INDIVIDUALISM AND
COMBATING POVERTY IN
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A
CASE STUDY OF BAYELSA STATE

by Tare-ebi Warri
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Abstract

The study is centred on individualism and combating poverty in contemporary Nigeria, using Bayelsa State as a case study. Poverty is widespread and the poor people are the hardest hit of the excruciating effects of the menace. Poverty is a one of the major problems confronting the world and combating it has being a priority of government at all levels. Poverty remains the root cause of many problems in the globe such as wars, conflicts, environmental degradation, prostitution, malnutrition, illiteracy, human trafficking, political violence and different dimensions of crime in our society. This research views poverty firstly as an individual challenge and considers the “self” a major factor in combating it. It is a qualitative study which adopted the expo-facto research design and data were obtained mainly from secondary sources, while relying on the problem solving approach for the analysis of data. Findings in the study reaffirmed the multi-dimensional nature of poverty in line with the existing literature. However, the research proffered a new approach in fighting poverty in Bayelsa State, with an acronym of “ESCAPE” – Poverty, which can be adopted in Nigeria and the world at large. It is recommended in this study that individuals must accept responsibility and prove consistent commitment that is believed to be a better approach in combating poverty in contemporary times.

Keywords: Combating, Expo-factor, Individualism; Poverty; Self.
Introduction
Combating global poverty and reducing it significantly is a key pre-requisite for the attainment of sustainable development. It is in line with this thinking that combating poverty featured prominently in the international quest and pursuant towards the realisation of sustainable development. Combating poverty is addressed in chapter 3 and principle 5 of the Rio Declaration of 1992. In the year 2000, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger was the number 1 goal of the 8 Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) as championed by the United Nations Organization (UNO). Following the expiration of the targeted date of the MDGs in the year 2015, the UNO came up with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and again, ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is the number 1 of the 17 goals.

The global fight against poverty seems not yielding the desired results. The United Nations (UN) acknowledged that by the end of 2019, the world had already missed the track of ending poverty in 2030, as the steady reduction in the rate of poverty for over 20 years was adversely affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic, which pushed an estimated 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 (UN, 2020). Global poverty rate rose in 2020 basically because of the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which exacerbated the problems of conflict and climate change, as about 120 million additional people are living in poverty, with the total number expected to increase to about 150 million by the end of 2021 (World Bank, 2021).

The World Bank defined extreme poverty as people living on or less than $1.90 a day. Consequently, recent estimates show that the global poverty rate stood at about 9.2% or 689 million people live in extreme poverty. These global poverty data are relevant for academic purposes, they are however very controversial and cannot be totally relied upon in reality, especially in third world countries generally and Nigeria in particular as result of adopting different benchmarks in the determination and measurement of poverty.

The poverty rate in Nigeria is dangerously alarming as close to half of the country’s population live below the official poverty line, measured at ₦137,430 per annum. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of poor Nigerians increased by two million people, which is attributed largely to population growth? With the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of poor Nigerians increased by seven million as the rate of poverty rose from 40.1% (82.9 million people) which is 4 out of 10 Nigerians in 2019 to about 42.5% in 2020 (NBS, 2020), and the number is estimated to rise by the end of 2021.

It is imperative to note that the official adoption of ₦137,430 per year as the national poverty line is worrisome, in view of the prevailing cost of living in the country. 137,430 per annum is approximately ₦11,450 per month, which is an average of ₦382 per day. In reality, this amount is believed to be grossly inadequate for an individual to be considered living above a minimum poverty line. Added to the above is the fact that poverty is conspicuous and extremely glaring in Nigeria, and remains a major challenge in the country.

For the purpose of academic efficiency and effectiveness, this study focused on Bayelsa State, which has a poverty rate of 22.61% (NBS, 2020). The data show that poverty rate in Bayelsa is lower than the national figure of 40.1%, the reality on ground paints a clear picture that portrays the alarming number of poor people in the state. This situation is more disturbing due to the fact that Bayelsa State is one of the richest states in Nigeria by virtue of the high deposit of crude oil and gas in its terrain which afforded the state and opportunity of receiving huge federal allocations on monthly basis, with 13% oil derivation fund and with a very small population of 1,704,515 people (NPC, 2006), estimated to be 2,277,961 in 2016 (NBS, 2017).
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