

# PATHWAY TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION AT THE FISHING COMMUNITIES OF THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

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## ABSTRACT

*Poverty has been variously measured in terms of income, consumption, and access to social and physical infrastructures. It is a multi-component phenomenon that cannot be measured by one single variable. This indicates that poverty alleviation or eradication requires a holistic approach. Because the existing strategies at ensuring poverty alleviation have not made impact at the Lake Chad Basin, this study sets out to succinctly identify a pragmatic strategy that is adaptable to the area. It therefore examines the parameters to measure poverty against the background of the Millennium Development Goal. Data were obtained on Literacy, income, quality housing, Mobility, access to infrastructure, cultural and socio-economic values of the area from five riparian Local government Area of Borno state viz: Kukawa, Monguno, New-Marte, Abadam and Gamboru Ngala. The paper develops a pragmatic strategy through which the fishing communities can experience true empowerment and improved standard of living*

## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations in setting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim to reduce poverty in the World by half by 2015. The world Bank and several bilateral and multilateral agencies see poverty in terms of households or persons living on less than US \$1 a day

In Nigeria 70% of the population are said to be living below the poverty line i.e. below US \$1.00 a day. The concern therefore is to implement policies, programmes and strategies on poverty alleviation particularly at the rural communities, because the rural population is the worst hit by poverty not with standing that they are the custodian of most of the natural resources on which economic development is based.

It is true to say that there are numerous studies on urban poverty which have gone on to identify poor or rich neighborhood, also numerous studies view poverty as household or person poverty but very few studies address real poverty (Abumere, 2004).

This probably informed the reason why the rural populace still lives in abject poverty. Although recognizable efforts are being made to bring about improvement in the local folks as seen in programmes like the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the fact remains that until the real issues of poverty are addressed, it is likely that the desire to half poverty by 2015 will be a mere wishful thinking.

It appears that the rural populace is ignorant of the opportunities available to them or that the existing strategies are inadequate to tackle poverty head on.

Among the strategies that have been adopted by both governmental and non-governmental organizations include; the sustainable livelihood programme at the fishing communities, the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) with its three strategies viz: Mobilization strategy, community development strategy and the empowerment strategy. All these strategies recognize the central role the community is to play in designing the policies that affect them.

Unfortunately, most participatory strategies seem to fall within the mobilization and community development categories which have been observed to be inadequate to give the community the highest level of responsibility for action to achieve agreed goal (Anijah - Obi,

2002). For a people centered programme to work, there must be a genuine feeling of the people's aspiration as well as their socio-cultural ways of doing things

Because poverty is multi-faceted, its eradication requires a holistic approach, the network of factors responsible for poverty among a people must be succinctly identified and a pragmatic strategy evolved to addressing them.

At the Lake Chad Basin, experience has shown that despite the enormous fisheries resources of the area and the accruing income, the fisher folks still live in abject poverty as reflected in the morbid deterioration in the physical and social-economic environment of the area.

It is evident that there exists a wide gap between poverty reduction strategies and the actual improvement in the standard of living of the area. It is also clear that the fisher folks are ignorant of so many issues of poverty. What is thus required is to bridge the gap. It is believed that the identification of the ideal pathway to alleviate poverty at the area remains the hope of achieving improved standard of living and sustainable livelihood as desired.

This study therefore seeks to identify the poverty inducing factors and work out pragmatic strategies that are adaptive to the area.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON LAKE CHAD**

Geographically, Lake Chad is located in North – East zone of Nigeria and specifically in Borno State with its shore extending to six local government areas of the state viz; Kukawa, Abadam, Monguno, Mobbar, Marte and Ngala local government

The Lake is of significant importance to the local populace and contributing immensely to the state, regional and national economy, for instance Lake Chad fisheries supplies 26% of the total fish supply from inland fisheries in Nigeria with annual yield ranging between 220,000MT in 1972 – 80,000MT in 2000 (FDF, 2000).

Fishing is the major occupation of the inhabitants of the Lakeshore supported by wide ranging associated fisheries activities as well as agriculture and trading. Fishermen population stood at 8,500 in 1995 (Balami et. al, 1996). It was estimated that the fishery contributes about #11 billion annually to the GDP of Nigeria (Raji and Omoyeni 2000, Raji 2002)

Notwithstanding, there are clear evidence that the fishing communities are living in squalors and the deterioration of the physical and socio-economic environment is sobering.

## **DEFINATION AND MEANSUREMENT OF POVERTY**

There are many definitions of poverty as there are researches in the field (Abumere, 1999). It is possible to categorize these definitions into three broad categories;

Those that define poverty in terms of income, in terms of consumption and terms of access to social and physical infrastructures. It is true to say that there is a near consensus in the literature that poverty, being a multi-component phenomenon, cannot be defined or measured by one single variable such as income but must be defined in terms of many variables including income, consumption, socio-economic resources, access to social and physical infrastructures, demographic variables such as life expectancy and infant mortality, political participation, freedom and human right (Abumere 2002).

Defining poverty in terms of income is appropriate because income reflects the budget restrictions within which a household can choose its consumption goods (Hagenaals, 1991). The problem here however, is what income to use, should it be actual cash household income, current rather than lifetime income? Actual rather than potential or full income? Whichever way, income as a measure of poverty has other problems, how do you measure the income of the informal section like self employment, of course to a large extent informal income can be measured though may not be evenly distributed over space, and time as the case with the fisher folks. Nevertheless, definitions based on income are fairly common in literature.

Definition based on consumption often argues that it is easier to measure consumption than income. Poverty in this case is usually defined as the minimum amount necessary to meet "basic needs". The problem is, what are basic needs. These may include food, clothing and shelter but even then, there is still the problem of determining the quantity and quality of those that will satisfy basic needs. This difficulty of operationalizing basic needs has been around since Adam Smith (1776) defined basic need as only those things which nature and established rules of decency have rendered necessary to the lowest rank of people. In recent times, consumption based definition have simply, been viewed in terms of those living on less than US \$ 1 a day (Abumere, 2004)

Definition based on access to infrastructures refers to environmental resources and the variety of strategies other than income earning that household adopt in pursuit of an adequate livelihood. Environmental resources here refer to all forms of resources and facilities provided by or within a nation and include social infrastructures (road, electricity, water, telephone, sewage system and other waste management facilities).

### **POVERTY MEASUREMENT**

These often follow closely the definition offered. In this way, poverty is measured as income poverty Index (IPI) based on income or consumption definition of poverty or as human poverty index (HPI) based on access to infrastructures, the United National Development Programme (UNDP) has popularized these computation of IPI and HPI and the combination of these two to obtain the Human Development Index (HDI)

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained at 5 randomly selected fishing communities in three local government areas with the aid of 50-structured questionnaire. The fishing villages visited were Malamfatori, Daban-masara, Kwata gabas, Doro and Tumbu-beriberi; these are within the three riparian local governments of Abadam, Monguno and Kukawa.

Data obtained were on Education, quality of housing, mobility, income access to infrastructure and social facilities.

Secondary data on the demographic characteristics of the area was obtained at the National population commission office.

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Measuring poverty based on the income poverty index (IPI) the study revealed that the fisher folks of the area cannot be regarded as poor. Table 1 and 2 shows the earning per week, table 2 shows earning over a period of 5 – 10 months when barrier fishing method is used.

Based on table 1, the fishermen with the least income earn between #28,000 –44,000 per month, at the other extreme monthly earning could be as high as #228,000 – 244,000. With this, the fishermen have been placed above the US \$1 a day because they can live above \$1 a day. The earnings of the fishermen can be corroborated using the fishermen population to compare with the volume of fish traded annually at the Doro fish market. Raji (2002) in a study of the market revealed that about #11 billion worth of fish is sold annually at the market. With the fishermen population of 10,926, it is evident that the income of the fisher folks is relatively high.

However, measuring poverty based on access to infrastructures, the human poverty index (HPI) as shown on table 3 reveals that there is sobering level of poverty in the area. None of the fishing communities is connected to the National grid, only 20% get drinking water from the artisan well free flow borehole which though is not pure but better than that of wells, pools and lake waters.

Household sanitary facility is nothing to write about, the study revealed that bushes / field / backyard and pit toilets are the sanitary facilities available at the area. Hospitals are hard to come by. Most fishing villages do not have hospitals at all; the inhabitants have to travel several kilometers in search of treatment.

Houses at the fishing communities are entirely rural with no modern facilities they are either made of mud with thatched roof, grasses, tent etc. Access to information and communication facility is ridiculously low.

Road network of the area is in a sorry state and largely not motorable. Most communities can be reached only with 4-wheel drive.

Illiteracy level is extremely high among the fisher folks (table 3) only 14% has formal educational at primary and secondary level. This trend is not likely to stop as their children have no access to school facilities. Those that don't see the need for education don't go the extra miles seeking schools for their children at the local government headquarters and adjoining towns.

All these lack of amenities have combined together to raise the death rate, increase illiteracy level, immobilizing the youth's socio-economically and increasing the ignorance level.

Given that social amenities and physical infrastructures are available at the fishing communities of the area there would have been remarkable improvement in their standard of living. Because this is not so, the people are living wretched even notwithstanding the amount they are generating in terms of income.

The factors responsible for this situation are not far fetched.

- (a) Government policies have not been pragmatic enough to tackle poverty head on.
- (b) The political will to implement people oriented programme that will trickle down to the least person in the rural communities is lacking.
- (c) The people themselves are largely ignorant of how to improve on their standard of living within the limit of their resources.
- (d) Fisher folks mostly do not believe in self-help, they are more often than non-waiting for the government to provide all they require for livelihood.
- (e) Absence of societies with innovative strategies, for poverty alleviation among members.
- (f) The distance between the fishing villages and Maiduguri, the state capital is an important explanatory factor for the spatial distribution of poverty in the fishing communities. This is based on the Schultzean hypothesis, which states, that proximity to a successful center is important in the explanation of regional development.

## THE PATHWAY TO POVERTY REDUCTION

Based on 1991 population census, the total population of the six local government around the Lake (Kukawa, Abadam, Marte, Mobbar, Monguno and Ngala) is put at 502,553 (table 4). Based on projection for 2004 it is 722,336. The fishermen population in 1995 was put at 8,500. (Balami et al), based on projection for 2004, it stands at 10,926. This figure is however exclusive of the people that are involved in associated fisheries activities like fish processing, packaging, marketing, transportation and distribution.

This information is considered relevant because the population figure of people is a factor of great influence on developmental programmes.

To start with, it is important that the government create the enabling environment by first formulating policies that will encourage private sector participation in rural development.

Government should take the bold step of opening up the fishing communities by providing access road and other social and amenities and physical infrastructures like health centers / hospitals, schools etc.

The government and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should organize the fisher folks into cooperative societies. Already there are few associations at the Lake Chad basin like, the Lake Chad fishers welfare Association, Tedak Fishermen Association and the Lake Chad fish buyers association. These associations can be strengthened with modern operational methods or establish new cooperative and credit scheme where members can access funds for developmental project. It is believed that a population of 10,926 fishermen can be well organized into cooperative and credit scheme to the extent that it will have positive impact on their standard of living.

Awareness drive through enlightenment campaign, seminar, workshop carried out periodically will go a long way at changing the psyche of the people, especially granting that there is conscious effort to reduce the illiteracy level at the area.

The purpose of seminar, workshops etc. is to teach the fishermen on how to be masters of their own destiny, how to diversify their economy from relying solely on fishing and agriculture, how to embark on community based development project etc.

The media has important role to play in sensitizing corporate organizations and multinational to extend their social services to the area.

With the fishermen properly organized into functional and dynamic cooperative societies, they could be pulling their resources together to be handling community based projects like schools, health centers, sinking boreholes etc.

Upgrading the Doro fish market to international standard where fish products would be packaged for export will bring about great improvement to the livelihood of the fisher folks and their families.

## CONCLUSION.

Alleviation poverties at the Lake Chad basin requires that the multi-faceted variables influencing poverty be addressed. The fisher folks of the area are not suffering from income poverty but are faced with human poverty due to lack of access to infrastructures facilities. Strategies that will culminate in the Improvement of the social amenities and physical infrastructures of the place remain the pathway to alleviating poverty among the fisher folks of the area.

Table 1  
Educational qualification

	No of fishermen	Percentage
Primary	6	12
Secondary	1	2
Arabic	30	60
Aduit	4	8
None	9	19
Total	50	100
<b>CHILDREN</b>		
1 - 5	18	36
6 - 10	16	32
11 - 15	10	20
16 - 20	3	6
21 - 25	3	6
Total	50	100

Table 2: Weekly earning of the fishermen.

INCOME (#)	NO OF FISHERMEN	PERCENTAGE
7 – 14,000	15	30
12 – 16,000	7	14
17 – 21,000	3	6
22 – 26,000	2	4
27 – 31,000	6	12
32 – 36,000	4	8
37 – 41,000	6	12
42 – 46,000	2	4
47 – 51,000	3	6
52 – 56,000	1	2
57 – 61,000	1	2
Total	50	100

Table 3: Earning from Dumba fishing method

Cost of mounting dumba	Duration of operation	Earnings #	% Return
95,000	9	930,000	978.95
120,00	10	895,00	745.83
140,000	10	1,250,000	892.86
163,000	9	995,000	610.43
165,000	10	1,196,000	724.85
170,000	6	1,400,000	823.53
185,000	9	1,675,000	905.41
205,000	10	1,700,000	829.27
220,000	10	2,100,000	954.55
300,000	9	2,400,00	800.00
375,000	9	2,250,000	600.00
420,000	6	2,150,000	511.90
450,000	9	3,500,000	777.78
500,000	8	2,800,000	560.00
550,500	6	1,967,000	357.31
725,000	10	3,980,000	548.97
760,000	8	3,640,00	476.95
820,000	6	4,250,000	518.29
920,00	5	4,478,000	519.56
1,200,000	8	6,986,000	582.17

Source: Field survey, Aug.2004

Table 4; Access to infrastructures  
Electricity (Natural grid)

Yes	
No	100
	100
Electricity (Generator)	

Yes	20
No	<u>80</u>
	100

**Source of drinking water**

Hand dug well	40
Lake water	30
Artisan well	20
Others	<u>10</u>
	100

**Sanitation facility**

Traditional pit toilet	36
Water closet	-
Bush / field / Backyard	<u>64</u>
	100

**Natural of building**

Mud with thatched roof	32
Hand woven grasses rein force	
With wooden grasses rein force	
With wooden materials (tent)	36
Mud with corrugated roofing sheet	10
Houses made entirely or roofing sheet	<u>22</u>
	100

**Access to information and communication facilities**

Radio	61
Television & Video set	15
None	<u>24</u>
	100

Source: field survey August 2004.

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