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## Social Science Education and the Achievement in the Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger for Sustainable Development in Cross River State

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By

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### Abstract

*Disparities associated with income inequality and poverty also go with food insecurity and extreme hunger. These result from a variety of factors that include differences between geographic regions and within geographic regions in natural resources endowment, disparities in climate and agro-climatic conditions, and absence of hierarchies of central places, among others. While these disparities have devastating consequences in developing countries with dominant rural landscapes, the effects are further intensified by government policies that discriminate between and within regions in the distribution of development influencing projects. Thus, the Millennium Development Goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger poses a great challenges to the federal and state governments in this state with a dominant rural landscape, and with many disparities. This paper assesses projects executed, the extent of achievement of the goal in the state, and suggests a way to meet the challenge by 2015, for sustainable development in the state.*

Although spatial disparities are clearly responsible for the intensification of rural problems of low agricultural production that give rise to extreme poverty and hunger, geographic knowledge has not been applied by political leaders in developing countries to deal with this endemic problem. It has been a shameless sing song by these political leaders to proudly mention that over 70 percent of the population of their countries live in rural areas.

There have been many rural development programs undertaken in these countries since their political independence. The aims and objectives of these

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*Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 2 No. 1, July, 2012*

programmes have been to raise low rural incomes, increase agricultural production, improve standard of living in rural areas, and provide welfare to rural dwellers. Since low rural incomes did not clearly depict the poverty status of rural dwellers, the poverty situation of their countries did not become a challenge to them until the MDG to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger was forced on them by the United Nation (UN) in the first years of the 2000s.

There have been many rural, developing programmes in Nigeria but none had nation wide coverage down to the grassroots or created as much impact on Nigeria like the Babangida's Directorate of food, roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) established in 1986. Although like others, the military president identified the immensely rural nature of our rural economy and noted that he was taking the first initiative to tackle the serious rural poverty of Nigeria, his elaborate rural development programme failed to employ a spatial organization strategy. Although that programme failed to provide any solution to low agriculture production and poverty and was abandoned by the late Abacha's regime, the national directorate of employment (NDE).which he did not see as a rural development programme has lasted for nearly three decades, and has gone through five successive administrations to the present administration.

But extreme poverty and hunger have been intensifying over these years. The problem has been that the attempts at finding a solution have been directed at the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause of the problem. Political administrations from ex-president Obasanjo have had the misfortune of having the U.N. shoulder them with the problem of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. While Chief Obasanjo responded by establishing the national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP), the national economic empowerment development strategy, (NEEDS), states economic empowerment development strategy (SEEDS) and local economic empowerment development strategy (LEEDS), all were powerless at eradicating poverty before he left office.

Despite all effort the disparities between different regions and within regions in resource endowment, agro-climate and climate conditions, differences between core and periphery areas, etc. are left intact to generate factors that intensify extreme hunger and poverty. But the government which has the wherewithal and the ability to deal with the challenges failed to identify the problems, and has executed wrong programmes that intensify the challenges. The questions are: What is the extent of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in the country? Can Cross River State government achieve this goal by 2015?

### **The Spatial Domain of Extreme Poverty and Hunger**

It is a well known fact that there are areas of prosperity and pockets of poverty and hunger in different countries and even within the same country that speed or retard development respectively. This problem can be solved with the application of appropriate spatial organization strategy. Johnson (1976) stated it clearly that differences between "Developed" and less developed countries (or between progressive and backward areas within countries) can to a useful degree be assessed in terms of

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ways whereby terrestrial space is organized. For, whatever the dominant organizing principle may be, they will necessarily shaped and influence the affected landscape.

Knowledge of the challenges of disparities associated with income inequalities and poverty that also go with food scarcity and hunger can be solved by the application of the fundamental objectives and directive principle of state policy of Nigerian Constitution 1979, 16 (2) which stated that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development of the country. Although, politicians from favoured areas overlook this provision, those in disadvantaged areas never identify this, and ask questions, and insist on this principle of even development to lift their people out of extreme hunger and poverty.

It is true that poverty and hunger do not affect all parts of Nigeria equally. There are core areas of prosperity and periphery areas of extreme hunger and poverty in Nigeria. Although Cross River State is positioned to be a core area, the weak position displayed by politicians in the state from colonial has forced the state into its periphery position. Udo (1967) identified Calabar town, and Cross River basin as a retarded, an underdeveloped, or backward area. The word backward here means that it is in the periphery, and not backward in terms of intelligence as the word is used in educational studies. The state is retarded because its natural resources are not adequately utilized, or are being exploited to develop other parts of the country. It suffered loss of locational advantage through neglect and weak bargaining power of its politicians. It also suffers intense unemployment for lack of economic progress, low incomes, (poverty) low buying power, volume of trade, and low levels of living as a result of the dominant rural landscape. The state has fertile soils for increased agricultural production; high level of emigration to other parts of the country and very little effort has been made by the federal government to provide development influencing projects in the area. Although some states in the country are in the periphery, Cross River State suffers more widespread diffusion of backwash effects that intensify extreme hunger and poverty.

Thus, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in Cross River State and some parts of Nigeria, there must be a well planned urban and regional development strategy that can stimulate agricultural and industrial commercialization to meet the challenges. It is not that the people of Cross River State do not respond to the need to develop their area, the position they find themselves is such that no effort can bring substantial reward.

Scholars have made effort to define poverty in relative or absolute terms. Townsend (1962) considers poverty in relative terms noting that we have to understand the level of living of the rich in order to compare the inequality of the poor. Sen (1995) considers absolute poverty as the inability to have the basic materials of well-being. Olowu and Akintola (1995) stated that poverty can be seen as primary or secondary. They stated that primary poverty is the inability to have income to meet family needs, while secondary poverty results from the mismanagement of income that should have been sufficient for the family. They also stated the differences between deprivation and

poverty. They stressed the fact that deprivation occur as a result of poor facilities that cannot give employment to people to eradicate their poverty. This study, accepts deprivation as part of the challenge that intensify poverty in Cross River State. This study also regards poverty as resulting from spatial challenges that give rise to differences between core and periphery areas which governments both at the federal and State levels can provide a solution to. When will this be?

### **Why Poverty in the Midst of Plenty?**

The fact that Calabar has the same advantaged position like Lagos and Port Harcourt is known to all. Calabar was the first international port on the Nigerian coast. This is why Calabar became the headquarters of the Royal Niger Company in the 1840s, the Niger coast protectorate in 1898, and in 1900, the headquarters of the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. Calabar lost the capital of the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria to Lagos in 1906, which subsequently became the capital of Nigeria because of the accessibility of Lagos that became the terminal of the western railway line that had reached Jeba to link the North. When finally Port Harcourt was chosen as the terminal of the eastern railway line, Calabar port declined and has not regained its socio-economic status till today. (Udo, 1967 Ofonagoro, 1979, Matiki, 2004). Although Sir Ralph Moor the high commissioner of the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria identified Calabar rail line and terminal as the best gate way into Nigeria that can go through Ibi and Maiduguri, and link the French Sudan and German Cameroon to tap their trade, the discovery of coal at Enugu in 1908 forced the colonial government to choose Port Harcourt instead of Calabar as terminal for the Eastern railway line. Matiki (2011) identified Calabar as the best terminal in Nigeria for a transcontinental railway line that can link Alexandria (Egypt) at the Mediterranean coast, the Red Sea (Sudan), and can be extended to link Uganda in east Africa.

With this, the growth of Calabar with port industries and multinational business can make it grow to the size of Lagos. Some scholars have called on the federal government to designate Calabar as a mega-city. These academics are not aware that the term Mega-city comes from the term Megalopolis. A wide spread, thickly-populated urban area. Only Lagos qualifies for the name. Calabar in its sorry stage is a parasitic urban center that relies on Aba (a non port city) and other towns for imported goods and services, and the people suffer backwash effects in high prices of goods that keep them poor. Ntukidem (1980 p.75) made the point clear when he stated thus;

*The greatest limitation of Calabar has been the weak socio-economic links with the rest of the subordinate towns to it. It is typically a parasitic consumer city generating only administrative services in return for food and services brought into it from the hinterland.*

For this, Calabar unlike Lagos and Port Harcourt is not a core centre and this helps to drain the resources of the state and other states to keep the people poor. Although Cross River State like Edo, Delta Ogun in the south has rich fertile soils with hard working people, they suffer poverty more than people in those states because they

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are in the periphery and lack viable urban centres. Worst still, there are no generative urban centres near-by. Although many people in the state refer to our local government centres like Ikom, Ugep, Ogoja, and Obudu as urban cities, they are in fact small towns or small urban centres. The rest, Boje, Itigidi, Akamkpa, Ibogo, Efraya, Ikot Nakanda, etc. are villages or you can call them village towns. So apart from Calabar a larger urban centre that is parasitic, Cross River State has no urban centres that stimulate food and agro-industrial crops production by farmers in our numerous rural villages.

According to Johnson (1976) by 1500 England was no longer a collectivity of self supporting rural communities. She had at least 760 market towns where farmers and graziers could sell their produce or their animals and buy their farm supplies or consumer goods, as well as hear the news, listen to sermons, criticize the government or organize insurrections. These towns provided an organizing mechanism that transformed the countryside. Again there were many market towns nearby, and farmers were not bound to a single local market, but could choose the best among them for high crop prices. Cross River State, farmers have no option than to give their rich crop products to the middlemen who keep producer prices low at give away prices while traders hike prices of consumers goods (backwash effects) that keep them very poor. This discourages increased agricultural production that hinders the achievement of food security, and intensifies extreme hunger. Painting a clear picture of why farmers in Cross River State suffer extreme poverty and hunger, Johnson (1976 171-187) Stated thus:

*The relative lack of central-place infrastructure in underdeveloped counties lead to serious handicap. Because the country side is inadequately provided with accessible market centres where farm produce can readily be sold and where shops filled with consumer and producer goods can exert tempting "demonstration effects; the incentives to produce more for the market, and the inducement to invest in better tools, fertilizers or better livestock in order to generate a large marketable surplus are weak...If there are no buyers proffering payment goods directly or indirectly (via money) it is of course, quite pointless to produce more grain, meat or vegetable than a family can consume.*

In this situation, there is reason for over 70 percent of the people who are farmers to be poor, live under the poverty line, and go without enough food sometimes. The civil/public servants, traders, tradesmen, etc. unlike their counter-pants in Lagos and other core areas, pay more for consumer goods and can not gain much from their services (backwash effects), which forced them to live under the poverty line. For these reasons extreme poverty and hunger are extensive and endemic in the State.

**The Federal and State Government Effort to Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger to Achieve the MDG by 2015**

The national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP, Aliyu, 2001) with elaborate schemes and programmes that included those of DFRRI and NDE has done

very little to change the poverty and hunger of people of the state. The only important visible sign of NAPEP in the state is the Keke NAPEP-a three –cycle service that is mainly limited to Calabar south and a few streets in Calabar municipality. Despite the effort of the Cross River State government at opening up rural roads for farmers to transport their food crops to rural village markets, the Keke NAPEP are not useful to their bulky farm produce. As a result, without rural transport services these rural roads have motorcycle transport service with increasing cases of accidents, with grave consequences to the rural economy of the state.

However, the state government under the present administration has put in place the first state poverty reduction programme with ‘Project Comfort’ and ‘Project Hope’ (C R S ministry of social welfare2011).Implemented by the ministry of social welfare and community development, while ‘project Hope’ is a free health programme for children under five years and pregnant women in the state, ‘Project Comfort’, otherwise known as conditional cash transfer to poor families living in extreme poverty. These two projects are the real poverty reduction programmes that will help some core poor persons in the state. Project comfort has a simple but really effective grass root committee at the Local government ward level.

### **Membership of the “Project Comfort” Ward Committee**

The members of the committee are;

Clan Head / Village head	Chairman
Head Master / Head Mistress	Member
Pastor / Rev father	Member
Woman Leader	Member
Youth leader	Member

**Functions:** The committee members, who know the people very well in their area, go door to door to select the core poor among them. The core poor are those with an income of less than one dollar (\$1) or ₦150 per day and have children who are attending school. This is the basic qualification for selection as well as those living with HIV/AIDS, the vulnerable i.e. widows, disable, and orphans are also considered. Fifteen members are selected from each ward in the local government. Currently there are 2,940 core poor who receive ₦5,000 bi-monthly or ten thousand (₦10,000).for two months or (₦60,000) for the year.

For their exit from the scheme, government plans to train one member of the poor household in a trade (an NDE type training scheme) and will pay each participant seven thousand (₦7,000) each month during the training i.e. eighty four thousand (₦84,000) Naira for the year for a trade he or she will later take to. This amount paid in part or in full will enable participants to be self-employed and get the family out of poverty.

Certainly, the state governor deserves commendation for this lofty programmes that have not been seen before in the state. NAPEP had no project like it. The

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₦5,000.00 for a month or ₦10,000 bi-monthly is really too much for the poor who are not working for the government. This is just more than the minimum wage of state workers a few years back. We believe that ₦2000 or ₦3000 would have increased the number of the core poor who should benefit from the project.

However, in a state with a population of over two million people, project comfort will go over many years before all the core poor can benefit. And in our experience, subsequent administrations do not continue with programmes of the administrations they succeed in office. Again clearly, the big effort of the governor is only directed at the symptoms of the problem while the cause of the problem is allowed to intensify extreme poverty and hunger daily, monthly and yearly. We have to deal with the problem to reduce poverty and hunger in the state.

At this point we want you to assess the extent of the achievements the governments at the federal and state levels have made at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger for success by 2015.

### **Conclusion**

Although extreme poverty and hunger have been with Nigerians long before the Millennium Declaration was ratified by 189 heads of State in September 2000 (Nelson and Precolt,2003) no serious effort has been made at eradicating it. Although rural development programmes were intended to raise low incomes of rural dwellers, poverty was not seen as a problem to identify its main cause. The establishment of NAPEP did not also identify the cause of poverty, but has rather intensified extreme hunger and poverty in Nigeria. Although project comfort of our dynamic governor is directed rightly at the core poor, it is an effort directed at the symptoms rather than the cause of problems. The solution to the achievement of the M D G in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 lies in the provision of central places that can commercialize industrial and agricultural production in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole for sustainable development in the country.

### **The Way Forward – Recommendations**

1. The federal and state governments have no option to executing a spatial organization process in the country, particularly in Cross River State for a hierarchy of central places that can stimulate the commercialization of agricultural production in the rural villages, and the commercialization of industrial and non-farm production activities in growth centres.
2. Calabar, the Cross River State capital, stands out in Nigeria, as the best terminal for a transcontinental railway line that can link north Africa, central Africa and east Africa, and thus provide a structural transformation that will provide employment, increase agricultural and industrial production to eradicate poverty and hunger of not only Nigerians, but the rest of Africans as well.

3. There is no way a coastal railway line to Calabar can make a difference in the lives of poor Cross River people. The Federal government free port established in Calabar by President Obasanjo in 2001 has remained dormant along with the port and Free Trade Zone till date. The Federal government should undertake growth stimulating projects of Calabar town to make it a growth pole by linking it with a transcontinental railway line and other such projects.

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