Abstract: This study examines the possible education for the eradication of poverty in Nigeria. It defines poverty as a state of shortage or deficiency of meeting basic needs. Major causes of poverty are over-population, illiteracy, unemployment, environmental degradation and government insensitive to the welfare of the people. Effects of poverty include homelessness, malnutrition and starvation, illness, crime, violence and antisocial behaviour like Internet Fraud (Yahoo business) and Advance Fee Fraud Populace (419). Some poverty eradication strategies highlighted include: (i) Organisation of international workshops on eradication of poverty, (ii) Respect for human rights, (iii) Quality basic education for girls (iv) Meaningful contributions by NGOs, (v) Provision of jobs for the people. Some recommendations are made for the way forward.

Key words: Education, elimination, poverty, strategies

INTRODUCTION

One of the most disturbing features of the world, particularly the Third World to which Nigeria belongs to, is poverty. It remains one of the most familiar enemies of most Third World countries. Poverty is a pandemonium that has eaten so deep into the fabric of the Nigerian populace. It is one of the very many problems of serious magnitude confronting Nigeria today.

However, both military and civilian government who have ruled this country, Nigeria have desired to provide a panacea to the problems of poverty since after independence in 1960, without success. Little wonder that Imaekhai (2009) observes that “the fact that poverty is still very much a problem in Nigeria even on a higher magnitude points to the failure of previous attempts made by both civilian and military government to tackle the problem”. Also various programmes like NAPEP, Operation Feed the Nation (OPN), Live Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO), etc, have been established for the education of the people and to find a lasting solution to this ‘sickness’ called poverty. But much of these programmes did not succeed as it was basically marred by corruption.

Moreover, it is an established fact that Nigeria is among the most endowed country in human, material and mineral resources in the world but yet was rated the one of the poorest countries world-wide. Nigeria is still surviving as a nation but it is yet to flourish. Paradoxically a country so blessed with rich human and natural resources and yet her people are very poor. This prompted Oladipo (1999) to posit that “Nigeria today is a country in which poverty, human degradation and despondency reign supreme. But this situation need not remain so”. Records, over the years have attested to this fact. As cited in Imaekhai (2009):

In 1960, the poverty level in Nigeria was about 15% of the population and after 20 years, that is by 1980 it grew to 28.0%. By 1985, the poverty level stood at 46.0%, dropping to 43% in 1992. Between 1980 and 1996, the poverty level had hit 66%.

He continued by stating that “The federal office of statistics state-by-state poverty level data puts it at 28.1% in 1980, 46.3% in 1985, 42.7% in 1992 and 65.6% in 1996” (Imaekhai, 2009). From the above, one can possibly insinuate that the poverty level increases astronomically both between 1980 and 1985 and between 1992 and 1996.

Based on this, one begins to wonder what the problem could possibly be. While some scholars have attributed the causes of the deplorable state of the country as economical, others say it is political, still some others said Nigeria has the problem of leadership. This study will address the possible education for the eradication of poverty in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

Poverty: Poverty, as a concept, is difficult to define as Imaekhai (2009) opines that it is a reality and therefore it
is difficult to ascertain its meaning. Bases on this singular fact, many scholars have defined it in relative terms. This is why definitions of many scholars will be presented below:

The Encarta Dictionary defines poverty as a state of being poor. That is, a state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing and also poverty is a deficiency or lack of something.

In the Encyclopaedia of Theology, (Verhey, 1995) says, “Poverty is a lack of means of subsistence (food, clothing, shelter and so on). But besides privations of this kind, poverty also connotes helplessness when faced with the demands of life: ignorance, weakness, bondage, isolation, defenclessness against injustice”

In relation to this definition, Corbett (2007) defines poverty as a “condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its most extreme form, poverty is a lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water and health services.” The use of word insufficiency in the definition makes it imprecise. He continued by distinguishing between extreme poverty and relative poverty. For him, extreme poverty, which threatens people’s health or lives, is also known as destitution or absolute poverty, and it is defined traditionally in the United States as having “an annual income that is less than half of the official poverty line (an income level determined by the Bureau of the Census)”. While relative poverty is the “condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages”.

For Stacy (2008), poverty is a relative concept and to really measure poverty, one has to look beyond a person’s financial income. It is for this reason that Stacy (2008) citing Haveman argues that a better way to measure poverty is “someone’s access to: Quality education, Health care, Adequate housing in safe neighbourhoods, Information on available public benefits, social contacts”. From a legal perspective, Wilkinson (2009) sees poverty as a violation of human right. He notes that:

...the definition of legitimate property rights and the criteria for identifying their violation are also vague...what do we say for example when an otherwise well-functioning democratic state fails to recognise a property right because almost all of its citizens do not recognize it? Almost everyone suspects some kinds of eminent domain without truly just compensation. And so a bit of my back 40 is confiscated to build a road. Who has violated my property right by refusing to recognise and enforce it? ..."the State"....

What the above is trying to say is that the poor are oppressed, dominated and relegated to the background by the opulent and the government without giving due consideration to their human rights to property and freedom.

From the foregoing definitions, it is clear that the concept of poverty is difficult to define. From the various definitions of poverty, we may attempt to define poverty as a state of shortage or deficiency of meeting basic needs. In other words it includes homelessness, lack of access to quality education, and lack of access to good health, lack of basic amenities, and no access to freedom of expression, etc. It also has to do with an abuse on human dignity and no access to justice. Conclusively, poverty presupposes inequality and injustice.

Causes of poverty: Poverty has many causes, some of them very basic. Some experts suggest, for instance, that the world has too many people, too few jobs, and not enough food. But such basic causes are quite intractable and not easily eradicated. In most cases, the causes and effects of poverty interact, so that what makes people poor also creates conditions that keep them poor. Primary factors that may lead to poverty include:

Overpopulation: this is a situation of having large numbers of people with too few resources and too little space. Excessively high population densities put stress on available resources. Consequently, in the rural areas, overpopulation could lead to scarcity of land which invariably will lead to shortage of food supply. However, Corbett (2007) opines that in developed countries such as the United States and the countries of Western Europe, overpopulation generally is not considered a major cause of poverty. These countries produce large quantities of food through mechanized farming, which depends on commercial fertilizers, large-scale irrigation, and agricultural machinery. This form of production provides enough food to support the high densities of people in metropolitan areas. It is important to note that high birth rate leads to overpopulation.

Also, another cause of poverty is an unequal global distribution of resources in the world economy which was caused by the legacy of colonialism. Many developing countries, however, lack essential raw materials and the knowledge and skills gained through formal education and training. They also often lack the infrastructure facilities like transportation systems and power generating facilities which are needed in industries.

Poor health and diseases also causes poverty in Nigeria. This is supported by Imaekhai (2000) as he posits that “poor health shackles human capital, reduces returns
to learning, impedes entrepreneurial activities and holds back growth and economic development.” Diseases, for example AIDS, which affect more of the adult population will certainly constrain the availability and participation of this segment of the population to earn income, which leads to poverty.

**Inadequate employment and education:** Illiteracy and unemployment are common in developing countries. In Nigeria, for instance, most public schools are not well funded by the government. It is a known fact that without education, most people cannot find income-generating work. Poor people also often forego schooling in order to concentrate on making a minimal living. In addition, developing countries tend to have few employment opportunities. Unemployment rates are high which leads to high level of poverty. Corbett (2007) notes that in countries with high populations, unemployment levels of only a few percentage points mean that millions of working-age people cannot find work and earn an adequate income and that other people may earn wages too low to support themselves.

**Environmental degradation:** In many parts of the world, environmental degradation, which is the deterioration of the natural environment, including the atmosphere, bodies of water, soil, and forests, is an important cause of poverty. Environmental problems have led to shortages of food, clean water, materials for shelter, and other essential resources.

Furthermore, lack of popular participation in governance and decision-making by the government to better the plights of the masses, also leads to poverty. Imaekhai (2000) notes that “many of the wealthy people who force themselves into office on account of their affluence, are so insensitive to the plight of those they are suppose to lead.” By this act, the government further plunge the nation into more poverty.

**Effects of poverty:** Firstly, poverty could lead to homelessness. This results in a large population of the country being homeless or inadequate housing. Wright (2007) notes that even larger numbers are considered ‘marginally housed’ because they are in danger of becoming homeless because of poverty or inadequate housing. For him, those who are housed only because they have been able to stay with family or friends are known as the ‘hidden homeless’.

Secondly, poverty results in malnutrition and starvation. Malnutrition is a dietary condition caused by a deficiency or excess of one or more essential nutrients in the diet while starvation is a condition in which the body’s tissues and organs deteriorate. Long-term starvation almost always results in death (Corbett, 2007). When there is poverty people hardly have the income to buy and eat food rich in protein, vitamins, vegetable, fruits etc they mostly eat food that are fatty or fried, high in sugar and salt, and made of mostly processed carbohydrates. This results in obesity and hypertension, both of which results in heart diseases and other ailments (Corbett, 2007).

Thirdly, in addition to the effects of malnutrition, the poor experience high rates of infectious disease. Inadequate shelter or housing creates conditions that promote disease. Inadequate sanitation and unhygienic practices among the poor also lead to illness. For instance, in ghettos and shantytowns that house only poor people, overcrowding can lead to high transmission rates of airborne diseases, such as tuberculosis, chicken-pox, and so on. According to Corbett (2007), the poor are also often uneducated about the spread of diseases, notably Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). As a result, STI rates are high among the poor. He also notes that along with the problem of a high incidence of disease, developing countries also have shortages of doctors. Medicine and treatment are often scarce and too expensive for the poor.

Fourthly, poverty leads people to commit acts of crime and violence such as anti-social behaviour ranging from child trafficking, prostitution, political assassination, election thuggery and rigging. Anger, desperation, and the need for money for food, shelter, and other necessities may all contribute to criminal behaviour among the poor. Poverty undoubtedly motivates people to commit crimes, although it may not be the only factor involved. On this, Imaekhai (2009) notes that “poverty which stems from injustice has the adverse effect of giving rise to youth restiveness as in the case of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria”. The constant kidnappings of foreign oil works, affluent Nigerians and the high monetary demands on the heads of such hostages by the aggrieved youths in the country shows the extent to which poverty and injustice can do to a people. Similarly, poverty has been linked to Advance Fee Fraud popularly known as 419 and the recent Internet fraud popularly known as the ‘yahoo’ business. However, one may say that such illicit business may not really be committed by the poor alone. Most often than not, the wealthy people are also involved in defrauding unsuspecting victims. This we may likely say is as a result of greed.

The fifth point poverty reduces human want and personal dignity. The rights and privileges of the poor are not respected. The process of self actualization and self fulfilment are hampered, if not completely jeopardized, as the poor live below subsistence level (Imaekhai, 2009).
Poverty eradication and education: The role of education in poverty eradication, in close co-operation with other social sectors, is crucial. The fact is that no country has succeeded if it has not educated its people. Education is important in reducing poverty and also increasing the wealth of a nation. But Julius Nyerere, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania says that “education is not a way to escape poverty - It is a way of fighting it” (UNESCO, 2001a).

For United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the measure for the eradication of poverty is by achieving universal primary education and adult education. The report made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations confirms that universal primary education is central to the fight against poverty. For UNESCO the crucial issues to be addressed by education for the eradication of poverty is in the education of the poor children, who are usually less equipped emotionally, physically and socially, to undertake a school programme and also the education of girls, who are particularly at risk as they tend to be prone to all forms of abuse, and very often confined to households in which they are virtually slaves- this UNICEF is most interested in.

Also, in the context of macro-economic programmes, special attention must be paid to breaking the poverty cycle for children. The adoption of systemic changes should be urged to ensure good quality education for all children. Furthermore, there are schools and communities that, particularly through NGOs and missionary groups, have successfully provided for the education of poor children (UNESCO, 2001a). Subsequently, UNESCO organises international workshops on education and poverty eradication. One of which was an international workshop that was held from 30 July to 3 August Uganda in 2001, which had the purpose of bringing together educators working in poverty education policy, plans and programmes and representatives of other sectors, including health and social welfare, to exchange ideas and explore options for reaching the poorest children with good quality education. (UNESCO, 2001a)

Also, in another article, UNESCO (2001b) note that “respect for human rights, meeting basic human needs and more equitable distribution of wealth, are clear priorities for the eradication of poverty. But that ultimate success, however, will only be ensured when there is a willingness and commitment on the part of the non-poor to assist in the elimination of the human degradation which poverty creates”.

Similarly, UNICEF (2002) equates poverty to subsistence and a powerless existence and that “it is through education that individuals realise their potential to contribute to production, wealth creation and execution of various roles that make for national development.” In line with UNESCO, UNICEF clamour for universal basic education of the right type which is seen as a critical prerequisite for countries to progress on the path to sustainable development and can help to lift communities out of poverty. They also advocate for girls’ education in that it offers unique advantages which brings about an improved family care in general and the quality of life for households in the poorest communities. For this organisation, this can achieve through Sector-Wide Approach Programmes (SWAPs), Sector Investment Programmes (SIPs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme that is multi-sectoral. (UNICEF, 2002).

Furthermore, Veneman (1999), the executive director of UNICEF, in her speech on the importance of girls’ education and the eradication of poverty, opines that “quality basic education of girls is an essential prerequisite of any global anti-poverty strategy”. She notes that “some two-thirds of the 130 million children currently not in school are girls” and their education, as a central requirement for ensuring their empowerment and advancement, will assist in the nations development. She continues by stating that only education can equip girls with the confidence to make appropriate use of their abilities, educate them on the changing values about violence while promoting equality and help to put women on a part of economic empowerment in order for them to be able to protect themselves from gender-based violence (Veneman, 1999). In conclusion she notes that girls’ education yields numerous social advantages among which includes late marriages, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, less childbirth, and so on. For them, the provision of non-academic support and security, for a girl child, is essential in order to contribute to their total well being and success in life. Moreover, dialogue and cooperation with parents and families should improve their participation and performance in education.

Based on the above, education for the eradication of poverty is very important and apart from international organisations mentioned so far, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) still contribute to the elimination of poverty in the country.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- There should be provision of grass-root (rural) development through the establishment of skill acquisition center for both the youths and adults
- Agricultural aspect of the nation should be assisted in soft loans to enable the populace buy seedlings and adequate means of transportation should be provided by the government so that the produce from such
farms can be shifted to the city where it will attract higher profit

- The government and some wealthy private individuals should establish industries and improve technologies
- The youths should be well empowered by giving them the required education and not just a ‘meal-ticket’. In other words there should be a full implementation of vocational education in order for them to be self employed and self reliant
- Also government and some private individuals should provide welfare system, which are programs aimed at helping people unable to support themselves fully or earn a living. This will provide a so-called safety net to prevent people from suffering the effects of poverty
- Encourage the education of girls and women in areas with gender discrimination. In addition to this, there should be an increase capacity in the distribution of distribution of education to the rural areas with particular attention on girls’ education

CONCLUSION

Poverty has not only compromise the lives of countless number of children and adult, but jeopardized the feature of the very society in which they live. It is very important to understand that the measures of eradication of poverty are numerous and varied in their manifestation. As a result, there is the need for an integrated approach to remove the causes and to eradicate poverty so as to pave way for a decent society free from anti-social behaviours which is the resultant effects of poverty. Nonetheless, education is pivotal in breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and social segregation that is the reality for many people.

REFERENCES


