

## FOOD AND VICES IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY

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### **Abstract**

This study focused on food and vices in South-Eastern Nigeria: implication for poverty. One hundred and sixty (160) respondents, adult male and female, were selected from 8 local government areas in Imo and Abia States. A purposive sampling technique was employed. The objectives include among others an examination of the nature of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria; an investigation to ascertain whether or not, poverty results in hunger, etc. The following were the findings: Hunger seems to have ravaged our society. This is because majority of our people are poor and are unable to solve the hunger problem. As a result of inability to provide food, which is a basic necessity of life, the poor have employed all sorts of measures to put food on the table for their families. Unfortunately, most of these measures have been negative; as people are engaged in vices like armed-robbery, prostitution, pick pocketing, over-profiteering, etc. Others, because of poverty, have engaged in begging, constituting nuisance in the society. This paper sought solutions that would improve the lot of the poor and have them properly engaged in activities other than these vices, which can help them provide food for their families. The following were recommended: There should be the provision of gainful employment through the setting up of industries, factories and other establishments. This employment should be made to incorporate both educated and uneducated people based on merit and according to their area of competence; Skillø Acquisition Centers should be widely set up so that those who cannot cope can learn trades that would help them to face lifeø challenges, etc.

**Keywords:** Hunger, Food, Vices, Armed-Robbery, Prostitution, Pick-Pocketing, Over-Profiteering, Poverty, Begging, Nuisance.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a West African country bordering on the Gulf of Guinea (Merriam Webster, 1994:1489), and with an estimated population of one hundred and forty million (140,000,000). The country is wealthy, having been blessed with abundant mineral and natural resources, such as crude oil, coal, lead, zinc, limestone, white clay, natural gas, etc. According to IFAD (2007:1), however, despite her abundant resources and wealth, poverty

is widespread in Nigeria. The situation has worsened since the late 1990s to the extent that the country is now considered one of the 20 poorest countries of the world. Over 70 percent of the population is classified as poor, with 35 percent living in absolute poverty (Ibid). The problem of poverty is of utmost concern because all directly or indirectly feel the weight of its presence. For the fact that various people differently use poverty, thereby portraying its relativity, there is the need to conceptualize it as selected in this discussion. Thus, the fundamental question is "what is poverty?" According to the World Bank (2008), "poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom". Such are the fate of millions of Nigerians. Poverty in Nigeria is caused by a lot of factors, which include unemployment (Olukosi, 2003:19), lack of education (Ibid), old age (Neubeck & Glessberg 1996:197), sickness, etc. These are caused and/or aggregated by the harsh socio-economic cum political climate of the country whereby distribution of goods and services is individualized and left at the disposal of the ruling elite.

A person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. The minimum level is usually called the **poverty line** (The World Bank, 2008). This situation attracts a lot of negative consequences, but a devastating one is **food insecurity**, which means that the person or household does not have access to adequate food at all times for the maintenance of a healthy and active life (Olukosi, 2003:5). Access to food at household level implies the ability of a household to procure food, not by begging but through its own production, purchases, bartering or gathering and hunting from the forest and the wild (Ibid). A person or household that falls short of these requirements is suffering from food insecurity and by implication, hunger. As defined by the Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1994:578), hunger is "a craving or urgent need for food or a specific nutrient; an uneasy sensation occasioned by lack of food; a weakened condition brought about by a prolonged lack of food". From the above definition, the emphasis on food implies that food is of paramount importance to life and for Karl Marx; man needs to eat before he can philosophize, theorize or carry out any productive activity. Food can then be said to be any material or substance that is capable of suppressing or quenching hunger. Indeed, food entails more than the above meaning, such that it has to be nutritious or adequate; containing the essential classes of food - carbohydrate, protein, fats and oil, vitamins, minerals and water. This is actually where the problem lies because the poor can hardly afford food in its ordinary sense, not to mention one that is adequate. Affirming this assertion, Offiong (2001:97), opined, "Poverty affects physical health as a result of poor nutrition. There is a relationship between one's level of income and the nutritional value of his/her diet". Poverty affects both the quality of food and its quantity as well. As a result, the poor are vulnerable to malnutrition, underweight, stunted growth, marasmus, kwashiorkor in children, serious illness and even death, if the situation is not arrested (Olukosi, 2003:15). Hence, the poor, especially in Nigeria, are pre-occupied mainly with

the need to quench hunger and since the first law of nature is preservation; they tend to seek fast ways of deleting the problem. Since it is obvious that an individual, who cannot afford food, shelter or clothing will definitely lack fund for good education, and consequently, gainful employment, crime and delinquency thus, serve as a poor man's means to ends, especially as it is in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of Study**

This paper presents:

- An examination of the nature of poverty in South-Eastern Nigerian.
- An enquiry into the causes of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria.
- An investigation to ascertain whether or not poverty results to hunger.
- An identification of the categories of vices associated with hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria.
- Appropriate measures aimed at eradicating or reducing to the barest minimum, the problem of poverty and hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria and the nation as a whole.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the nature of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria?
- Does poverty result in hunger?
- What are the categories of vices associated with hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria?
- What are the appropriate measures that could help in eradicating or reducing to the barest minimum, the problem of poverty and hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria and the nation as a whole?

### **Research Hypothesis**

- H<sub>1</sub>** - There is a relationship between lack of gainful employment and hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria
- H<sub>2</sub>** - There is a relationship between hunger and social vices in South-Eastern Nigeria

### **Contextual Definition of Key Terms**

**Absolute Poverty** This implies a situation whereby a person or group is unable to afford the basic resources needed to maintain human life, such as food, shelter and clothing.

**Vices** Has to do with acts that violate the moral codes or laws of a particular society. Vices such as armed-robbery, ritual killing, prostitution, etc, are not in conformity with the acceptable standards of behaviour in South-Eastern Nigeria and they are mainly triggered-off by poverty. Vices are also relative to space and time.

**Unemployment** This is a situation whereby a person or group lacks paid job(s), mostly as a result of lack of educational attainment or due to the nature of the society.

**Gainful Employment** The term suggests that not all employments are gainful. The term refers to when a person is prone to a situation of improvement.

**Nuisance** Begging is seen as a disturbing or unpleasant phenomenon to the South-Eastern - the sight of beggars, loitering everywhere, and persuading people to come to their aid.

### **Constraints of the Study**

The limitations of the study were in the form of **finance** (due to the number of areas covered and the cost of providing the research materials); **hostility** from some angry respondents, who insisted on getting rewarded monetarily before they could answer the question posed; **time constraints**, given the limited time frame for the research. However, the researchers were unperturbed, as they had to move doggedly beyond these setbacks and ensured that the objectives of the study were achieved

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper views the issue of hunger and vices from the perspective of the symbolic interactionism as put forward by George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, and Herbert Blumer etc. The basic premises or tenets and approach of this theory as put forward by Blumer are:

- öHuman beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those thingsö.
- öThe meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the societyö.
- öThese meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encountersö.

Mead argued that people's selves are social products, but that these selves are also purposive and creative. Blumer coined the term ösymbolic interactionismö. His summary of the perspective is that: people act towards things based on the meaning those things have for them, and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation. Blumer in agreement with Mead claimed that people interact with each other by interpreting or defining each other's action instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. He further said that their response is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning, which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols and significations, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's action (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning during social interaction, how they present and construct the self (or öidentityö), and how they define situations of co-presence with others. One of the perspective's central ideals is that people act as they do because of how they define situations. In Nigeria, for instance, much emphasis is placed on wealth, which could afford one the luxury of living in mansion(s), owning expensive cars, becoming influential in the society having access to the best medical facilities at home and abroad, and having access to the most nourishing meals and the best recreational centers, such as Tinapa and Marina Resort, Obudu Cattle Ranch Resort, etc. For the poor, his luxury starts from being able to afford any type of food, at least once or twice a day, before looking forward to other öfrivolitiesö For the symbolic interactionist, the fact that one is able to meet his/her basic need of survival is what is

important not minding how you go about it, since not everyone has equal access to the achievement of financial success, (Odumosu, 1999). For example, the poor in Nigeria are characterized by the low educational qualifications, menial jobs that provide little opportunity for advancement or total lack of jobs, and in turn hunger. When poverty and its associated hunger are coupled with high levels of economic and social aspirations, the stage is set for **anomie** (crime and vices).

Anomie then refers to the breakdown of social norms and a condition where these norms no longer control the activities of societal members (Ibid). The Nigerian society seems to be in a permanent state of anomie, the individuals caught in this web (largely the lower class) are then, faced with no option but to interpret their ability to survive based on survival of the fittest. Thus, the hungry-poor man is caught in-between satisfying his need for food and other basics and his limited opportunities for achieving them. He may have several children or a large family waiting on him, debt to settle, etc. Therefore, he is confronted with the feelings of frustration and disillusionment and this can lead the poor to interpret the situation in line with Robert Merton's Anomie Theory. Once meaning is attached to the situation, the poor is bound to react in one of the five ways advocated by Merton.

The different meanings given to a situation can easily lead to problems. For example, when the poor continues to see a few others who have successfully attached themselves to the political class, having so much to play around with, they will definitely feel the need to do something in order to uplift themselves from the pit of absolute and abject lack. This line of interpretation will/can lead the poor to any of the five ways Merton enumerated for reacting to such situations such as, *Conformism, Innovation, Ritualism, Retreatism and Rebellion*. Conformists are those that follow the institutionalized means to reach the goals; for example, medical doctors. The Ritualists are those that accept the means but do not believe in the goals; the Retreatists do not believe in both the goals and the means; the Rebels tend to reject both goals and means and try to bring about changes in the status quo. Innovators on the other hand, are those that accept the goals but reject the institutionalized means. They are so frustrated that they believe in the adage that says, "the end justifies the means" (Ahamefula & Nnajieta, 2005; 113-114) and as such, invent their own means, which are often illegal. Using Nigeria as a case study, many poor, hungry masses belong to this category. There is a popular saying that "man must wackö, meaning that by hook or crook, a poor Nigerian must satisfy his craving for food. Some of the safety valves for this are Armed-Robbery, Ritual Killing, Prostitution, Over-profiteering, Pick Pocketing, etc, just to put food on the table. Others, who are not very strong-hearted to engage in the above vices, simply stay in the streets and beg for alms from fellow hungry country-men. Begging in Nigeria has in recent times, assumed different dimensions, as people go as far as acting or claiming to be disfigured or disabled in one way or the other, just to attract the sympathy of others, in order to enable them put food on their tables. Some other criminally minded individuals have devised means of committing heinous crimes, such as ritual killing and kidnapping under the guise of begging. All these constitute nuisance and pose serious threats to the optimal development of the country because the

society repletes with crime and delinquency breeding nothing but moral decadence and socio-economic retrogression.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study is concerned with the relationship between hunger and vices in South-Eastern Nigeria. South-Eastern Nigeria is one of the six (6) geo-political zones in the country, comprising the five (5) core Igbo speaking states, Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi. Because of the vast nature of the zone, the scope was limited to two (2), out of the five states and these include; Imo and Abia States. This selection was done through a ballot system (simple random sampling).

Imo State was created on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1976 and is blessed with abundant natural resources such as crude oil, lead, zinc, white clay, fine sand and natural gas in commercial quantities. Education is of high priority in the state and she has the only Federal University of Technology in South-Eastern Nigeria. The State comprises 27 Local Government Areas (L.G.As).

Abia was carved out of Imo State on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1991. It consists of 17 L.G.As. The people of the area are predominantly traders and Aba, one of its major towns, is regarded as one of the largest commercial towns in the country. Besides trading, the people of the area are also farmers. It could likely be said that there is nothing that could not be produced in Abia State, if the necessary raw materials and equipments are made available.

Out of the 27 Local Government Areas in Imo State, 4 were chosen and they include: Owerri Municipal, Ngor-Okpala, Isu and Isiala Mbano. From the 17 L.G.As in Abia State, 4 were also selected and they include: Aba, Umuahia South, Umunneochi and Isikwuato. These selections were also done using the ballot system. The sample comprised 160 respondents, adult male and female, selected from the 8 L.G.As in the study areas. 20 respondents were selected from each of the 8 L.G.As and the questionnaires were administered to them. The questionnaires comprised both open and close-ended questions, in order to ensure the collection of detailed information.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Meanwhile, the respondents were selected based on **purposive or judgmental** sampling technique, so as to ensure that the required categories of respondents (adult) were incorporated. Other sources of data collected such as text books, journals and internet materials were also consulted in the search for relevant information. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed; 77 were returned from Imo State, while 63 were returned from Abia State, thereby making a total of 140 returned and valid questionnaires.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

The research questions were analyzed using **simple percentages**, while the hypotheses were tested using the **Chi-Square** ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical formula:  $E(0-e)^{2/e}$ .

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The first hypothesis states: there is a relationship between lack of gainful employment and hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria.

**Table 1: Chi-Square Summary Indicating the Relationship of Gainful Employment on Hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria**

<b>0</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>0-e</b>	<b>(0-e)<sup>2/e</sup></b>
112	122.5	-10.5	0.9
24	10	14	19.6
4	7.5	-3.5	1.63
135	122.5	12.5	1.2755102
5	10	-5	2.5
0	7.5	-7.5	7.5
105	122.5	-17.5	2.5
11	10	1	0.1
24	7.5	16.5	36.3
138	122.5	15.5	1.96122449
0	10	-10	10
2	7.5	-5.5	4.03
<b>Total</b>			<b>88.2967347</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2010

Calculated value = 88.3 (approximately); degree of freedom = (4-1)(3-1) = 3 x 2 = 6; significance level = 0.05; table value at p<0.05 = 12.592.

The table shows a significant relationship between lack of gainful employment and hunger. The second hypothesis states: there is a relationship between hunger and social vices in South-Eastern Nigeria.

**Table 2: Chi-Square Summary Indicating the Relationship between Hunger and Social Vices in South-Eastern Nigeria**

<b>0</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>0-e</b>	<b>(0-e)<sup>2/e</sup></b>
123	126.5	-3.5	0.09683794
9	8.5	0.5	0.02941176
	5	3	1.8
134	126.5	7.5	0.44466403
1	8.5	-7.5	6.61764706
5	5	0	0
129	126.5	2.5	0.04940711
8	8.5	-0.5	0.029441176
3	5	-2	0.8

125	126.5	1.5	0.01778656
14	8.5	5.5	3.55882353
1	5	-4	3.2
138	126.5	11.5	1.04545455
1	8.5	-7.5	6.61764706
1	5	-4	3.2
110	126.5	-16.5	2.15217391
18	8.5	9.5	10.6176471
12	5	7	9.8
<b>Total</b>			<b>50.07</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2010

Calculated value = 50.1 (approximately); degree of freedom =  $(6-1)(3-1) = 5 \times 210$ ; significance level = 0.05; table value at  $p < 0.05 = 18.307$ . Table shows a significant relationship between hunger and social vices.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

**Research Question 1** What is the nature of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria? It was gathered that 69.3% of the respondents had educational qualification less than HND/Degree. Thus, it could be inferred that a good number of people in South-Eastern Nigeria has not attained high educational qualification. As such, it was also gathered that many of them do not have well-paying jobs, as their monthly income stood mostly between N10,000 and N19,900. On the issue of nutrition, it is gathered that a good number of people in South-Eastern Nigeria eat only once or twice daily (based on the 72% response gotten from the field) due to lack of finance they tend to consume food substances that are inadequate (mostly consuming carbohydrates regularly). It was also gathered that a lot of people in the region give birth to many children than they can actually cater for (based on the 69.4% response gotten from the field) and hawk goods in the markets and streets or serve as domestic servants to relatively wealthy individuals within and outside the area. Begging was also identified as a very disturbing phenomenon to the people of South-Eastern Nigeria in the sense that beggars are found in virtually every nook and cranny of the zone. The most disturbing aspect is that these beggars demand assistance from people who are also struggling to survive. From these, it could be rightly said that poverty exists in South-Eastern Nigeria and it in fact, affects a large number of people. To buttress this fact, 78% of respondents also agreed that many people in the area are suffering from poverty.

**Research Question 2** What are the causes of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria? It was gathered that many people in South-Eastern Nigeria are so poor that they cannot afford to go to school and acquire education. From the interview conducted, it was gathered that those that manage to push their way through usually end up in poor quality schools, where they learn little or nothing and not many of them are able to secure admission into institutions of higher learning. Due to poor educational background, they are unable to secure good or well-paying jobs and in turn, remain in their impoverished state, since they



have limited opportunities of advancing themselves in a society like ours, which places much emphasis on paper qualifications. Other causes of poverty in the area include negligence on the part of the government to provide essential social amenities to the people in the form of electricity, good road, etc, to ease transportation and commerce; procrastination and laziness on the part of individuals; fatalism (the belief that fate determines the status of every human being); poor implementation of government's policies on rural development, lack of assistance to willing Small and Medium Scale Entrepreneurs and farmers; high cost of goods and services in the market, thereby making life difficult for petty traders and consumers; low level of investment in Skills Acquisition Centres, which could enable people to be self-employed; old age accompanied by an epileptic pension payment pattern that makes it extremely difficult for pensioners to get paid, etc.

**Research Question 3** Does poverty result in hunger?

It was gathered that poverty by its very nature, presents a situation whereby its victims suffer from lack of basic necessities of life, more especially, food, thus, resulting in a state of hunger.

**Research Question 4** What are the categories of vices association with hunger in South-Eastern Nigeria?

It was gathered that due to poverty and its associated hunger, obviously frustrated individuals engaged in vices like **armed-robbery, prostitution, pick-pocketing, over-profiteering, ritual killing** and some of the respondents also added **Cyber Crimes**, popularly called 'Yahoo runs'. All these are mechanisms employed by some desperate people in order to satisfy at least, the craving for food (hunger). Based on the information in Chi-Square table 1 above, the hypothesis was accepted as valid. This implies that many people in South-Eastern Nigeria are not gainfully employed, and as such; receive wages that are inadequate to take care of their basic needs. This is reflected in the fact that some of them lack food to eat, while others, who have food, eat inadequate meal. This situation is very disheartening, given the very impressive economic potentials of the zone.

Based on the information in Chi-Square table 2 above, the hypothesis was accepted as valid. It was gathered that in a bid to quench hunger, people, especially the unemployed or those not gainfully employed, manufacture illegal but lucrative means, since they cannot satisfy the urge through the institutionalized means.

**Conclusion**

Man has need for the basic necessities of life. Food is one of them, which is of utmost importance. This paper took the pain to reveal that in South-Eastern Nigeria the lack of inadequacy of food has caused frustrated individuals to take to one kind of vice or another. It is the opinion of this research work that when poverty and hunger are treated, social vices would in turn be reduced to the barest minimum and our society would be a better place to live in.

### **Recommendations**

Having established the presence of hunger in relation to poverty, it is pertinent to proffer some solutions to the problems at stake. In order to quench social vices through the elimination or drastic reduction of poverty in South-Eastern Nigeria, the following should be done:

- There should be free education, especially at primary and secondary school levels—one devoid of payment like Stakeholders' fees and other petty contributions that amount to so much in the final analysis.
- Teachers that instruct pupils in public or government schools should be properly trained to deliver quality education to the growing children.
- There should be the provision of gainful employment through the setting up of industries, factories and other establishments. This employment should be made to incorporate both educated and uneducated people based on merit and according to their area of competence.
- Skills Acquisition Centers should be widely set up, so that those who cannot cope with school can learn trades that will help them to face life's challenges.
- Our people should discard the culture of laziness, which usually hinges on the issue of fatalism, which is a belief that some people are destined to be rich, others, poor, or that somebody or some spirit is responsible for a person's predicament. People should cultivate the habit of planning the present and the future and have some focus in life.
- The government should listen to the cries of the South-Easterners, especially those in the rural areas. Essential amenities, such as roads, pipe borne water, health facilities should be adequately provided so that people can at least, be alive to work hard. Also, there is the need to immensely improve on poor supply of electricity, in order to boost economic activities, because the inadequacy of electricity supply is a clog in the wheel of progress of this nation as a whole.
- Micro credit facilities should be made readily accessible to micro, small and medium scale entrepreneurs and farmers in order to boost economic growth.
- The prices of goods and services in the market should be made affordable to the masses. This can be done through the setting-up of an independent price regulating body, whose duty it would be to monitor the prices of goods and services in the market and also check the activity of manufacturers in order to control hyper-inflation.
- Old people should be properly incorporated into the scheme of things because they are very vulnerable to poverty. For the pensioners among them, their pensions should be made accessible to them in due time, in order to avoid the problems that most of them encounter while trying to receive their payments.
- Agricultural development should be given utmost priority so that adequate food will be produced, thereby guaranteeing food security. This can be achieved by ensuring that those involved in farming activities are adequately supplied with agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, tractors, etc.

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