

Exploring Volunteer Tourism as a Panacea for Sustainable Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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Abstract—One of the most intractable menaces that humanity has been battling with several decades ago is poverty. There have been a general consensus about the pervasiveness of poverty and its grave consequences on the well-being of citizens of developing (Nigeria) and least developed nations. Notwithstanding the enormity of human, material and natural resources that nature has endowed in the country which should have been effectively and prudently channeled to alleviate the poverty situation of its citizenry. The said resources have over the years not been properly harnessed and or prudently utilized for societal development. One of the ways to address this cankerworm is economic diversification from crude oil reliance to new areas such as volunteer tourism or voluntourism. This paper examine efforts at poverty alleviation strategies by the government of Nigeria and realized that the efforts has not yielded positive results because the citizenry are still wallowing in abject poverty, inadequate social infrastructure, insecurity, unemployment amongst others as an offspring of poverty. This assertion prompted this study and recommendations among other the utilization of voluntourism that are characterized with financial assistance, knowledge transfer, international connection, integrated national endowment via restoration of environment through skill acquisitions, education, cultural immersion, wealth creation and equitable distribution and economic development. We then recommend that volunteer tourism may be adopted as the main antidote for sustainable poverty alleviation if the opportunity is thoroughly harnessed.

Keywords-voluntourism; poverty alleviation; economic diversification; sustainability; Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism or voluntourism has become a global phenomenon ignited by “Gap Year” and the seal of its younger participants to travel the universe with the main motive of “Making a Difference” basically at grassroots level in local community more than twenty years ago [1-2]. This is due to the affections about our natural and serene environment and the aim to render selfless services. Volunteer tourism is an alternative form of tourism in which tourists volunteer in an organized manner to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material needs of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environment or research into aspect of society or environment [3]. In the same veins, voluntourism is perceived to be [2] a type of tourism experience where tour operators offer travelers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer components as well as a cultural exchange with the host

community. McGehee and Santos [4] conceives Volunteer tourism as utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of the regular activity to assist others in need. The increasing demand for an alternative, friendlier, discriminating experience has occasioned a new array of niche product amongst which Volunteer tourism is one the fastest growing and most prominent [5]. The definition above portends travelling with a purpose of alleviating poverty through rendering of assistance to the needy regardless of religion and cultural background, trait, sex, color and restoration of environment, conservation through educational research, finance and freewill donations which benefits the community and tourists in the aspect of destination changing, interaction, cross-cultural, experience, improving race relationship, exchange of care, improved partnership capacity and motivational standard.

The shift from the traditional or conventional tourism activities that exploit the host community to activities where the tourists gives back to host community at large connotes willingness and eagerness to participate in goodwill activities [6]. Although, many authors have different opinion to Volunteer tourism [3, 7], based their study on habitat for humanity, and also [5, 4] generalized volunteer tourists as being driven by not just pleasant diversions and alternative experiences, they are devoted to “poverty alleviation and to ameliorate social and environmental conditions within local communities”. This assertion is of significant relevance to our subject of investigation “poverty alleviation”. The aim of this research is to understand voluntourism as a vital weapon to sustainable poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The study investigates different development strategies adopted in Nigeria and it’s workability on the citizen’s welfare, physical development, national economic growth and national image in general. And proffers recommendations to public policy makers and other stakeholders for proper decision making and implementation.

II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The increasing global population explosion and its attendant pressures on the world’s finite resources and environmental degradation and depletion have led to more deliberate public policy statement of the sustainable development philosophy along with evolving guidelines to put it into practice. Sustainable development as described [8] is development that meets the needs of present generation without

jeopardizing the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. The National Poverty Eradication Councils of Nigeria cited in [9] defined poverty as a condition in which a person or group of persons are unable to satisfy their most basic and elementary requirements of human survival in terms of good nutrition, clothing, shelter, footwear, energy, transport, health, education and recreation. However, the (UNDP [10] Conference Report, described poverty “as a form of political, social and economic oppressions, where some people are poor for reasons beyond their control”. Thus, any government policy that is far from ameliorating the problems of the masses is seen as poverty perpetuating. Poverty itself is a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a means for proper medical attention or educational yearning, not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit, it means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities from goodies of life.

This few opinions of some authors as to what poverty means, explains that the poor are completely neglected in terms of access to basic needs of survival mostly food, shelter and provisions of the same to their family thus gives a clear description and the nature of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. The United Nations has shown deep concern on pervasiveness of poverty in the third world countries [10]. Poverty in Nigeria has been a long and controversial political issue, with its reality manifesting in the worsening incidence and severity over the years, despite the enormous human, material and economic development potentials the country is blessed with. And her inability to judiciously harness these natural resources towards solving the economic yearning of the majority of the masses has worsen the country’s categorization from a middle income status nation to a low-income category as a result of lack of access to resources by individuals leads to a state of powerlessness, helplessness and hopelessness, and inability to survive and defend oneself against economic shocks. This situation can also degenerate into docile followership, ineptitude and political apathy and under such conditions, national goals and objectives as well as their attainment means nothing to the large proportion of the society that are groaning in pains of poverty. Nigeria is currently regarded as one of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, statistically, over 34 million Nigerians representing 70 percent of households officially recognized as poor and 40 per cent as core poor, the extent of Nigeria’s poverty strikes one, as one walks the streets of the nation and finds people loitering around and begging for survival in terms of feeding, clothing and above all shelter [11, 9].

Against this backdrop, it is high time we imbibe the manifestation of voluntourism which create more significant and long lasting contribution to the development of people and the community at large. It is seen as unpaid labor but also a group of people needs, who probably present a greater leadership challenge than paid job because most of them seek rewards in intangible and intrinsic form [12]. It is opined that voluntourism is the antidote to poverty alleviation in Nigeria as this debacle has continuously negate human and socio – economic development of the nation as a whole. A positive

correlation to the above assertion is in [7] which reveal the experience gained by tourist in New Zealand relating to host culture, interaction and established relationship, self-development, foster peace, provision of medical assistance, educational support, and ecological conservation and can potentially alleviate physical growth and development menace.

III. PREVIOUS PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES

Based on the review of the presidential committee on poverty alleviation [13] evaluated the existing poverty alleviation efforts of government with a view to upgrading the programs where lacking. The pioneering initiative in this regard was the Lagos Plan of Action 1980 (LPA) which emphasized strategies of self-reliance, food security, industrialization and regional integration and the establishment of Africa’s Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) 1986-1990. In the year 1986, United Nation Programme [10] of Action for Africa Economic Recovery and Discovery (UNPAARED) was established to overcome constraints to development in Africa through mobilization of development in African resources. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development in Africa (UN-NADAF) in 1990s was adopted to strengthen the continent’s economy and reduce vulnerability to external shock and increase its dynamism, internalize the process of development and increase progress towards achieving oriental goal by the year 2000 in the area of life expectancy, woman empowerment, child and maternal mortality, nutrition, water and sanitation, basic education and shelter. The policy reform became handicap as it was unable to fulfill the objectives set thus become pragmatic to unveil new strategies.

A. The Poverty Alleviation Strategies in Nigeria

Poverty reduction is one of the main challenge that serve as a threat to third world countries, where the greater population of the citizenry lives in abject poverty [14]. National statistics shows that in Nigeria the number of affected people has continuously increase from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985, this accounted for 19% increment in number of poor just within 5years, despite the discovery of more crude oil, gas and bitumen in large quantities and in good quality, this is too calamitous and portends greater danger for the existence of human, sustenance, wellbeing of the people and even detrimental to the nation’s economic, physical, social and development in general. Within a space of 1986 and 1995, there is a slight reduction in poverty but in the year 1996, it witnessed a drastic increase and skyrocketed in year 2010 to the tune of 60.9% and as time progresses so also the number of people living in abject poverty increases. Precisely, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stated that the percentage of Nigerians living in poverty has risen from 54.7 per cent in 2004 to 60.9 per cent in 2010, translating to 112 million Nigerians living in poverty, despite a 7.6% Gross Domestic Product growth in the country’s economy. It was affirmed, that the rate of increment become worrisome in year 2000 [15-16], that the Federal Government of Nigeria committed #10 billion to poverty alleviation programme out of the total #470 billion approved budget. This singular commitment by the government marks the origin of alleviating poverty in the country as a result of long years of brutalized military misrule but all these

concerted efforts has not yield significant result as the poverty rate keeps increasing. The analysis of these programmes reveals that they cut across all sectors of the economy as explained by the Presidential Panel on Streamlining and Rationalization of Poverty Alleviation Institutions and Agencies in its report of 1999 comprehensively listed and classified the programmes as presented in Table 1.

TABLE I. POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES

Sectors	Programs
Agriculture	National Agriculture Land Development, Strategic Grains Reserve, Small-Scale Fishery, Small Ruminant Production, Pasture and Grazing Reserves, Accelerated Crop Production and Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme
Healthcare	Primary Healthcare Programmes, Diseases Eradication Schemes and Expanded Programmes on Immunisation
Housing	Site and Services Scheme, Prototype Low-Cost Housing Scheme and State Government's Housing Programmes
Education	Nomadic Education Programme, Migrant Fishermen Scheme, Adult and Non-Formal Education Programme, Family Support Basic Education Programme Resource/Technological Development, Family Economic Advancement Programme and Industrial Development Centres
Employment Creation	National Directorate of Employment, Environmental Protection, Federal Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Soil Erosion Control and Ecological and Disaster Relief Programme
Micro-Credit Scheme	Nigeria Agricultural and Co-operative Bank, Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry, Nigerian Industrial Development Bank, People's Bank of Nigeria, National Economic Reconstruction Fund and Community Banks

B. Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) of 1973

This bank is primarily responsible for providing credit for the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural produce to groups and individual farmers, cooperative organizations, limited liability companies, states and federal government in which about #5.8 billion was extended as credit to 318,000 small scale farmers. This program suffered a setback as a result of the fact that it was a non-interest loan awarded through selected commercial banks and a substantial volume of fund became trapped in distressed and liquidated banks.

C. National Directorate of Employment (NDE) of 1986

Established by decree 24 of 1986 to promoting skills acquisition, self-employment, labor intensive work schemes and to maintain a data bank on unemployment and vacancies in the country. The NDE was able to train more than 2 million unemployed Nigerians, provided business training for not less than 400,000 people, vocational training in up to 90 different trades, assistance to more than 40,000 unemployed to set up their own businesses but suffered from inadequate funding from the Federal Government, loans recovery problem, poor maintenance of data bank as well as matching applicants with vacancies. Despite all the problems enumerated above, the NDE possesses great potentials as an agency for the promotion of skills acquisition and self-employment schemes, given its

widespread presence and over 15 years relative experience in the design and execution of employment generating programmes.

D. Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of 1986

DFRRI was established as enabling facility management organization to coordinate and streamline all rural development activities in the country and accelerate the pace of integrated rural development. Though now defunct, the Directorate left legacies including rural feeder roads, potable water supply, and electricity. The level of awareness for integrated rural development strategy was raised by the Directorate and has resulted in the draft national policy on rural development but was grounded in corruption, hence, proper coordination of the entire sector was not achieved and lack of technical depth in most projects.

E. River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) of 1987

Established to carryout comprehensive development of both surface and underground water resources, for multipurpose uses, with particular emphasis on the provision of irrigation infrastructures and the control of floods, soil erosion and watershed management. They also construct, operate and maintain dams, dykes, pounders, and wells, bore-holes, irrigation and drainage systems and other relevant works. They supply water to all users for a fee. They construct, operate and maintain infrastructure services such as roads, bridges linking projects; and develop and keep up to date comprehensive water resources master plan, as well as identify all water resources requirements in their areas of operation. The authorities have a poor revenue collection system, poor maintenance of equipment, gross under-utilization of functional plant and machinery and general neglect of development of irrigation activity downstream. Despite these achievements, it was realized that their activities are insignificant compared to huge government investments in the agency.

F. Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) of 1990

Decree No. 22 of 1990 established the PBN, charged with the responsibility of extending credit to under-privileged Nigerians who could not ordinarily access such loans from the commercial banking system. The PBN was engaged in group lending to cottage industry promoters, agricultural producers, NGOs and cooperative societies disbursed up to N1.7 billion as in-house loans as allocated by the Federal Government but external audit report showed a huge loss provision of over 80% on its loan portfolio at its close before it was merged with the Nigerian Agriculture and Cooperative Bank (NACB) to form the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB).

G. National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult & Non-Formal Education (NCMLAE) of 1990

This commission was saddled with the onus of establishing links, in cooperation with all stakeholders, to eradicate illiteracy in the country, designing and promoting strategies and programmes for the conduct and implementation of a national mass literacy campaign in concert with relevant government institutions and NGOs. Similarly, it was to organize in-service professional training courses for senior staff

from government and capacity building. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) has since subsumed the Commission and its programmes.

H. National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) of 1992

It was set up to provide strategic public support for land development; promote and support optimum utilization of rural land resources; encourage and support economic-sized farm holdings and promote consolidation of scattered fragment holdings; and encourage the evolution of economic-size rural settlements. It was also to facilitate appropriate cost effective mechanization of agriculture; and institute strategic land use planning schemes to deal with major allocation problems, the creation and location of forest and grazing reserves and other areas with restricted use, and the relocation of population. Undefined roles and lack of specific purpose and overspending led to its downfall.

I. Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) of 1997

This Programme was established to provide credit for agricultural production and processing, cottage and small-scale industries through cooperative societies; to encourage the design and manufacture of plants, machinery and equipment; and to establish enterprises and pilot projects at village level as a means of providing employment. The Programme has problems of non-supervision and monitoring of the loans and projects by the participating banks. Fabricator's connivance with the beneficiaries to inflate cost of equipment, provision of sub-standard equipment and delays in the fabrication, and poor loan recovery. These identified shortcomings led to the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

J. Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of Year 2000 till Date

The introduction of PAP was as a result of quick response to unemployment, and within a shortest time, some 200,000 unemployed youths were benefactors thus stimulate economic activities and improve the environment and also to reduce social vices and stem rural-urban drift. The participants were paid N3, 500 monthly stipends each for a period of twelve months as they engaged in direct labor activities such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along highways, a forestation, environmental sanitation, maintenance of public buildings, among others. The programme encountered problems of over centralization, unsustainable design, uncoordinated management, over-politicization, irregular payment, lack of monitoring logistics and high-level and low-level corruption. Also, the FGN integrated their implementation into the National Development Plan and even the MDG [17] as encapsulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the federal level, State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) at the state level and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) at the local government level. From 2003 to 2007, Nigeria was implementing the NEEDS, which is currently the overarching framework for poverty reduction in the country. The purpose of

NEEDS is to raise the country's standard of living through a variety of reforms, including macro-economic stability, deregulation, liberalization, privatization, transparency, and accountability. NEEDS focuses on four key strategies. In assessing the performance of NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS in general, it has been criticized and characterized with siphoning of public fund, lack of inclusiveness, bad political motive, greed, personal motive, weak targeting and low level of transparency which we think volunteer tourists could help to tackle this scourge of poverty and promote the well-being of an average Nigerian and the socio-economic development of the entire country [13].

IV. EXPLORING VOLUNTOURISM POTENTIALS FOR FUTURE PROSPECTS

Nigeria, the land of pleasure and discoveries in the tourism treasure of Africa with a landmass of about 924,000sq.kms. The country has over 160 million population [16] with over 250 ethnic groups and 400 tribes according to projected population census of 2010. Nigeria is located in the tropical region with abundant serene environment, sun shining and cool region thus makes it unique and pleasurable for any class of volunteer tourists. The country fondly called "Giant of Africa" is endowed with abundant amount of sun-shine, sun Eco-tourism and natural based tourism like National parks, sanctuaries, wet land, and sport tourism. The country is a sporting nation and lovers of sports and many have excelled in various sporting activities like soccer, athletics, basketball, professional and traditional wrestling. Cultural festival such as; Osun-Oshogbo, Eyo, Arugungu fishing festival, Durba and Egungun festival (masquerade), conference/business tourism, beach tourism are bound in Nigeria. Nigeria has over 700km of coastline covered with unpolluted sand beaches, prominent areas and sites such as Lagos, Portharcourt, Bonny and Ibeno beach, Ibeju beach, Tinapa resorts world and others.

There also, we have Holiday Resorts developed around natural physical attraction, like the Obudu Ranch Resort, the Farin Ruwa water Falls, the Ikogosi warm spring resort, whispering palm, Badagry slave Route/ Relic, Portharcourt tourism beach, Zuma rock, Tiga Dam, Erin Ijesha, Erinta spring. Adventure Safari: Mountain/plateau experiences, Rock climbing, trekking. Rural tourism: village lifestyles, farmhouses, ranches-Olona ranch and plantations, hunting, local iron smiths, potteries, historical districts and gardens [18]. With all these endowment, Nigeria still wallows in poverty, as a result of non-challant attitude of political and public and even the private sector office holders are all entrenched in corruptions, surprising to mention multinational corporations and foreign investors are also not left out as they have found Nigeria as a safe haven to perpetuate all forms of corrupt and illegal activities. Therefore, voluntourism potentials if properly harnessed stands a test of time as a means for sustainable poverty alleviation in Nigeria, as the next discussion centers on the benefits of voluntourism.

V. THE POTENTIALS OF VOLUNTOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

A. Focus

Considering the magnitude, profile and dimension of poverty in Nigeria, it will be ideal to properly focus on sizeable proportion of people and specific programmes to be embarked upon, thus require the wealth of knowledge, ideas and goodwill of volunteer tourism to key in with the Government of Nigeria's policy and programs towards the low income bracket. It should be noted that the primary goal of any economic planning is the attainment of rapid increase in the nation's productive capacity with a view to improving the living standard of people and improving the standard of living of an average person. Empirical findings have shown that all strategies and efforts highlighted in this study have failed to tackle endemic poverty situations and poverty has defiled solutions in Nigeria despite the enormous wealth of the nation. This calls for more concerted efforts and advocacy in rejuvenating the system through the use of new strategic efforts such as free donors of time, finance and presence [19].

B. Financial Aid as a Golden Gate

There has been an acute lack of adequate financial resources by most of the developing and least developed countries, although, the meager resources available to these countries are often misappropriated and channeled based on greedy and selfish intent of policy makers. Therefore with the meager financial resource available in developing countries, it may be extremely difficult to really alleviate poverty which explains the importance of developing the voluntourism sector as another source of financing aid and knowledge transfer medium.

C. Knowledge Transfer

Volunteer tourism can provide a range of technical and managerial expertise on poverty alleviation both at the pre-conception, during the course of tour and post tour as the whole world is now seen as a global village with the advent of different communication gadgets, electronic media and internet facilities. The developing countries can utilize this medium from voluntourism website in line with their current objectives to seek and solicit for assistance and guide on the way in which they are able to apply the same strategy in alleviating poverty in some developed countries as rightly observed [5,4]. Emerging nations may relate with the voluntourism sector on area of interest like the design of workable programmes, mode of implementation, affected people, organizational procedures, operational procedures, and engineering aspect, planning and training. With this cross exchange of ideas, the Government can institute a policy supporting programme seeking for volunteer tourist or voluntourist via tour operators to come over to educate [20] and participate in any programme exhibited in the role played by volunteer tourism in conservation of natural park, preservation, conservation protection of natural environment and festivity [21-23].

D. International Connection

Volunteer tourism or voluntourism provide international connection thereby help to polish the host country's image through selfless service rendered to the country which will

eventually open more doors to other multinational organizations to help in alleviating poverty either through provision of machineries, materials and or finance. It should be noted that the sustenance of this assistance is dependent of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of the people and the nation at large, cultural immersion [24-25], understanding and positive motive [12], cultural and spiritual experience, amiability [26], increase social contact [27], sustainable development and most importantly the security of life and property of the tourists must be guaranteed. Thus, the involvement of volunteer tourism and thier motivational antecedents [26] results in rebranding the national image thereby open more vistas of opportunities for bi-lateral relationships between the participating nationalities.

E. Proficiency and Hegemony

The organizational competence of volunteer tourists is another profitable avenue that accompanies their goodwill in poverty alleviation. And in enhancing proficiency, activities rendered to improve the well-being of those areas visited by gap year volunteers as investigated by [28] global awareness [29], skill development and acquisition [30] is unquantifiable ranging from rendering personal assistance of time, finance, superior research, good reputation, managerial skills, education, enlightenment, direct construction cum supervision, sense of oneness and togetherness, people centred approach and the welfare of the host community [31], appreciative enquiry [32] that are the paramount motive of volunteer tourism as well as resident support are vital tools that can be employed to alleviate poverty in Nigeria [33-34].

F. Integrated Development

Although, many developing countries have different challenges bedeviling implementation of programmes and policies but in case of Nigeria the pervasiveness of poverty could be attributed to failed strategies and non-inclusion of volunteer tourism [11,35]. Hence, the need for alternative approach to sensitize, harmonize and develop all natural endowment to world acceptable standard for tourists and recreationists.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This paper revealed that voluntourism is completely a neglected sector of human engagement in Nigeria's bid to become a developed nation in the year 2020. Nigeria has abundant natural potentials which can be developed in order to improve well-being of its citizenry. It also noted that despite spirited efforts made by government, the pervasiveness of poverty in Nigeria is still at an alarming rate which could be attributed to failed strategies and non-inclusion of volunteer tourism to contribute to national development. Equally voluntourism is a more preferred alternative for poverty reduction because of its broad and diverse nature ranging from their willingness to assist personally, financially, dedication of time and services arising from their tour. However, it was emphasized that one of the main antidote to economic development, unemployment and poverty reduction is the adoption of voluntourism.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the government has failed to make judicious use of this sector and have also failed to recognize that investing in this sector will aid economic growth of the nation. This however may be considered as a lack of political will on the part of public policy makers and policy implementers. A finding also indicates that all efforts by the government to eradicate the scourge of poverty in the country have failed. This study aims to encourage individuals who have participated and those who have not to embrace the gesture of alternative tourism via their participation in a volunteer tourism activity and shared experience as a way of testing the possibility of alleviating poverty. The study found that while past volunteering experience, tourists' attitudes, subjective norms, motivation, self-efficacy and their readiness to participate in alleviating poverty, the developing countries has failed to provide enabling environment devoid of conflict, maiming and kidnapping as an attractive measures to entice the voluntourists to come to their aid. This finding suggests that volunteer tourism providers, the Non-governmental organizations and Nigerian government in particular, needs to pay greater attention to building a strong relationship with their previous volunteer tourists and to develop programs that demonstrate an obvious positive impact on the host community. Volunteer tourism providers and organizers should work toward a better understanding of the different motivation factors of various types of volunteer tourists in order to achieve; learning more about volunteer tourists' unique motivations as a way to encourage volunteer tourists participation in poverty alleviation, developing marketing programs that appeal to those distinctive motivation factors and provision of accurate information of volunteer tourism activities may motivate potential volunteer tourists to participate. It is on this premise that, this study strongly recommends that government of Federal Republic of Nigeria should recognize and adopt this sector as an antidote, weapon and tool for sustainable poverty reduction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Universiti Teknologi Malaysia for part funding this study under GUP vote No.00J74 and the International Doctorial Fellowship (IDF).

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