

## **Politics of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: A Study of the Activities of Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA)**

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**Abstract:** This study titled “Politics of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria, A study of the activities of Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA)” was carried out with the broad objective of ascertaining the effects of Politics on poverty Reduction in Nigeria with specific focus on Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency. The study was based on descriptive research survey design. Data for the study were generated through both primary and secondary sources. In the field survey, copies of structured questionnaire were distributed to a sample size of 370 respondents through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The data collected were analyzed with tables, frequencies and simple percentages. The chi-square statistical tool was adopted in testing the three null and alternate hypotheses formulated. Based on the analysis and interpretation of collected data, the following findings were made: that EB-CPRA takes the responsibility of initiating and executing Poverty Reduction Programmes in Ebonyi State, poor funding is one of the serious hindrance posed by EB-CPRA to contribute towards poverty reduction in the state and depoliticization of the EB-CPRA in Ebonyi State will elevate their contribution in poverty reduction in the state. However, it was recommended among others that EB-CPRA should be insulated from active politics, Adequate Fund should be made available to the institution and discipline, codes of conducts and work ethics should be revitalized in EB-CPRA to enforce discipline.

**Keywords:** Politics, Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Nigeria

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### **I. Introduction**

The concern about poverty worldwide dates back to 1944 when the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its historic Philadelphia declaration drawn up after the Second World War, stated that "poverty anywhere constitutes a threat to prosperity". It was this declaration that necessitated the crusade for poverty alleviation worldwide especially in the United States of America, where some segment of the society were identified as being in generally poor state of health and suffering from inadequate diet and poverty (Denis and Williams, 1973).

Overtime, it has been discovered that reducing the menace of poverty remains one of the most difficult challenges facing most countries of the world especially the developing countries where on the average about 67,000 people join the legion of the poor on a daily basis, representing about 25 million every year (Okonkwo, 1998:24). Nigeria like many other Sub-Saharan African countries is neck deep in poverty. The country is characterized by declining per capita incomes, increasing hunger, rising unemployment and environmental degradation (National Bureau of Statistics 2014). Despite all the various efforts made by various governments in Nigeria, to improve the lots of the people through the various poverty alleviation or eradication policies and programmes, it is evident that the proportion of people at poverty level has continued to increase. For example, the figure increased from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985, it declined slightly to 42% in 1992 and increased very sharply to 66% in 1996. By 1999, estimate had it that more than 70% of Nigerians were living below the poverty line (National Planning Commission, 2004: 28).

According to the report published by the United Nation’s Global Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index in June (2015), as at 2010, 46% of Nigerians lived below the national poverty line (only 28% in urban areas and near 70% in the rural). This is based on data collected on years between 2004 and 2014.

In the words of Farnsworth (1990), the problem of poverty in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) does not lie in the quality of individual’s aspirations or mental and entrepreneurial endowments but with the structure of African society and its economy. Poverty is a crucial matter in Africa since its inhabitants not only began their independence from an extremely low level of economic and social development but are the only people whose situation is expected to worsen in the coming years (National Bureau of Statistic 2014). Specifically, in Nigeria today, more than 70% of a population of about 150 million people lives below the poverty line (Gbosi and Omoke, 2004). In recent years, the eradication of poverty has become major goals of Nigerian economic policy. People have become increasingly aware of the great difference that exists in the economic and social circumstances of the people in Nigeria and some Nigerians have begun to ask whether Nigeria is really the land

of opportunity. Throughout most of the Nigerian history, poverty was regarded as a reflection of personal inadequacy and people were expected to pull themselves out of poverty.

However, many Nigerians have come to realize that the causes of poverty are complex and that often, poverty is the seed of discrimination. Recently, the prevailing view has been that equality of opportunity ought to be the birth right of all Nigerians. Thus, poverty could be viewed as a subjective and moral term. For some, it is scientifically established.

In view of the foregoing, Nigerian government at various time had frowned at poverty by establishing poverty alleviation programmes aimed at reducing poverty in the country. The various poverty Alleviation programmes in Nigeria had different nomenclature, different structures and different out took, but maintained the central objective of reducing poverty and making life meaningful for the masses.

Nigerian administration from the year 1999 till the present year 2016 has observed with dismay the alarming rate of poverty across the entire country and that Nigeria is classified among the poorest countries in the world (National Bureau of Statistic 2014). Consequently, poverty Alleviation programme (PAP) was introduced in the year 2000, not too long after its take off it was dawned on the government that (PAP) was not after all the panacea to poverty pandemic in Nigeria. This realization led to the establishment of yet another programme; National Poverty Eradication programme (NAPEP) to replace the former.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) introduced by President Olusegan Obasanjo in the year 2001 in an attempt to reduce poverty was established with the following objectives.

- To train youths in vocational trades
- To support internship
- To create employment in the automobile industry
- To provide social welfare service and exploitation of natural resources etc.

**The activities of NAPEP are classified into four schemes**

- Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS)
- Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) and
- Natural Resources Development Scheme (NRDS).

It has been argued that most of these programmes have had little positive impact on the poor, they have been poorly targeted, sectoral in nature and have often been imposed from above with little, if any commitment or involvement of communities, they were ostensibly attempting to help.

Recently, there has been a reorientation of the government focus towards developing community based poverty reduction approaches. The Federal Government constituted a presidential panel to rationalize and streamline all the poverty reduction strategy document called "Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA) prepared by the National Planning Commission (NPC), rooted in a community based approach to poverty alleviation.

It was in the light of the above that the Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency (EBCPRA) was formed to empower the poor through grass-root participatory decision making. The whole essence was to move from top-down, supply driven and non-participatory mode of delivering service to communities to a demand-driven approach to poverty reduction covering multiple sector depending on specific community determined need.

It is against this background that the researcher intends to x-ray the extent the EB-CPRA had gone in empowering the targeted group.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Poverty in Ebonyi State is a pervasive phenomenon characterized by low levels of income and social deprivation. It is the state's deadliest disease. The Federal Office of Statistics (2015) reports that 52.6% of Ebonyian are poor.

Ebonyi is a State divinely blessed with diverse rich human and natural resources to be used for the wellbeing of every Ebonyian. Ebonyi soil is widely acknowledged as the most fertile soil in the south-East. Despite all these gifts of nature, sadly enough most Ebonyian are living in abject poverty and wants.

There is practically lack of basic infrastructure and low level of income. In spite of the huge sums of money pumped into those National and state poverty reduction programmes there is still high incidence of poverty. People still die of preventable diseases, others suffer from water born diseases consequent upon poor sources of drinking water. Village women and aged farmers lack access to basic infrastructure like good road, electricity supply, clinics etc. They find it difficult to evacuate their farm produce to where they can sale them. These are indications that the real poor have not benefited from those national and state poverty reduction programmes.

Another problem is that officials who manage these programmes are corrupt, hence budgetary allocation for poverty reduction are often times siphoned and mismanaged leading to failure of such programmes.

Sometimes, politicians do hijack citation of programmes and projects meant for the poor. This unnecessary politicization has been the bane of efforts targeted at poverty reduction in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular.

In view of the above, the researcher posed the following question to guide the study.

1. To what extent does Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA) contributed to poverty reduction in Ebonyi State.
2. How far has political interference affected the performance of EB-CPRA.
3. How does inadequate funding affect the performance of EB-CPRA

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of the study is to ascertain the effects of politics on poverty reduction in Nigeria with specific focus on Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA). The specific objectives include:

1. To ascertain the extent to which EB-CPRA has contributed to poverty reduction in Ebonyi State.
2. To examine the effect of political interference on the fight against poverty in Ebonyi State.
3. To ascertain how inadequate funding has affected the performance of the agency.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- I.  $H_{01}$ : EB-CPRA has not significantly contributed to poverty reduction in Ebonyi State.  
 $H_{A1}$ : EB-CPRA has significantly contributed to poverty reduction in Ebonyi State.
2.  $H_{02}$ : Political interference has not significantly hindered the fight against poverty in Ebonyi State.  
 $H_{A2}$ : Political interference has significantly hindered the fight against poverty in Ebonyi State.
- II.  $H_{03}$ : Inadequate funding has not been the bane of poverty reduction programme in Nigeria.  
 $H_{A3}$ : Inadequate funding has been the bane of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is the noble laureate Amantya's human development approach propounded in 1998. According to this theory, the economic prosperity and functioning of a nation depend on its physical and human capital stock. It rest on the assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and necessary to improve the productive capacity of a population because an educated population is a productive population. The approach emphasized on the restoration and rehabilitation of the psyche, mind, socio- psychology and being of the poor. It is not the development that is understood in terms of the introduction of advanced technology and complex organization, characteristic of market oriented capitalist production, in which the sources of initiative and development are external to the rural community. EL-Serfy (1995-62) one of the major proponents of the human development approach to poverty eradication, argued that development should not be equated merely with economic growth because it is not an entirely economic phenomenon, rather it has always impede a systematic and rising prosperity, though, it has been associated with social change. Among it's manifestation are industrialization, efficiency, improved, governance, egalitarian income and wealth distribution and often functional institutions, the rule of law and the guarantee of individuals liberties.

As a result, Putterman (1995:20) suggested that human capital should be understood not merely as a collection of skills but more broadly as a totality of materials, knowledge and attitudes that takes the society form of culture, deserves more attention as a determinant of the date of and indeed the capacity for modern development. The human development paradigm for poverty reduction is not obvious of this position. The advocate of this approach to fighting poverty argues that the evolution and inculcation of good induces, skills and attitudes are imperative for the elimination of the traumas and inhibitions of the debilitating impacts of poverty. The relevance of the human development approach to the study is the reminder that the objectives of the development effort are to provide all human beings with the opportunity for a full life. When human beings are developed physically and mentally, they are fit to earn a living and become independent, fend for themselves and family, and as well reduce the rate of poverty in the state. All development efforts specifically poverty reduction programmes will pursue this kind of development.

## **II. Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design is suitable for this study because it is a type of research design that studies samples of individual opinions about a particular phenomenon based on the relationship and interconnectedness between sociological and psychological variables. Hence, the research investigates and determines individuals' opinions about the politics of poverty reduction in Nigeria with specific focus on the activities of community poverty reduction agency in Ebonyi State.

### III. Literature Review

#### Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

Poverty is widely accepted as a worldwide problem. To this effect, the United Nations declared 1996 the international year of Eradication of poverty and 1997/2006, the decade of poverty eradication (Ubosi and Omoke, 2004). In the pursuance of this target, government in both developed and developing countries have become increasingly aware of the poverty problem and several developmental efforts to alleviate poverty and therefore have been embarked upon by different countries of the world. The Nigerian government had at various times established poverty alleviation programmes with the major intention of reducing poverty. However, Onah (2010) laments that several studies on the various poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria shows that the programmes ended up benefiting the rich and not the poor, thereby increasing the inequality margin and poverty in Nigeria.

The two earliest poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria were established by General Yakubu Gowon's administration in 1972/75. These programmes are known as National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB). These programmes viewed Nigerian poverty from Agricultural perspectives. The programmes were aimed at improving Agricultural production as the only way out for Nigerian poverty. The programmes see lack of funding as a major cause of Agricultural poverty and aimed at increasing food production through increased funding of Agricultural sector. The NACB was empowered with the capacity of providing loans to farmers and cooperatives for the purpose of Agriculture. The Bank was also established in various states of Nigeria for easy accessibility to farmers. One of the greatest impacts made by the two programmes was the creation of awareness of funds for Agricultural development and the need for Nigerians to participate in the loan scheme. Regrettably, explained by Maduagu (2002); *The Gowon Poverty Alleviation programmes "turned to be a colossal waste and nothing was achieved". This is because the funds were made available to the elite and not the poor. The elites, who have access to the funds, diverted the funds to other sectors rather than Agriculture. At the end, the main focus of the programmes was not achieved, poverty was not alleviated, the poor increased in number and the Agricultural sector faced a severe setback.*

General Olusegun Obasanjo saw the inability of the Gowon's poverty Alleviation programmes NAFPP and NACB to reduce poverty in Nigeria and the problem of food insecurity, increase in food importation, high prices of food items, high urban migration in search of white collar jobs, he then established Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), as a poverty Alleviation programme.

The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), launched in May, 1979 in the words of Agedah (1993:43) aimed at making the country self sufficiency in basic food needs and import on Nigerians a new sense of purpose and the need for self resources. To achieve poverty reduction in the country, (OFN) embarked on the following activities.

- a. Mass Mobilization: This (OFN) did through radio jingles, music, television, advert etc to create awareness. It also approached various communities to donate their unoccupied farmlands to the agencies to embark on massive farming.
- b. Provision and distribution of fertilizer: The OFN also embarked on fertilizer provision and distribution, seedlings, pesticides and the necessary support service to farmers. Over 5,000 tones of fertilizer were distributed to farmers across the federation, Onah (2010).
- c. Regulation and stabilization of food prices: Attempts were made by OFN to regulate and stabilize basic food prices such as garri, maize, rice, guinea corn, yam, beans etc with the aim of protecting both the farmers and the customers in order to avoid increased food price fluctuation.

In spite of the above objectives, OFN could not achieve her set objectives as Onah (2010) notes that the programme could not reduce poverty in Nigeria. He observes that the OFN poverty reduction strategy was faulty in its policy objectives due to its narrow focus on Agriculture. It viewed Nigerian poverty from Agricultural perspective and neglected other sectors such as the socio-cultural, economic, political technological and national security.

The failure of this programme to reduce poverty and the emergence of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in 1979 as an elected president of Nigeria gave birth to yet another poverty Alleviation programme. Shagari's administration view poverty in Nigeria in terms of insufficient food and distribution. Hunger was observed as the consequences of poverty and therefore could be handled by empowering and improving the Agricultural sector. Thus, the administration established the Green Revolution Programmes (GRP). The GRP was objectively meant to achieve dual purposes;

- Reducing importation of basic food
- Improving crop and fibre production locally through mechanized farming.

To appraise this programme, Onah (2010) makes it clear that the GRP survived as long as Shagari lasted in office as president between 1979/1983. He reveals that the end of the regime shows that GRP

could not achieve its objective as foods were even imported more than ever. The local farmers were discouraged and food insecurity was on the increase. The programme only achieved making top military officers serving the retired, politicians and bureaucrats wealthier than ever. They have access to GRP facilities and acquired vast land for themselves through the programme with the use of state power. The lands acquired by individuals were not even used for farming, but as assets and collateral to enable them collect bank loan for other investments. By this revelation, it is seen that the GRP could not reduce poverty but induced it by enhancing income inequality and poverty in Nigeria.

Consequently, General Ibrahim Badamasi, Babangida established the highest numbers of poverty Alleviation programmes and the most diversified. They include; the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Directorate for food, Road and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), Better Life Programme (BLP), People Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Bank (CB) Mass Transit Programme (MTP).

The people Bank of Nigeria (PBN) was established in October 1980 with a very wide scope aimed at reducing poverty through financial empowerment of the poor. It was established to provide soft loan for lower and middle class citizens, Onah (2010) notes that loan ranged from N2,000 to 5,000 without collateral. Those scheduled to benefit from the loan scheme were the vulcanizes, road side mechanics, self employed technicians, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, small scale farmers, truck pushers, tailors and petty traders. Beneficiaries of this soft loan were given one year for repayment to qualify for another loan. The Banks had branches in all the states of the federation for easy access to those who needs its services.

This followed the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986. This was in response to the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) released in September 1985 that one in every twelve Nigerians was unemployed in both urban and rural areas (Agedah, 1993:127). The NDE was basically established to create jobs for Nigerians as a means of reducing poverty. The NDE has four basic programmes to achieve its objective viz:

- Youth Empowerment and vocational skill Development
- Agricultural Sector Employment
- Small Scale Industries and Graduates Employment
- Special Public Works

Onah (2010) writes that the NDE generated 142,075 in 1987, 94,365 through various programmes. In the same 1988, about 10,000 NDE graduates benefited from kits and materials loan for the initial take off of their self employment scheme. In 1989, it created job opportunities through NDE in federal ministry of works.

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that NDE has been making tremendous impact in job creation as poverty Alleviation programmes but despite this tremendous effort, NDE is still faced with difficulties of various kinds. These difficulties includes; poor implementation strategies, poor revenue allocation, corruption, political influence and ethnicity. These problems of the NDE have been a hindrance to its effective operation.

The wife of the military president of the federal republic of Nigeria and first lady Mrs. Marryan Babangida in September 1987 established the Better Life Programme (BLP) as her contribution towards poverty reduction aimed at;

- ✓ Raising the social consciousness of women about their rights in social, political and economic responsibilities.
- ✓ Mobilizing women for concrete activities including seeking leadership position in all spheres of national life.
- ✓ Improving and enriching families' life and also improve the condition of children.
- ✓ Educating women on simple hygiene family planning and importance of child care.
- ✓ Bringing women together and closer for better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective actions and encourage an institutional recreation.

BLP had conventional federal structure having at the centre, the chairperson and wife of the president who was to be assisted by the National organizing committee. At the state and local government levels are the wives of the Governors and assisted by the state and local organizing committees respectively.

In response to poverty reduction in Nigeria, the BLP established markets in Lagos State and other States of the federation, encouraged Nigerian women by providing financial aids to their agricultural production, small scale businesses, craft works, introduced small scale industries to employ Nigerian women, organize trade fair in the country and participated in foreign trade fairs aimed at showcasing several products of Nigeria women.

Onah (2010) noted that the programme was more or less hijacked by the elites and it ended up serving

the interest of the rich rather than the poor.

In January (2001) president Olusegun Obasanjo introduced yet another programme; National Poverty Eradication Programme popularly known as NAPEP. This programme aimed at creating jobs as means of empowerment and poverty eradication. It has a federal structure and also at the state and local levels. NAPEP has several schemes such as skill Acquisition programme, the conditional cash transfer etc.

Unfortunately, despite the huge financial allocation to the programme by government, the poor are yet to see the actual impact of the programme, Onah (2010) agrees that the programme has good intention but the focus is doubtful, resulting from poor implementation strategies and lack of good initiative towards poverty eradication.

However, despite numerous poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, available statistics still show high incidence of poverty in the country. Specifically, the incidence of poverty is very high among unemployed, uneducated, women and rural dwellers.

### **The Concept of Poverty**

Nwalu (2010), writes that discussion on poverty problems and progress in its alleviation had often been affected by the choice of its definition. This is as a result of definitional quarrels that abound among social and management science researchers which has made poverty to be approached with dissimilar views on its nature, appropriate methods of its alleviation and the effect of past economic and social conditions as well as government policies on the poor.

Gbosi, and Omoke (2004) maintained that poverty is not easily defined, yet a precise definition has been offered in the statement that many Nigerians are poor.

In the words of Onah (2010:57);

*In Nigeria, the past colonial era was occupied by military rule and political instability. For about three decades not of fifty years of independence coupled with fiscal neglect and mismanagement, lack of investment and commitment to socio-economic sector and corruption induced poverty in the country.*

Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996) point that poverty is a way of life characterized by low salaries intake, inaccessibility to adequate health facilities, low quality education system, low expectancy, high infant mortality, low income, unemployment and inaccessibility to various housing and social facilities.

According to Sancho (1996), the poor are the most vulnerable and lack resources and capacity to organize themselves and unable to exercise the right to project their situation. The poor are those who are deprived, and lacked resources to acquire basic needs of life,

Amoguo (2003) unveils that the 2003 official statistics released by the federal office of statistic (FOS) shows that the National poverty Rate is projected at 70% amounting to 80 million people as poor in Nigeria. This is alarming as two-third of the population is poor and this is detrimental to Nigerian socio-economic and political development.

Fields (1994) says that poverty is the inability of an individual or family to command sufficient resources to satisfy their basic needs. For Ekong (1791), poverty is ones general inability to attain or enjoy a given social, cultural or economic benefits. The significant issues in the view of Fields and Ekong are the inability and basic needs of individual or group that clearly states the incapability conditions of the poor. Engelema and Bamidele (1997), sees poverty as a state of individual not being able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, meeting social and economic objectives, lack gainful employment, skill and self esteem, education, health, portable water, sanitation, which reduces the opportunities of advancing his or her wellbeing to the limit of his or her capability. Onah (2010), averred that poverty has deprived a good number of Nigerians the prestige of citizenship. He added that the less privileged, the unemployed and the landless peasant are not given access to bank facilities as a result of the collateral barrier, which has been placed above their affordable capability. Basic education, good water, good environment and health care are being made for a class, as those who are within the enclave of poverty are not opportune to afford them. Against the background of economic perspective of poverty, researchers have argued that the economic definition of poverty is inadequate because of its failure to incorporate such issues like social, political, religious and psychological aspect of the poor. Hence, it should be understood that the poor both as individuals and a group possess social and psychological characteristic that may or may not be associated with lack of economic resource. These social and psychological traits can to a great extent affect them even if their economic problems are alleviated. Agu (1997) notes with dismay that food was scarce and expensive, people died unaccountably and salaries were not paid to workers. Hospitals, universities, primary and secondary schools were closed either because of non-payment of salaries or because people wanted increase or still because of students demonstration.

Omeje (1997), maintained that the economy is so bad, people are dying of hunger, there is unemployment and unpaid employment, inflation, hardship of all kinds abound. Majority of the people no longer sleep for thought and want of what to eat. She went further to state that most of the people are women and it is the poorest that suffer most from environmental degradation. Infact Obadan (1995) says that poverty is system of low income or low consumption.

### **Poverty in Ebonyi State**

Poverty in Ebonyi State is a pervasive phenomenon characterized by low levels of income and social deprivation. It is the state's deadliest disease. The federal office of statistics reports that 52.6% of Ebonyians are poor. The indicators for social sectors development are unfavourable for Ebonyi State in general and worse for the poor. Indicators of poverty are very much in evidence anywhere in Ebonyi State. Poverty manifest in worsening incidence and severity despite the vast human and natural resources and the economic development potential the state is endowed with.

A direct effect of poverty can be seen in the virtual collapse of basic infrastructure and social amenities such as roads, health, educational institutions, water supply, and other social services. Overt poverty shows up among the under nourished population particularly the vulnerable groups, most of which are children and women. Unemployment is very acute particularly in the rural areas where approximately seventy percent of the population lives.

In the United Nation Development Programme UNDP (2002) Human Development Report, Enugu/Ebonyi ranked low (0.466) on the Human Development Index (HDI), a combined measure of longevity (Physical Health), knowledge (Education) and income (Purchasing Power). The reason for this low expectancy at birth is estimated to below 59.2 year for male and 60.7 years for female. Mortality rate for children under 5 is 191 per 1000 lifes. This means that 1/3 of the state's population of rural dwellers obtain water and sanitation. Approximately, half of the population of rural dwellers obtain water from shallow wells and contaminated water from rivers. A good percentage of the population are illiterate. In social amenities, Ebonyi State is one of the states in Nigeria without the 132 KVA electric transformer which is necessary to enhance rapid industrialization.

The story is not different in the health sector, health facilities where available are all equipped resulting in poor health care services. There is also a resurgence of disease especially the preventable ones like malaria, tuberculosis, STD, HIV/AIDS, laser fever, diabetes mellitus etc. All these are compounded by poor nutrition and high fertility ratio rate of 7.0. Though the past administration of Governor Martin Elechi and the present administration under Governor David Umahi has made some effort in improving the health statue of the state's hospitals and health centres.

Increase in school enrolment in the state as a result of free/compulsory primary and secondary education is becoming a source of concern. The state would require several millions of naira to ensure a thorough renovation of the primary and secondary schools, most of which have remained in a state of dilapidation since after the end of the civil war. Most of these schools are house in sub-standard facilities, which provides an unconducive physical environment for teaching and learning.

Above picture clearly depict Ebonyi State as one of the poorest state in Nigeria. Poverty, hunger and malnutrition exists on such a large scale that they require political, economic and social efforts to eliminate them. It is against this background that Ebonyi State was selected by the federal ministry of finance and National Planning Commission as one of the six pilots State in Nigeria for Community Based Poverty Reduction Project (CPRP) which is in the state called Ebonyi State Community Based poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA).

### **Impact of Poverty**

Studies directed at explaining the multi-dimension and multifarious ramifications of poverty abounds (Addision and Demery 1985, Atkinson, 1989, Schiller, 2002, Sen. 1999 Harrison and Hunrington 2000). Poverty destroys aspirations, hope and happiness. In Nigeria as in other poverty stricken nations, this is the poverty one can feel Poverty affects tolerance of others, support of civil liberty, and oppress towards foreigners-It also affects ones disposition to participate in community activities, interpersonal trust, and self -satisfaction (Amoo 1997; Hogle Hart, 1997, Fair Back, 2000:271).

Sen. (1999:87) averred persuasively that an individual's advantage or otherwise in a society should not be measured in terms of substantive freedom he or she enjoys to live the kind of life he or she as reason to value. Therefore, poverty is a deprivation of basic capabilities such as under nourishment and illiteracy rather than merely as lowness of income, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty. He emphasized that poverty as capability inadequacy and lowness of income are such an important means to capabilities. And since enhanced capabilities would tend to expand a person's

normal ability to be more productive and earn higher income, it is also normal for people to expect connection going from capability improvement to greater earning power (Sen, 1990:90).

The role of productivity in determining living standard is important for nations as it is for individuals. A nation can enjoy a higher standard of living if it can produce a large quantity of goods and services for national consumption. The productivity of a society is determined by many factors which includes physical capital, human capital, natural resources and technological knowledge; the havoc major determinants of a nations productivity.

A country will remain absolutely poor inspite of all her resources, if her leaders cannot create an institutional framework capable of organizing the resources at their disposal for effective and efficient management of the productive sector.

Given the foregoing, poverty is definitely degrading to mankind and the life of the person afflicted by it is comparatively miserable and will give threat to the future stability of our society. Consequently, poverty, destitution, indigence and scarcity are word that shows images of Ebonyi's malaise.

### **Poverty Reduction**

Repink (1994) explained poverty as first, the inability to satisfy basic need of human life due to the lack of income or property; second, lack of opportunity to generate income or property and third lack of means to change the situation.

In this context, poverty reduction means the creation of general condition which allows man to live in dignity, where people are free to take their own decisions in life and where the poor participate in social, political and economic decision.

The initial effort focusing attention on poverty reduction was through the basic needs approach developed in the 1970s and supported by the World Bank. It emphasized increase income for significant attainment of the requirement for a permanent reduction in poverty such as improvement in health, education, better and affordable shelter and regular access to nutritional foods.

Three arguments were advanced to support this view. The first of all was that most of those who are poor are not producers themselves and this group of people forms the dependent population. Secondly, there is no guarantee that an increased income would be spent on essential services. In other words, better medical care, safe drinking water, shelter may not be available. In such situation, people may be better off normally but worse off on the basis for any permanent improvement. Lastly, the ability of household to spend wisely and affectively varies. Certain households may irrationally prefer consumption of goods that contribute less welfare to other goods that could act as input for higher productivity, (Fishlow 1995). On the other hand, vast section of the population may experience food shortages because they cannot afford to buy it or they are not entitled to it. (Thirwal, 1994). This could lead to malnutrition caused by the lack of access to food but also on people's entitlement to food. To understand poverty and starvation or malnutrition associated with it, it is necessary to understand both ownership pattern and exchange entitlement which in turn requires an understanding of modes of production and class structure.

Poverty in Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular could be explained by the combining factors of inadequate food supply and limited entitlement to food. Since independence, the Nigerian policy makers have always conceive poverty as byproduct of stagnation and declare an economic growth as a mechanism through which problem of poverty can be reduced.

Infact, the World Bank (1990) recommended a two-pronged approach to poverty reduction which are; the promotion of economic growth and special programme to increase human capital formation and provide safety nets.

### **Over-view of the Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency**

The Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Agency (EB-CPRA) was established as an autonomous body without undue interference and bureaucracy with the mandate of improving the socio-economic condition of the population at the grass-root level. The EB-CPRA was established to ensure that the rural population receives a representation share of its support. At least 80% of funding will go to rural area. The allocation of the remaining project will depend on the demand and other pertinent factors. The EB-CPRA does not itself identify project but selects from among those proposed by beneficiary communities through their respective community association composed of selected representatives of each community including representatives of women, youth and disabled.

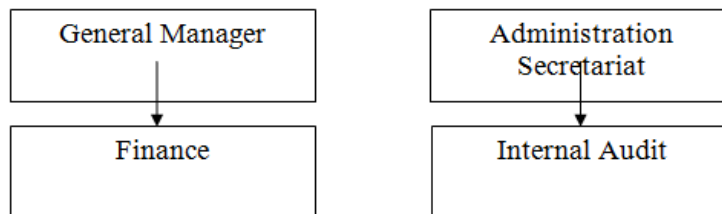
The EB-CPRA established on 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2005, has its management office in Abakaliki and coordinates its activities with the assistance of the community Development Department in thirteen (13) local government areas of Ebonyi State and other relevant like ministries. The management office



is divided into four (4) units.

- Administration
- Finance
- Account
- Secretariat

**Organogram of EB-CPRA**



**III. Aims And Objectives Of EB-CPRA**

The Aims and objectives of the Agency are to:

- a. Improve the living conditions of the people in communities and address the demands not satisfied by current social programme in Ebonyi State,
- b. Empower rural communities so that they play a role in reducing poverty in their communities.
- c. Provide small labour intensive economic and social infrastructures and amenities to communities in the state.
- d. Help communities to develop and implement and enhance comprehensive system of community based poverty reduction project.
- e. Promote participatory community development through demand driving labour intensive bottom up approach to poverty reduction agency.
- f. Strengthen the development capacities of the informal sector, non-governmental organizations, grass-root Community Based Organizations (CBOs), local governments and co-operations.

**Functions of the Agency**

**The functions of the Agency are to:**

- a) Support policies and utilize effective strategies for the effective implementation of projects in beneficiary communities, directed at poverty reduction in Ebonyi State.
- b) Disburse funds provided to its donors in support of poverty reduction to the beneficiary communities in the state.
- c) Liaise with the national planning commission to ensure that the state benefits from other poverty alleviation programmes of the federal government and international organizations.
- d) Appraise finance and supervise projects designed sponsored and implemented by beneficiary communities.
- e) Supervise and monitor the implementation of poverty reduction projects in the beneficiary communities in liaison with local government, communities and IMGO's.
- f) Carryout Public Enlightenment, Advocacy, Awareness and mobilization of communities towards Poverty reduction
- g) Liaise with other poverty reduction programme by the Federal Government, Donor agencies, foreign government and bodies for harmonization and avoidance of duplicating efforts.

Meanwhile, in line with its mandate of reducing poverty in Ebonyi State through a community based approach, the Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Agency has embarked on a number of projects in the various communities in the state. The agency has not only assisted in constructing health centres, it has also in the area of provision of classroom blocks, rural roads, bridges, drilling of borehole, rural electrification, skill acquisition centres. The agency's policy of making the benefiting communities to not only pay counterpart fund but to select projects of their choice has contributed to speedy completion of her numerous project across the state.

1. Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency has helped in improving the living condition of people in Ebonyi State through the provision of basic amenities like sources of portable drinking water (mostly boreholes). Through this, diseases like guinea worm are no longer found in the state.
2. The agency has assisted in giving financial support to poor communities during various benefiting projects like bridges, health facilities school structures etc.

3. EB-CPRA has contributed in ameliorating the unfavorable condition of people in many communities through the provision of employment opportunities. E.g., the Skill Acquired Centers established in various development center in the state.
4. Through the EB-CPRA, many were trained on practical hand trades and skilled businesses like tailoring, hair dressing, etc. after which the beneficiaries of such training programmes would establishes their own business in line with the skill they have acquired.
- 5.

#### **Challenges Faced by EBCPRA in Poverty Reduction**

The Ebonyi State Community Poverty Reduction Agency is faced with numerous challenges among which include:

1. Inadequate fund for the agency to implement their poverty reduction programmes.
2. Inadequate access to receive sponsors by those who are victims of poverty.
3. Party politics among some communities where funds and resources meant for the targeted poor are sometimes diverted by political office holders either for private use or to a particular political group believed to have belonged to a particular political group or party.
4. Refusal and non-participation of the representatives of the poor communities or beneficiaries in the discussion, preparation, design and implementation of programmes that will affect them. This has been a hindrance to poverty reduction in some communities.
5. Other challenges facing the Agency in Poverty Reduction is lack of adequate and effective coordination as well as mismanagement and financial indiscipline among the serving teams of the agency.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Poverty steals ones dream, sense of worth and significance as it disrupts ones ability to bless those around him. It is a situation that every rational being wants to avoid. It has been proved that no society can surely be flourishing and happy when a greater part of the population is poor and miserable without any functional means of overcoming those poverty induced factors. Therefore, increasing the participation of communities in the planning and management of community based projects and adopting a "bottom up" approach has been recognized as an element of development process.

Finally, since the import of the work is on poverty reduction, investment by the rural communities in Agriculture, education, healthcare, electricity functional feeder-roads for networking, distribution of goods and services, investment in human capital and skill acquisition and training for available job opportunities are some of the functional strategies geared towards poverty reduction.

#### **V. Recommendations**

This study recommends the following:

1. Discipline, codes of conducts and work ethics should be revitalized in EB-CPRA. Ebonyi State Government is required to ensure that a high manpower panel is established and mandated to embark on a full commitment to eradicate the incidence of indiscipline, sharp practices in EB-CPRA.
2. EB-CPRA should be provided with adequate training and retraining programmes that would make the staff to acquire more skills that would encourage their efforts geared towards poverty reduction.
3. EB-CPRA should be insulated from active politics so that it can be more effective and efficient in their duties hence political office holders and other public functionaries of the state should be made to adhere strictly to the rules and regulations guiding government business.
4. Adequate fund and upward reviews of remuneration of staff of EB-CPRA will help to elevate the low morale in performing their duties. Efforts therefore should be made to substantially review upwardly the allowances of workers in order to improve their morale and reduce sharp practices among them.
5. Finally, given the current economic state which has affected the vibrancy and potency of government agencies by way of draining the little fund at the agency's disposal, the sources of fund to the agency should be reinforced so as to make them available to the agency and on time.
6. Health is wealth the agency should ensure that the health centres are put into active use by providing drugs and personnel that are essential to make it work.

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