerians have been afflicted with abject poverty in the midst of abundant natural and manpower resources. The grinding poverty has manifested itself in poor feeding, poor housing, poor clothing, poor health, poor education, poor transportation, poor communication, poor political participation, poor economy, poor environmental, and poor social policies to tackle problems of poverty and inequality. The country has failed to embark on meaningful, effective and truthful total planning, total mobilization and considerable regimentation which are important pre-requisites of rapid progress in combating poverty and inequality. The paper begins with theoretical conceptualizations and conceptual clarifications of poverty and inequality, discusses types of poverty, barometers of measuring poverty and inequality, x-rays causes of poverty and inequality, analyses the problematic problems of poverty and inequality, suggests actions to be taken to address the issues and makes policy recommendations. The paper also relates poverty and inequality to an investigation of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are United Nations' facilitated development goals that were established at its Millennium Summit in 2000. The goals which were adopted as United Nations Millennium Declaration by 189 member countries and a number of international organizations are eight, namely:

- Eradication of extreme hunger and poverty;
- Achieving universal primary education;
- Promoting gender equality and empowering women;
- Reducing child mortality rate;
- Improving maternal health;
- Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Ensuring environmental sustainability; and,
- Developing a global partnership for development.

The paper concludes that unless and until the crises of poverty and inequality are resolved, it will be an herculean/uphill task for Nigeria in particular in her effort to realize vision 20:2020. This is a document of an economic transformation blue print (road map) that is expected to launch Nigeria into the league of the 20 most developed countries of the world by year 2020.

The paper finally submits that no stone should be left unturned and all hands must be on deck by all and sundry – individuals, local, state, regional and federal governments; as well as the private sectors, civil societies, non-governmental bodies, agencies, professional associations, among a host of other stakeholders to tackle the problems of poverty and inequality. Otherwise, the national objectives enunciated over forty (40) years/four decades ago in Nigeria's Second National Development (1970-74) which have hitherto eluded the country, will continue to be more problematic and more insurmountable to achieve.

These are:

1. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
2. A great and dynamic economy;
3. A land of bright and full opportunities for all its citizens;
4. A just and egalitarian society;
5. A free and democratic society.

Keywords: Federal governments; Proportion; Environment; Societies

Introduction

The debate on the issue of inequality between the large proportion living in affluence and the small poverty stricken segment in societies all over the world has continued unabated. Conversely and depending on the society being described and analyzed, the issue of inequality could be between the small proportion living in affluence and the large poverty stricken segment as depicted by the Nigerian state and society. In point of fact, it is noteworthy to state that the proportion of poverty

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Received October 20, 2014; **Accepted** December 06, 2014; **Published** December 18, 2014

Citation: Olayiwola ARO (2014) A Comparative Political Analysis of Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria and Britain. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 2: 138. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000138

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in poverty stricken societies does not connote 100% poverty but that small proportion of the population dominate or sit comfortably on the wealth of the society, resulting in high incidence of socio-politico-economic disenfranchisement, poverty and inequality.

In the same vein or by the same token, an affluent society does not connote absence of poverty and inequality but that the proportion of affluence overshadows poverty and inequality incidence.

Different nations, states, countries and societies have embarked on various social policies to address the issues of poverty and inequality. Describing the existing economic conditions of the United States of America in the mid-twentieth century, writing about true life story of the Americans, Galbraith [1] argued for the need to use a sizeable amount of tax revenue to promote public expenditure in the areas of education, health care and nutrition for the children of the poor thereby preventing them from poverty trap that had become the lots of their parents.

In Nigeria, there have been series of government policies and programmes especially in the area of alleviating poverty among the people, but the result has been so poor due to government policy inconsistencies. No government, be it state or federal level, comes without introducing and leaving behind one form of poverty alleviation or reduction programme meant to reduce the level of poverty and inequality, give hope and succor to the poor or move towards some sort of wealth creation. Strategies, plans and policies have been formulated and executed over the years.

For instance, after political independence in 1960, poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria centered on education, which Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Community Banks, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Family Support Programme (FSPL) and National Poverty Alleviation and Eradication Programme (NAPEP) existed during the period to mention just a few [2].

In Britain, over one hundred years ago in London, Britain, Charles Booth presented the results of the first systematic study of poverty to the Royal Statistical Society. From his research in East London he estimated that one-third of the population were poor or very poor [3].

In the discussion of Booth's paper, an ex-President of the Society, one Sir Rawson Rawson, said he:

"Scarcely knew of any work which would tend more to arousing sympathy and assistance for the classes who needed it, than that which Mr. Booth had initiated.... could it be doubted that the result would be the discovery of some means of elevating them and reducing the distress which existed among this class throughout the country."

In Waterloo area of London, hundreds of people were passing the night sleeping rough in cardboard boxes. In Britain one in six people was living on or below the state's minimum income level-for a young, single, unemployed person, a level for everything except housing was costing £26 per week. In global terms, within, half a day's travel by air, about ten million babies die yearly before they reached their first birthday.

Poverty then continues, and in Britain has increased rapidly in relative terms over the last decade. Yet the alleviation of poverty has been a continuing and central concern of social policy. The questions then, are, how can poverty and inequality be explained and what are the implications of different possible explanations for social-politico-economic policies?

The framework in which we view the world shapes our interpretation of it and our actions. Most analyses of poverty and inequality focus either on individual factors or on social and economic constraints that are outside the individual's control.

Also, over three decades ago in Nigeria, there were demonstrations by Ibadan undergraduates against the indiscretion of a white American student, Miss Michelmore, who, after spending a few weeks in Ibadan wanted to write home about her experience.

On a post-card which she intended to send to the United States of America, Michelmore wrote that some Nigerians urinate, bathe and eat in the streets. An irate Ibadan student seized the post-card. It was never posted. The entire student population reacted with outraged indignation to what some of them described as "the insult on our national pride". There were protest meetings and Michelmore was sent home immediately [4].

One may admit that in one respect, the indiscreet American girl had no reason to complain about people eating in the streets. In Europe, London for example and America people also eat in the streets. They eat ice-cream and hot dog, apples, fried chicken etc. on the busiest streets. Even the elderly ones do so in Europe and America.

Yes, one may dispute Michelmore's observations with regard to details and her inability to admit that every nation has its own dark spots. But even then, the American girl's reaction was a legitimate one especially for a young woman who, for the first time in her life, came in contact with the reality of the wide gulf that separates developed countries from developing nations in terms of standard of living, poverty and inequality.

The most serious social problems undermining progress in the world today are poverty and inequality. They have emerged as important social issues in many developed and developing countries. Yet, it is difficult to say that an end of the war against poverty and inequality is in sight. Rowntree and Lavers [5] argued, that the policies of the welfare state-full employment, provision for emergencies and so on—had almost entirely eradicated "primary poverty" in Britain where the "war on poverty has gone on longest". Akeredolu-Ale [6], is also true to say that the basic structure of economic and social relations which generates poverty as a by-product of its normal functioning has remained largely unscathed in the prolonged campaign in Britain and especially in a developing country like Nigeria.

It is pertinent to mention, however, that there are reservations on various theories of poverty and inequality. First, some of the theories have been formulated within the framework of the particular ideological orientation and peculiar preferences of the proponents which may be either too ethnocentric or too holistic. If ethnocentric, they cannot be truly comparative, if holistic, they cease to be analytical. Nevertheless, it is a herculean task to come across value-free theories of poverty and inequality.

Secondly, some of the theories may not be comprehensive or capable of being tailored to fit all cases of poverty and inequality. This is because there are various cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, economic, social, political, legal, local, national and international implications manifested in different societies by the phenomena of poverty and inequality. For example, compare explanations of poverty in Britain, or other industrialized countries, with explanations of poverty in the Third World. In analyzing the causes of poverty in Britain many studies have concentrated on patterns of economic activity, inequalities in earnings, and variation in household needs according to their size. Policy proposals concentrate on redistribution and tackling the inadequacies

of government social security. By contrast, many analyses of poverty in the Third World concentrate on land tenure systems, urbanization, and the status of women. From such analyses come policy proposals on land reform, industrialization and appropriate technology, family planning and gender planning. The difference in these policy proposals is evident. Our local parameters are very restricted. If we could see ourselves as others see us and recognize structural influences we treat as given- influences that do change and can be changed – the dimensions of social policy would be enhanced. It may be questioned whether there should as now be one social policy framework for industrialized countries and another quite different one for the Third World [3].

Statement of the Problem

Poverty and inequalities are global phenomena which affect continents, nations and people differently. They afflict people in various depths and at different times and phases of existence. There is no nation that is absolutely free from poverty and inequality. The main differences are the intensity and prevalence of the malaise.

The nations of Sub-Sahara Africa, Asia and Latin America in particular, have been with the highest level of poverty and inequality and consequently with the lowest level of socio-politico-economic development. They also have the highest level of social insecurity, violence and generally low standard of living.

The Central Bank of Nigeria views poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothe, and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligation, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem and has limited access to social and economic infrastructures such as education, health, portable water, and consequently has limited chances of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities.

The World Bank utilized inductive approach to uncover various dimensions of poverty such as wellbeing, basic infrastructure, illness and assets. In other words, poverty is lack of multiple resources that leads to hunger and physical deprivation. Another of such definition is lack of voice, power and independence that subjects them to exploitation. Their poverty leaves them vulnerable to humiliation and inhuman treatment by both private and public agents of the state from whom they seek help. This is the problem. How does one explain the phenomena of poverty and inequality? What are the causes of poverty and inequality? What policies can be pursued to address the problems of poverty and inequality?

It is clear that the individual is in many respects shaped by society as far as poverty and inequality are concerned. But the relationship is interactive and always changing. Whatever policies that are employed to address the problem, social policy in particular and in all its dimensions, is concerned with many levels of a matrix.

For instance, education policy affects individuals and the wider community and economy. Housing policy affects households and family formation. Health policy affects survival and economic productivity. How these and a host of other socio-politico –economic policies work with respect to different groups- different ages, sexes, races, classes,-in large measure determine the future of society on poverty and inequality.

The genesis of Nigeria's poverty reveals that the problem is not a tautologal/verbose question of "a country is poor because it is poor" or due to some fatalistic "vicious circle of poverty". The fundamental issues involve the structure of relations of production in the country [7].

- Are poverty and inequality man made?
- Are poverty and inequality not an original state of mankind but a historical moment in the development of man's productive activity and accumulation?
- Is the phenomenon of poverty and inequality a consequence of man's alienation from the means of production and the products of his labour by his fellow men, leading to inability to procure basic needs as defined at any historical era? This paper attempts some answers.

Brian Abel-Smith wrote a few years ago;

"With rising standards of life, a belief in a subsistence minimum is a belief in ever-increasing inequality and class distinction. Make no mistake about that"

Arthur Lewis saw a clear relationship between economic growth and social division:

The most effective destroyer of discrimination is fast economic growth. This creates a shortage of skilled workers and incites employers to upgrade persons and jobs... Tightness in the labour market also reassures skilled workers, making them more willing to accept liberal policies.

How far this is true of Britain, Nigeria and many countries in the world today is, alas, open to question. The assumption that the benefits of growth "trickle down" to the poorest areas and groups in society is increasingly dubious.

Why should the state spend more on educating those with more advantages, rather than on those with fewer advantages? Such questions are inescapable if one takes a dynamic view of poverty and endorses the argument of Jane Jacobs when she wrote:

"To seek 'causes' of poverty ... is an intellectual dead end because poverty has no causes. Only prosperity has causes. Analogically, heat is a result of active processes; it has causes. But cold is not the result of any processes; it is only the absence of heat. Just so, the great cold of poverty and economic stagnation is merely the absence of economic development. It can be overcome only if the relevant economic processes are in motion."

If the focus is on opportunities then it makes no sense to think of the poor in isolation, stuck at the bottom of society. Poverty must be seen as part of broader economic inequality. This is not to suggest that they are the same thing or that all inequalities are a cause for concern. Some inequalities might better be called equalizing differences. Other inequalities are causes of real deprivation and poverty.

Concern with inequalities in outcomes, and to some extent with poverty itself, has led to a relative neglect of inequalities in opportunities and their causes. Yet it is the latter that are of greater long-term importance. Here it must be stressed that opportunities are not the same thing as incentives: having a genuine opportunity to do something requires much more than a financial incentive. Policies which give financial incentives in an economic structure that offers few genuine opportunities to the poor are as futile as policies which address structural problems but offer no individual incentives.

Social policy should be far more concerned with opportunities and allow for, indeed foster, independence and diversity of outcomes. It cannot be based solely on doing things for people but must tap the capacities and experience of those affected. Most people are only too keen to stand on their own feet. But this is difficult without a secure foundation [3].

Theoretical Framework

In describing and analyzing poverty and inequality, we employ a combination of contending paradigms of contemporary socio-political analysis. These are Comparative Political Analysis, Structural-Functionalism, Political Communication, Cybernetics, and Systems Approach. We also combine empirical, semantic, normative and public policy orientations in our analysis and suggested actions.

Comparative Political Analysis is concerned with significant regularities, similarities and differences in the working of political institutions and in political behaviour. Our objectives in Comparative Political Analysis include:

- An identification of uniformities of policy characteristics;
- Ability to yield a panoramic description of the universe of politics;
- The possibility of constructing classifications, typologies and rankings;
- Ability to explain similarities and differences [8].

On Structural Functionalism, we believe that there are political structures, performing the same functions in all systems, that multifunctionality exists, and that each political culture is a mixture of the traditional and the modern. We believe that if all the relevant structures perform the universality of functions in all political systems, [9] the issues of poverty and inequality may be drastically reduced. The functions are: rule-making, rule-application, rule-adjudication (output functions) interest articulation; interest aggregation, political communication, political socialization, (input functions) and political recruitment.

Also, we believe that there is a peculiarly intimate relationship between the communication processes and the socio-political process hence our utilization of methodological analysis of Cybernetics – the science of communication and control [10].

As for the Estonian systems analysis, we believe that adequate inputs and constructively effective outputs will help to supplement and complement efforts at reducing poverty and inequality [11].

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Conceptualization: Literature Review

What is poverty?

Poverty means being poor destitution, and indigence. And to be poor means to be hard-up, needy, penniless, impoverished, deficient, inadequate, incomplete, insufficient, lacking, reduced, feeble, worthless, miserable, pitiable, unfortunate, wretched, etc. (Collins Gem Dictionary and Thesaurus) Wrotham, London, Glasgow, Great Britain, 1992). It is not easy to give a definition of poverty. One does not need to attempt to offer a definition but merely gives a description and some analysis coupled with some recommendations to alleviate poverty.

It is our submission that describing and analyzing poverty in all its ramifications, one can talk about economic poverty, political poverty, environmental poverty, social security poverty, health poverty, religious poverty, cultural poverty, leadership poverty, follower-ship poverty, poverty of action and / or inaction, planning poverty, educational poverty, housing poverty, food poverty, employment poverty, communication poverty, transportation poverty, mental poverty, bureaucratic poverty, industrial poverty, intellectual poverty and poverty of ideas among a host of other categories of poverty [12].

In Nigeria, poor people know what they require to satisfy their interest, meet their needs and solve their problems.

This does not mean that they know all the obstacles that are likely to emerge, have full information about alternative approaches or will avoid serious mistakes and pitfalls.

It does mean that plans, projects, policies and recommendations work best when the intended beneficiaries are listened to and their ideas are respected; and indeed when the projects are initiated, designed and managed by the beneficiaries themselves.

The issue that concerns most Nigerians today is that of food (Garri and Water); (Bread and Butter); problems of day-to-day existence.

This problem, more especially as it affects the greater proportion of Nigerians, is illustrated by the Late Comrade Ola Oni:

“We are told that the economy is doing well and that billions of Naira are being spent on this or that, but “.... The question which the ordinary man or woman continues to ask is: why is this high achievement not being reflected in his or her living and conditions? Why is it that a peasant farmer finds it difficult to secure one meal a day, or many like him who have deserted farming for urban exploitation...”

The everyday problems that confront the citizen are problems ranging from high cost of living, problems of education and training, problems of employment and underemployment, and lack of public amenities, among others.

These problems are further worsened because of corruption, avarice, nepotism, greed, injustice, and the indifferent work attitudes of most of the public officials.

A well-established person, Professor Nzimiro calculating the consequences of the efficiency or lack of it, of public service and public officials for the quality of life and the overall welfare of the masses as far as poverty and inequality are concerned said:

The Nigerian Public service does not extend its services to the majority of the population. For example, the social conditions of the rural peasantry are characterized by:

1. Extreme Poverty;
2. Malnutrition
3. Diseases.... ‘

Our rural societies are denied the basic social infrastructures viz:

- a. Medical care;
- b. Schools with adequate and qualified teachers;
- c. Constant water supply.... And a good network of roads, satisfactory housing and environmental conditions.

Perhaps, the only consensus among scholars on the definition and measurement of poverty and inequality is that the phenomena are very difficult and very elusive to define, delineate and measure.

Zweig, (1948) opines that:

“It is easier to speak of poverty than to define it”

The word poverty means different things to different people. It is a hydra-headed concept; hence it is conceptualized in different ways in the literature. On a wide dimension, there is poverty when a household or an individual is unable to meet the basic necessities of life, which are not primarily consumption of goods and service only but included

food and non-food items, considered as minimum requirements to sustain livelihood in a given society (Sulaiman et. al.) [13]. In *Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary (1995)*[14] the concept poverty is derived from both French and Latin words respectively. The words: poverty or *pauvete* are French in origin, meaning- want, lack, deficiency of necessity. While the Latin word *paupertas* equally gives a background meaning to English word pauper, meaning a very poor person or wretched person. Poverty is associated with lack of or inadequate basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, water, light, shelter, education and healthcare. This shows that poverty is a general condition of deprivation whose manifestations could come in the form of social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, powerlessness and humiliation. (*Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1995: 1051*) [14].

Poverty traverses various ramifications of human conditions that are: moral, intellectual, spiritual, ideological, social, physical and psychological nature.

From Anyanwu's [15] standpoint, typology of poverty is based on different criteria. Emphasizing this view, the first, based on basic needs, is classified as absolute and relative poverty. According to Anyanwu, absolute poverty refers to lack of the minimum physical requirements of a person or a household for existence, and is so extreme that those affected are no longer in a position to lead a life worthy of human dignity. In other works, he cited Schubert [16] to corroborate the above that absolute poverty exclusively refers to a situation of particular individuals without any comparison being made between them and others. This exists when the lives of those concerned are impaired by physical or socio-cultural deficiencies. Also, such an absolute classification requires defining a minimum or basic datum level, below which an individual or household can be considered to be in a condition of poverty. This involves minimum consumption norms, usually with some nutritional criteria, which are translated into food requirements and then into a required income. However, the author identified two types of poverty, primary (absolute) poverty and secondary (relative) poverty. For instance, when physical human subsistence expressed in terms of nutrition, clothing and housing is not guaranteed, this is referred to as primary, absolute poverty.

On the other hand, the work submits that relative poverty refers to a person or household whose provision with goods is lower than that of other persons or household. Relative poverty, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the persons concerned cannot lead a life that is worthy of human dignity. It merely states that, because of the distribution structures in a society, certain economic subjects are disadvantaged to an unacceptable extent. Thus relative poverty exists when the subjects under consideration are "poor" in relation to "others" who need to be more closely specified [15].

Hiffe [17] distinguished between conjectural poverty and structural poverty based on individual circumstances. He explains that conjectural poverty is a temporary phenomenon into which normally self-sufficient individuals are thrown in a crisis, whilst structural poverty is long-term and normally caused by individual circumstances.

Poverty is also categorized as either chronic or transitory. A chronically poor household is poor throughout the sample period, and if it is poor only some of the time, then, it is transitorily poor. However, absolute and relative poverty can also be seen from two perspectives: microeconomic and macroeconomic.

In microeconomic term, poverty refers to a situation in which individual persons or households are not able to satisfy their basic

needs, or can satisfy them only to an inadequate degree. From a macroeconomic perspective, poverty exists when the average inhabitants of a country live below the minimum subsistence level and not far enough above it. Besides, another type of poverty identified is the urban poverty and rural poverty. Vocationally and spatially, there are urban poor people-living in slums, ghettos and shanties usually characterized by environmental degradation, inadequate welfare services and social deprivation, low level of capital resources, and non-formal sources of capital for business. While rural poverty is characterized by poor material conditions, low level of education or a high rate of illiteracy, lack of infrastructures, expensive technology, low levels of investment, high population growth rates, high level of unemployment and underemployment, poor health, and high out-migration. [15]. There are also generalized poverty, Island poverty and case poverty. Generalized poverty refers to pervasive poverty which is common in the society. Island poverty is that which exists in the midst of plenty, while case poverty' is associated with affluent societies caused by peculiar circumstances of individuals or families, such as ill-health or disability.

Measurement of poverty

Having examined the basic types of poverty based on different criteria, it is important to take a look at the measurement of poverty. From the above considerations, [15] posits that the first attempts to measure poverty were made more than a century ago. He reported that while Booth's and Rowtree's studies were focused on the urban cities of London and New York, Nairoji's was directed at estimating the extent of poverty- in the whole of India. These first attempts were intended to identify poverty lines. Hence it was only later that poverty profiles and indicators were introduced. Also, the first axiomatically based measure of poverty was not introduced into the debate until 1976. Therefore, in quantifying poverty and identifying the poor, the author informs that there are two basic requirements. First of all, he states that we need some measure of the "standard of living" that is, both the direct consumption aspects and the basic needs which is non-consumption aspects. This is necessary in order to distinguish different individual households and countries from each other. Secondly we need to choose a "cut off i.e. "poverty line" which separates those we identify as poor from the non-poor. This second requirement is how the degree of poverty relative to a particular poverty line is measured and how this is aggregated across those who are deemed to be poor.

However, for the measurement of poverty, Zweig (1948) used three standards, viz: personal or individual standards, social standards and scientific standards. According to Dandekar and Rath [18] if an individual is not able to have a diet which has an adequate intake of calories, he, according to them is below the poverty line. Galbraith [1] also considers poverty in part to be a physical matter. According to him those afflicted have such limited and insufficient food, such poor clothing, and such crowded, cold and dirty shelters that life is painful as well as comparatively brief.

Analysis of poverty and inequality

Broadly speaking, those who stress individual factors see people as having free choices which determine their lives. Those who stress structural factors see people as pawns with little force over their own destiny.

Let us examine each of these two main forms of analysis in turn.

Individualism

In the nineteenth century Britain, poverty was seen as a sign of moral

failure-easily done when drink was so evident. Similarly, imperialism, and much poverty of those colonized, was rooted in assumptions of the inferiority of individuals of different races.

Today an individual analysis of the causes of poverty appears to be in vogue-along with a powerful, if selective, nostalgia for Victorian values. Directly linked with this is the notion that social provisions undermine individual effort. Government, it is argued, should pull back from social policy and leave issues of poverty and inequality to individuals and markets, families and charity. As Keynes wrote:

“The Economists were teaching that wealth, commerce and machinery were the children of free competition-that free competition built London. But the Darwinians could go one better than that-free competition had built Man. The human eye was no longer the demonstration of [God’s] Design, miraculously contriving all things for the best; it was the supreme achievement of Chance, operating under conditions of free competition and laissez-faire. The principle of the Survival of the Fittest could be regarded as a vast generalization of Ricardian economics. Socialistic interferences became, in the light of this grander synthesis, not merely inexpedient, but impious, as calculated to retard the onward movement of the mighty process by which we ourselves had risen like Aphrodite out of the primeval slime of Ocean.”

There are three aspects of the Radical Right’s analysis. First the question of whether the poor cause their own poverty and whether or not there exists an underclass. Second, how far social policy contributes to, rather than reduces, poverty? Third, the question of whether social security policy should be targeted at the poor at all?

Sociologists have long been concerned with the question of whether poverty is due to the characteristics of the poor themselves. Is there a culture of poverty-“a way of life that is passed down from generation to generation along family lines,” as Oscar Lewis described it? As McNicol has recently shown, there have for a century been interpretations of poverty that were primarily based on characteristics of the poor. Often, the victims were blamed for their own plight. The idea of a culture of poverty, much discussed in the 1960s, has now re-emerged in the concept of an underclass.

Yet there are problems with the concept of underclass on many counts.

First, there is a problem of definition. Is the supposed underclass composed of the poor, of unemployed people, of long-term unemployed people? Is it only those in council or rented housing? The search for a stable underclass proves as hard as that for a stable definition of money supply-and it is often the same people searching for both.

There is substantial volatility of the poor population. There are changes, however limited, between generations. Many who were prosperous when employed become poor when unemployed or chronically sick; many who are poor in old age were not so in earlier years.

The notion of a distinct and permanent underclass is convincing as an explanation of Britain’s increasing poverty. For some groups, such as young people on housing estates without jobs or hope, it is a description that seems to fit, but it is not an explanation. The distinction between a description and an explanation is important. Attributes of the underclass are generally, symptoms rather than causes of poverty and are results of the structural conditions.

Structural Analysis

Social policy has long been concerned with people who, however strongly motivated or rational, are unable to respond to economic opportunities and provide for themselves-children and the frail elderly, physically and mentally handicapped people and others. It has also been concerned with those who cannot support themselves due to lack of opportunities.

Different modes of analysis are intended to assist understanding and explanation. The academic social scientist-armed with theories and models, data archives and computer software, mathematics and Greek symbols, professional ambition and a sense of adventure-can now explain almost anything at least in part-and the unexplained residual opens up fresh opportunities for more research funding. This armory is sometimes unleashed at trivial but amenable problems and sometimes it is used to explain away what is manifestly unjust. To explain and understand poverty and inequality becomes to excuse and accept poverty. Yet only if the analysis assists action will the study of poverty and inequality be of any benefit other than to its students.

Dom Helder Camara once said: “When I give food to the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food they call me a communist”. Asking why the poor in Brazil have no food or why in Britain or in Nigeria on average the poor have shorter lives than those better-off, cannot be answered in individual terms and inevitably poses questions about the structure of society.

Structural explanations of poverty and inequality have tended to concentrate on unemployment, inequalities of earnings and the inadequacies of social security. There is no doubt that, if this Analysis led to action, policies for full employment and substantially improved social security benefits would greatly reduce poverty and inequality.

Poverty anywhere and everywhere is “the inability of man to control his environment and when this is the situation means is under the control of his environment with all its vicissitudes, vagaries and uncertainties of which often result in the prevalence of poverty.”

The attendant effect of this scenario is the inability of the poor to meet the challenges, the basic necessities of life which include in the main, food, clothing and shelter.

There are three basic challenges which the poor everywhere must confront if there must be solutions to poverty including Nigeria and Britain.

These challenges are

- (1) Access to capital;
- (2) Access to information; and
- (3) Access to stable market [19].

Lack of access to capital means the inability of the poor to acquire the necessary tools for productions.

In the layman’s language this means lack of money to acquire the necessary implements to combat poverty and inequality. Equally important as a challenge is lack of access to necessary information and adequate knowledge as well as lack of access to stable markets.

The question one should ask here is, what kind of remedy shall we apply to clear the problem? Attempts will be made here to demonstrate that given the class base of the poverty problem, the so called anti-poverty programmes are either crippled from inception or hypocritical [20].

Writers have pointed to “income redistribution”. The problem here is that the neo-colonial structure, property ownership and economic power tends to produce a pattern of income distribution that generates or perpetuates mass poverty and powerlessness among the masses. This means that programmes of income redistribution in Nigeria, such as progressive taxation, social security and the like, will not go far towards eliminating poverty. Their bankruptcy lies in their failure and, or refusal, to tackle the basic institution of private property together with the class dominance it generates.

The second observation is that in Nigeria, economic programmes are typically inspired and elaborated by the elite classes without mass participation. According to Onimode, [7] in a capitalist society, the fundamental exploitative relations between the elite classes and the poor masses guarantee that economic programmes will inevitably consolidate the predominant economic and political power of the rich dominant classes and the exploitative interests of the imperialist collaborators. Even when such programmes and policies are publicly declared to be in the interest of the poor, the main beneficiaries are the elite classes. This may be by design or default. Examples of such programmes that increase or perpetuate poverty in Nigeria include agricultural reforms and indigenisation programmes (in which agricultural credits go to the rich) which legitimizes-capitalism among the domestic *bourgeoisie*; the so called poverty stricken people are not involved either in planning or implementation of the programmes. As a result, the programme of income/property redistribution in favour of the masses is negated.

Thirdly, the various development plans have elaborated the concept of mixed-economy which is dominated by imperialists and the domestic *bourgeoisie*, while the middle class plays an uncomfortable second fiddle in the setting. Again the elite classes and their imperialist collaborators formulate and execute without the poor masses.

Thus, taken, collectively, the economic programmes for the elimination of poverty and inequality in Nigeria and Britain are caught in the power implication of the very social forces that generate mass poverty.

In Britain, the objective in tackling poverty is often defined in terms of ensuring some minimum level of consumption-for example of food. To achieve this there is a need for some minimum level of income. But how much is enough? We can find out the income at which average spending on food is at the minimum level or that at which, say, 95 per cent spend at least the minimum. But if the question is posed-what income is needed so that all spend at least the minimum? – then, there is no answer. However high the income, someone-due to drug addiction or whatever reason-will spend less than the minimum on food. Suppose, with greatly increased benefits that were indubitably adequate, the structural cause of inadequate food consumption were removed, then if anyone failed to eat adequately this would have to be attributed to individual incompetence. There is no structural solution that eliminates all individual problems.

This raises the question of whether social benefits are best paid in cash or in kind. The usual assumption of economists is that it is better to give benefits in the form of cash. This gives the choice to use the money in the way that gives most satisfaction and it is similar to the form of payment to those in employment. Yet, if the object is to ensure a certain minimum level of consumption then cash benefits administered through the family may not be at all efficient. The provision of a subsidized school meal may be a far more reliable means of providing a minimum level of food consumption. Of course, most children would in any case be provided with a meal and subsidized meals would make

no difference to their nutrition. For some, however, it could make a very important difference indeed. Thus the form in which income is redistributed does matter and it is perhaps worth reconsidering how far the structure of social benefits should be aimed at the majority, allowing them the greatest choice, and how far the aim should be to protect the most disadvantaged minority. Individuals again remain a concern of social policy.

The clear separation between individual and structural explanations of poverty is not in practice sustainable.

In Nigeria, programmes embarked upon to deal with the issues of poverty and inequality include agricultural and extensive services, educational and vocational training, primary health care delivery, enlightenment awareness programmes, and co-operative societies. Such programmes include: National Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life Programme (BLF), Family Support Programme (FSP) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); as earlier mentioned. Besides, Oderinde et al., underscores other specific sector-driven programmes which include:

Health Sector Programmes e.g. Primary Health care scheme, Guinea worm eradication project, and National programme on immunization.

Education sector programmes e.g. Normadic Education Programme (peculiar to the North Area of Nigeria) National Commission for Mass Literacy and Universal Basic Education

Transport sector programme e.g. urban mass transit programme.

Housing sector programme e.g. Site and services scheme, Low cost housing scheme and Federal Housing scheme.

Financial Sector Programme e.g. Rural Banking Scheme for Commercial Bank, Nigeria Agriculture and Co-operation Bank, People’s Bank of Nigeria, National Economic Reconstruction Fund and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) small scale industrial loan scheme. Community Bank and Agricultural Credit Guarantee scheme fund.

Industrial Sector Programmes e.g. Small Scale enterprise programme and Industrial development centers.

Community-based Programme e.g. International donor or agencies and nongovernmental organization initiatives nutrition-related programmes [21].

In Britain social administration-the caring, sharing, soul-baring, conscience-salving approach-has tended to approach poverty as purely a matter of redistribution in a static world. Benefits for the poor can be increased by higher taxes on the better-off. Low pay can be cured by minimum wage legislation. This is a world in which government intervention has been assumed to have little impact on individual behaviour and be invariably preferable to the jungle law of private markets [22-30].

Yet, there is every reason to believe both in theory and from evidence that the nature and extent of redistribution affects behaviour of many types: work effort, family formation, saving and mobility. To say this is not for a moment to suggest, as some do, that unemployment benefits are the primary cause of unemployment. Rather it is to acknowledge that a social security system which now distributes one-sixth of total personal income is bound to affect the choices facing people and their decisions [31].

Those taking a static view have tended to emphasize redistribution or expropriation from the rich. A more dynamic view would emphasize

controlling unfair advantages of the prosperous and improving the opportunities of those worst off.

In terms of analysis, the choices that individuals make are important and individual and structural explanations cannot be wholly separated. But it is not primarily to the poor that we should look for explanations of poverty: rather it is to the economic and social structure. Structures that have been created can also be changed.

Whether and how they will be changed is another question. The direction of change in Britain towards a more selective, means-tested social policy is reducing the incentive for many of the poor to provide for themselves and is inconsistent with the government's own individualistic analysis of the causes of poverty. Action is not always based on analysis [32-56].

The old notion of the New Right that society can advance solely on the basis of individual self-interest having been exhumed should be buried for all time. It is irrelevant and dangerous in a complex society where we live in an interdependent matrix as social beings.

Poverty and inequality as they exist in Nigeria, Britain and the world are not inevitable. Few can see the numbers sleeping in cardboard boxes or see affluence and starvation on the same small planet and think this is the best we can do.

Of course this is a value judgment. The social scientist's tradition of treating values as taboo has usually resulted in sustaining the unstated values of the status quo. In thinking about social policy, about the dynamic interaction of individual responsibilities and social rights, questions of values must be answered. What sort of society we want to live in depends ultimately on our values and the status we accord them.

In Nigeria, the application of the principle of federal character must be revised. It must give succor to the poor, the weak, the marginalized, the down-trodden, the wretched of the earth, and limit the power of the strong.

Access to food should be entrenched as a right in the Nigerian Constitution. The safeguard of the right to food revolves around ensuring the capacity to produce food or to earn income sufficient to be used to purchase food.

And because of the importance of this right, national economic and political resources will need to be mobilized for its protection with a sense of urgency and priority.

There is the need for self-sufficiency in food production.

Provision of adequate shelter is of paramount importance; after all, shelter is one of the basic necessities of life.

There should be a policy of real health for all and not death for all.

More money needs to be expended on the health of Nigerian citizens. I hate to remember and I remember to hate the acute shortage of drugs, medical staff and facilities in our public hospitals, which is counterproductive.

I refuse to accept that Nigeria has little or no resources. Besides this point, there is the urgent need to shift emphasis from curative to preventive aspect of our health care, by emphasizing such things as good sanitation, provision of portable drinking water and sewerage systems for our urban and rural societies. We should continue to remember the evil catastrophic effects of deadly diseases such as EBOLA [57].

Also, both the traditional and orthodox aspects of our Medicare should be optimally utilized.

Mass literacy is a sinequa non-for development anywhere. To achieve mass literacy in Nigeria, I suggest that all levels of the educational system be made tuition free, with primary and secondary education made compulsory while adult literacy should be taken to our citizens in the rural areas. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) should be further amended to ensure that the constitutional provisions can be challenged in a court of law if the provisions are violated as they are being done with impunity today.

There should be a department of employment to provide employments, job centers and social security such as job-seekers allowance, family, child, disabled, housing, business and/or income support or benefits to the deserving citizens.

A social security system for all citizens should be in place-for the poor, the aged, the destitute, the unemployed, young or old, man or woman, to guarantee them at least a minimum standard of living.

There should be protection of fundamental human rights for all citizens irrespective of one's social status.

This calls for emphasis on the rule of law and equality before the law.

There is need for discipline, self-examination, self-reliance and positive action.

The mass media must continue to play their role of informing, educating, enlightening the people and exposing the ills of the society and any governmental arbitrariness and exercise in futility. In performing these functions, the press should observe and adhere strictly to the professional journalistic ethics of objectivity, impartiality, socio-politico-economic responsibility, developmentalism and balancing.

The protection of citizens against hunger, lack of shelter, food, housing, education, ill-health, joblessness, illiteracy, and other forms of poverty, inequality and insecurity should be our concern.

We must admit the fact that we are running a race against time.

That time is running out. But the choice is still ours.

We must do everything to fight poverty and inequality in our countries.

Who saves his/her country saves himself/herself, saves all things and all things saved do bless him/her!

Who lets his/her country die lets all things die, dies himself/herself ignobly, and all things dying curse him/her!

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