

Strategies for Rural Poverty Reduction in Ekpoma Region of Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategies for rural poverty reduction in Ekpoma region of Edo State. The study used primary and secondary sources of data for the study. The paper reveals the causes of poverty in the area which include poor accessibility, poor marketing facilities, and lack of storage facilities for agricultural produce, capital shortages and very low industrial activities in the area. The study also reveals the socio-economic effects of poverty syndrome on the rural people in the region which include poor housing facilities, poor diet, high death rate and poor educational facilities. The paper also reveals the strategies to reduce poverty level in the area by providing quality education, accessible roads and the provision of soft loan to the people particularly the farmers in the area. Finally, recommendations are made to improve the quality of life in the area which include the provision of health facilities and rural electrification. To achieve these laudable objectives, the government and the Non governmental organizations (NGO's) should be involved in the provision of these facilities.

Keywords: Strategies, Poverty and Reduction.

1. Introduction

The concept of poverty has been a subject of controversy. The World Bank of Nigeria (1996) defined poverty as a lack of command over the basic needs of the people. The inability of the rural population to meet their basic needs of life which include quality housing, clothing, balance diet, education, electricity supply, water and involvement in political activities that decides the condition of the people amount to rural poverty.

Poverty is observed in both absolute and relative terms. Absolute poverty refers to a condition in which basic needs are hardly met. Those so afflicted engaged in bitter struggle for survival. Relative poverty on the other hand refers to a condition in which the basic needs of life are met, but whole needs or desires are not met. For example a female house head who owns a shelter, provides food for her household, but cannot afford to send her children to school, may consider herself poor or deprived. It is therefore a state of relative deprivation.

The conventional Bourgeois school of thought conceives poverty as the collective consequences of specific sectoral defects and imperfections of shortages in the economy. Poverty, therefore, exists in any society as a result of limited resources and distortions. Poverty in the rural areas of Nigeria exists because of the defects in the policies on the various elements of the economy, education, agriculture, and the provision of infrastructure such as roads, water and electricity supply. Also favourable political environment, efficient marketing and encouragement of cooperative movements particularly thrift cooperative society that will enhance the saving capacities of the rural people are lacking (Coudovel and Hentshel, 2000).

Poverty is said to lie at the root of unsustainable development (Morgan, 1996 and Yekeen, 2009). The interpretation is that, poverty is antithetical to sustainable development. It is against equity and it impinges on environmental limits. Indeed, 'Sustainability is not just about economy or a given social condition, but copy with stress and insuring against stress. Rural poverty restricts alternatives available to people, restricts capacity for choice making and the pressure on the few available resources increase when people lack alternatives (Yekeen, 2009), Abbas (2012) proposed rural poverty alleviation index of nine variables. These variables are: (1) Nutrition = food intakes; (2) Clothing = use of clothes; (3) Shelter = occupancy of dwelling; (4) Health = health care services received; (5) Education = literacy and years of schooling; (6) Leisure = protection from over worked; (7) Security = security in its broadcast sense; (8) Social environment = social contacts and recreations; and (9) Physical environment = beauty, cleanliness, amenities and quietness.

Various organizations are involved in poverty alleviation activities over the years. The institutions exist and operate at different levels. There are government agencies and ministries established to implement government policies and programmes intended to provide employment, income generation and to boost increased agricultural

production. They are expected to; among others things provide infrastructures and social services to ameliorate poverty (Osawe, 2004).

Various poverty alleviation programmes have been implemented in Nigeria, but the level of success is minimal. The manifestation is the low agricultural productivity, unemployment, poor or lack of infrastructural facilities in the country, inefficient civil services and attitudes to execution of government projects are among the reasons why the above programmes have not been able to achieve its objectives. This work is therefore out to examine the strategies for of rural poverty reduction in the study area which will include: Provision of quality education, Provision of accessible roads, Establishment of industries, Provision of soft loan, Provision of health facilities, involving the rural people in political matters and others.

The industrial activities in the rural areas of Nigeria, particularly those of the study areas are operating in difficult environment. The poor accessibility of rural settlement due to unreliability of rainfall, problem of finance, procurement of raw materials, transportation problem, limited market and power shortage are among the problem that limit the performance of the industries which include, welding, block moulding and computer industries in the study area (Ehisuoria, 2012). Alegieuno (2008), also examined small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. The industries examined are both agro-based and non-agro based industries. The non-based industries studied in the include farming, fashion design, motor works, electrical and electronic services and water packaging. The study also revealed that shortage of capital is one of the challenges facing the industries. To solve the problem of financial constraints for rural industries in Nigeria, the government has put in place various schemes, programmes and policies to finance small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria particularly in the rural areas which include national poverty eradication programme (NAPEP), and bank of industries (BOI). Despite these policies and programmes, the problem of finance is yet to be overcome because most of the rural entrepreneurs have no collateral security that qualify them to secure the loan.

2. Statement of the Problem

Over the years, a lot of developmental programmes have been initiated to enhance the quality of life in the rural areas of Nigeria. These programmes include agricultural modernization, rural industrialization and infrastructural provision. Also, a lot of studies have been carried out by different authors on how to improve or alleviate rural poverty in the developing nations such as Nigeria

For example, Ehisuoria (2013) assessed community self help efforts in rural development in South-Southern Nigeria, a case study of Emuhi community. The study reveals that the community involves in the provision and maintenance of schools, health centre, market, roads and water to improve their condition of life. Similarly, Hadiza (2005) examined the role of Micro Finance Development funds as one of the powerful developmental tools with which to eradicate poverty through the provision of timely, affordable and dependable financial services to the economically active poor and low income households. She exerted that throughout history, credit has been a key factor for the creation of wealth since loans to small business and individual entrepreneurs foster self reliance and community-wide economic development. Despite the role of micro finance in community development, the rural areas of Ekpoma Region have not been so benefited from the scheme. This is due to lack of awareness, illiteracy, lack of collateral security and the deliberate exclusion of the rural people from the scheme by the implementing officers.

The above works notwithstanding, no one has actually been focused on the strategies for rural poverty reduction in Ekpoma Region of Edo State, hence the research gap and interest.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to examine the causes of rural poverty and remedies in rural development in Ekpoma region.

The objectives are to examine;

1. The concept of rural poverty.
2. The causes of rural poverty in the study area.
3. The socio-economic impacts of rural poverty on the development of the rural areas of Ekpoma region and
4. To suggest remedies that will alleviate rural poverty in the study area.

4. Study Area

The study area is Ekpoma region. It is one of the seven clans that made up Esan West Local Government Area. It is also the administrative headquarter of Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State (Eghobor 2009,

Ehisuoria 2011 & 2012). The area lies within latitude $60^{\circ} 40'$ and $60^{\circ} 45'N$ and longitude $60^{\circ} 05'E$ $60^{\circ} 10'$ (Ojeifo, 2005). The study area is made up of 12 settlements which are Eguare, Emaudo, Ujoelen, Ukpenu, Uhiele, Illeh, Emuhi, Iruokpen, Uke, Ihumudumu, Idumebo, and Ujemen. For the purpose of this study, Ekpoma region will include Egoro, Urohi, Idoia and Ukhun. See fig. 1

Ekpoma is located in the tropical region. It has Equatorial type of climate characterized by wet and dry seasons. The climate regime is controlled by the position of the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). The Northerly and Southerly movement of the ITCZ through out the period of the year in the region is between January and March ($34^{\circ}C$) while the lowest temperature is recorded between June and July ($24^{\circ}C$) Omofonmwan (2006). The soils of Ekpoma are Ferri soil on loose sandy sediments. These soils are less leached and consequently retain the advantages of agricultural activities.

The economic activities of the people of Ekpoma are made up of agricultural and non agricultural sector. The agricultural sector includes crops cultivation and the rearing of animals. The crops cultivated include yams, plantain, maize, mango, pawpaw, pepper, pineapple and cocoyam. Others are oil palm, cocoa, cashew, pear, orange and ducanut. The animals domesticated are goats and sheep. The non agricultural sector is industrialization. The industrial sector of the study area is made up of both agro-based and non-agro based industries. It is high time to separate the non-agro based industries from the agro based industries. The non-agro based industries in the study area include block moulding, black smiting, vulcanizing, welding, hairdressing and banking industries.

The population of Ekpoma region is relatively high. The 2006 population census estimated the population of the area at 110,519 people. The population distribution of the area is biased. The rural settlements close to Ekpoma town have more population than the peripheral settlements as in table 1. Ekpoma has over 70% of the total population of Esan West Local Government Area which is estimated at 127,718 people. The population of the area is made up of both indigenes and non indigenes (Okojie 1994 and Omofonmwan, 2006). The indigene are the Ekpoma people while the non-indigenes are the immigrants who are either students or workers in Ambrose Alli University (A.A.U) Ekpoma. Other are those employed by other industrial sector, agricultural sector, religious sector and those that are involve in the marketing of both industrial and non-industrial products in the area.

Table 1: Population Distribution of the Study Area According to Wards

Wards	2006 Population
Ogwa	8,855
Ujiogba/Ebute	8,344
Egoro/Idoa/Ukhun	10,609
Eguare/Emaudo	24,786
Ihumudumu/Ujemen/Idumebo/Uke	24,842
Iruekpen	20,924
Ukpenu/Emuhi/Ujoelen	10,529
Urohi	7,693
Uhiele	5,263
Ileh	5,873
Total	127,718

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**Ekpoma
region**

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Source: National Population Commission, Benin City.

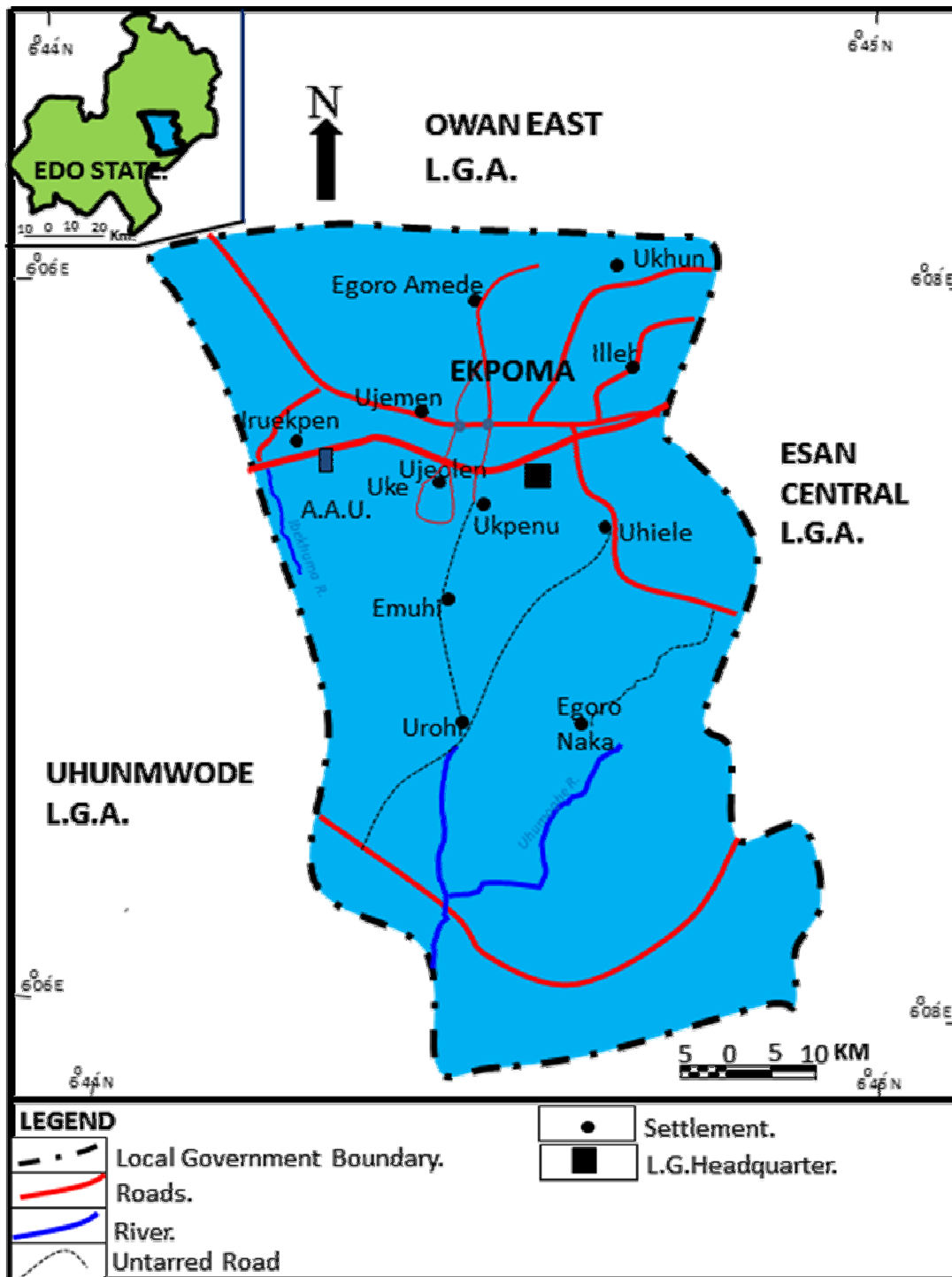


FIG :1 LOCATION: ESAN WEST THE STUDY AREA.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF LANDS AND SURVEYS, BENIN CITY, 2012.

5. Conceptual Frame Work

The conceptual frame work adopted for this study is the concept of sustainable development. This concept was used by Segynola in (2004) to examine development and environmental degradation in Nigeria. On these issues, he asserted that “The process of economic development and change has brought rewards to the people all over the globe – higher income and material welfare, lower sickness and deaths rates, greater knowledge and freedom.

But a heavy price has been paid. Pollution, environmental degradation and destruction of resources are some of the prices paid.

The United Nations World Committees on Environment and Development (1992) has defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Any development policy to alleviate rural poverty in Ekpoma region should be a sustainable development. Any development that will have negative impacts on the generation in the area should be disregarded.

6. Materials and Methods

The data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected by use of questionnaire administration and personal observation in the field. Six hundred questionnaires were administered in eight settlement in the study area while five hundred and seventy six questionnaires were retrieved which were used to examine the causes of poverty in the rural areas of the study area. The settlements surveyed are Urohi, Idoa, Ukhun, Emuhi, Uhiele, Uke, Illeh and Egoro-Eguare. The selected rural settlements are the most affected by poverty syndrum in the area particularly inaccessibility and infrastructure decay. Questions were asked on their sex, age, origin, educational qualification, employment, income earned, nature of housing and the nature of their roads. Others include, source of water supply, nature of their schools, marketing system, sanitation and the security provided by the government. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the rural settlements while the random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for interview.

The secondary data used includes, the population data generated by National Population Commission (NPC) 2006, data on developmental strides by Esan West Local Government Area Council and the non-governmental organizations in the area which include Ikhide Social club of Ekpoma and Emuhi Progressive Union in Ekpoma. The data generated were processed and analyzed using appropriate simple statistical techniques which include tables, percentages and degrees.

7. Results and Discussions

The field survey conducted by the researcher to examine the causes and the strategies for rural poverty production in Ekpoma region reveals the followings.

Table 2: Causes of Rural Poverty in the Study Area.

Causes	No of Respondents	% of Respondents
Poor accessibility	570	22.57
Poor marketing facilities	368	14.45
Lack of storage facilities	90	3.56
Government neglect	465	18.41
Lack of adequate fund for agric & small scale industries.	421	16.67
Shortages of labour	342	13.54
Very low industrial activities	197	7.80
Others	73	2.89
Total	2,526	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2013.

Table 2 reveals that rural poverty is a product of a combination of several constraints. Poor accessibility as a problem of rural development accounts for 22.57%, poor marketing facilities accounts for 14.45%, lack of storage facilities constitutes 3.50%, government neglect account for 18.40%, lack of adequate fund for rural agricultural and small scale industrial development constitutes 16.67% labour shortages amount to 13.54%, low industrial activities constitutes 7.80% while others which include land tenure system account for 2.89%.

It is the decay of infrastructure in the rural areas of Nigeria that lead to rural poverty. It is on account of this that Ayeni, 1980 recommended among others, the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and services is

essential for promoting the efficient operation of a settlement, safeguard health, protect the living environment and enhance general standard of living.

Table 3: Socio-Economic effects of poverty syndrome on the rural people in Ekpoma region.

Effects	No of Respondents	% of Respondents	0 ⁰ of Respondents
Poor housing facilities	223	12.05	43.39
Poor diet	98	5.30	19.07
Poor clothing	109	5.89	21.21
High death rate	89	4.81	17.32
Rural urban migration	456	24.65	88.74
Labour shortage	374	20.22	72.78
Poor educational facilities	436	23.57	84.84
Others	65	3.51	12.65
Total	1,850	100.00	360.00

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 3 examines the effects of rural poverty on the rural people in Ekpoma region. Out of the 576 inhabitants that were interviewed in the study area, 12.05% which accounts for 43.39⁰ agree that, they cannot afford quality housing, 5.30% and 19.07⁰ agree that they have poor protein intake, 5.89% and 21.21⁰ responded to poor clothing, 4.81% and 17.32⁰ agree that high mortality rate in the area is associated with poverty, 24.65% and 88.74⁰ accepted that rural urban migration in the area is due to poverty in the rural environment, 20.22% and 72.78⁰ of the inhabitants agree that labour shortage in the rural areas of Ekpoma region, is associated with poverty, 23.57% and 84.84⁰ responded to poor education in the area is due to poverty, while 3.57% and 12.65⁰ responded to effects of poverty other than those shown in the table which include poor agricultural and industrial activities in the area.

Table 4: Strategies for Rural Development in Ekpoma Region.

S/No	Strategies	Total No of Respondents	% of the Respondents
1	Provision of quality education.	366	21.49
2	Provision of accessible roads	434	25.48
3	Establishment of industries.	213	12.51
4	Provision of soft loan	272	15.97
5	Provision of health facilities	235	13.80
6	Involving the rural people in political matters	136	7.99
7	Others	42	2.76
	Total	1,703	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2012.

Table 4 reveals the needs of the rural dwellers to improve their condition of life in the study area. 21.49% of the total respondents believe that the provision of water will enhance the quality of their lives, 25.48% agree that provision of accessible roads will improve their socio economic well being, 12.51% agree that the establishment of industries that will create employment and income in the area will boost their development. 15.97% are of the view that the provision of soft loan will enable them to boost their agricultural and the non agricultural sectors of their economy, since capital shortage limits their socio economic activities in the area. 13.80% are of the view that the provision of health facilities in the area will improve the labour force of the area since only a healthy man that can offer himself for work, 7.99% agitating for full participation on political matters that affect them. This will enhance rural development because the favourable policies that will improve the quality of rural areas particularly in Ekpoma region will be initiated. 2.76% of the respondents are of the view that the encouragement of the rural people to form cooperative movements & enlightenment campaign to sensitize the rural people by the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will improve the rural areas of the study area.

The findings of this work is related to the findings of Gbakeji and Okhani, (2013) when they examined community participation in the provision of infrastructure in rural areas in Uzairue clan, Edo State. The work reveals that to improve the quality of life of the people in the area, infrastructure such as water, electricity, roads, schools, markets and health facilities should be provided by the government, Non Governmental organization (NGOs) and the individuals.

8. Recommendations

From the foregoing discussions, the following recommendations are made to alleviate the quality of lives in the rural areas of Ekpoma region.

The government and Non Governmental organizations should assist rural development by providing infrastructural facilities which will include portable water supply, access roads, quality education and rural electrification in the study rural areas.

Agricultural modernization policy which will include the provision of improved seedling, irrigation facilities, storage facilities and land ownership reform that will make land available to the prospective farmers in the area.

The rural inhabitants should also be encouraged to form themselves into cooperative societies that will enable them save part of their income and secure loan from the appropriate sectors. This will solve the problem of capital shortages that hinder socio-economic development of the rural people.

The rural people in the study area should be encouraged to participate actively in the political movement that will enable them influence positive decisions affecting them.

Also recommended is the provision of security services in the study area. The security services should include citing of police station, encouraging civil defense and vigilante groups in the area. Security consciousness in the study rural areas will attract and retain investors that will lead to the development of rural areas of Ekpoma region of Nigeria.

9. Conclusion

Rural rehabilitation is essential to improve the socio economic well being of the people in the rural areas of Nigeria particularly of those in Ekpoma region. Rural development and poverty alleviation in the rural areas of the study area, will retain and attract labour in the area. This will increase the production of food and raw materials for the urban population and the industrialists who will want to operate in the area. It will equally reduce rural urban migration that create problem in the planning and management of Nigerian Urban centres. Finally, rural poverty alleviation in the rural areas of Ekpoma region will create employment, income, provision of infrastructure that will enhance the standard of living of the people.

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