

# Challenges of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development among the Kanuri in the Sahel Region of Yobe State in Nigeria

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**Abstract** This work examines some of the challenges affecting poverty eradication measures adopted so far among the Kanuri speaking people in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. It also assesses the meaning of poverty eradication and sustainable development. The study also came up with a number of solutions on how poverty can be eradicated and sustainable development enhanced among this group of people. Personal observation method and library based documentation analysis were utilized as the method of data collection in this work. Poverty as this work found is very common among this group of people and measures adopted so far in tackling it are minimal; facts that has also been translating in negative effects on sustainable development in the region.

**Keywords** Kanuri's, Poverty, Eradication, Sahel, Yobe and Region and Challenges

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## Introduction

Poverty status is assigned to people that do not meet a certain threshold level set by national department of Health and Human Services. It is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the essentials to enjoy a minimum standard of life acceptable in society. This view described the living conditions of the majority of Kanuri people in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria who are deeply swallowed by the inability to satisfy their basic needs of life-essential among which include; food, shelter, cloths and comfortable accommodation or housing. World Bank as submitted by Investopedia (2014) estimated that in terms of regional populations, sub-Saharan Africa; the same region where the Sahel, Kanuri people, Yobe state and Nigeria all exist had 47% rate of absolute poverty in 2008 which was the highest for that particular year in global statistics. Between 1990 and 2010 to 2013, about 663 million moved above the absolute poverty level to extreme poverty condition;

resulting in a challenge not only to the Sahel region but as well to the entire globe in general (Investopedia 2014 and Wikipedia 2014

Okwonkwo and Odun (2012) asserted that in Nigeria, high level of poverty remains a major impediment in the effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is part of this impediment that is translating in persistent poverty and the inability to curb it or sustain already achieved development among the Kanuri in the Sahel region of Yobe state and Nigeria as well. To me, the lives and conditions of the Kanuri who are the dominant ethnic group in Sahel region of Yobe state and Nigeria are unarguably sensitive issues to address. The standard of living of majority of the people is far below expectation. Poverty is clearly pronounced among this group. Greater percentages of the people dwell in the rural areas and are predominantly farmers. But still, agriculture and rural development programs in the area are not impressive. Social and political exclusions inclined with religion and culture is high among the people. Few are public servants but still, disparity in income among the workers is glaring. Illiteracy level is high among this group of people and the school enrolment rate for the girl child is discouraging. Child abuse occasioned by street hawking of school going children is common in the area. The public health sector in the area is under jeopardy; medical treatment and facilities are assessed by majority of the citizens abroad across the Nigerian border at Maini Soroa and Diffa in Niger republic, water provision, transportation system and women empowerment as well as job creation measures in the region are not outstanding in reality. The faster rate of desert encroachment into the region which public efforts in ameliorating it is minimal also seems to be putting the lives and assets of the people in this region under serious environmental hazard. Insurgency which the north eastern region of Nigeria is witnessing as well as other insecurity acts has also been affecting the lives of the people in this area.

## Poverty

Poverty is general scarcity or death, or the state of one who lacks certain amount of materials possessions or money. The term poverty is defined as the lack of the minimum food and shelter necessary for maintaining life. It is an exceptionally complicated social phenomenon. Poverty deprives people of their security and well-being. It deprives people not only of safe water and adequate food, clothing and shelter, but also education and health care. It takes away people's rights, freedom, dignity and peace of mind. It also puts people's life in danger and robs them of their future. Poverty is symptomatic a symptom of poor basic services, scarce financial resources and low returns from natural wealth such as oil, gas, etc. while revenues from public investments and taxes are exposed to corruption and embezzlement. Around the world, in rich or poor nations, poverty has always been present (Investopedia 2014, Miffin 2013, Needham 2011 and Shah 2013). The above perceptions of poverty explains the situations on ground in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria where the Kanuri's are the dominant ethnic group. The sympathetic conditions in which the people are living in indicate that they are truly suffering from severe poverty. Nigeria in global record is the sixth highest producer of crude oil in the world. The country also boasts of abundant gas reserve meaning it is an affluent nation by world ranking. The Sahel region of the country which is part of Yobe state and home to the Kanuri speaking people get little share from this fortune compared to what the oil producing region gets as revenue. This little and unequal statutory allocation promoted by revenue sharing formula and use in the country also affect infrastructural development and contribute to poverty and inability to promote sustainable development among the people of this region.

Globally, the MDG target with regard to extreme poverty is estimated to have been reached-the proportion of people living below \$ 1.25 (PPP) per day in developing regions fell from 47 per cent in 1990 to less than half this value in 2010, five years before the target date. The proportion of people living below the poverty level in sub-Saharan Africa also fell from 56-47. But then, extreme poverty tend to be more pronounced in rural areas (UNDP 2014). By this statistics, it is expected that the Kanuri's in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria are with time pulling out of the net and vicious circle of age long poverty from which they have been suffering.

The extreme type of poverty as Norton and Snieska (2008) posits tends to be more pronounced in rural areas. Majority of the Kanuri's settlements are rural areas suffering from severe harshness of desert encroachment on daily basis. The people's attitudes of pondering on shrubs in search of herbs and wood for cooking purposes due to shortage and expensiveness of kerosene and cooking gas are further subjecting the region to environmental degradation and increasing the vulnerability of the region to desert encroachment and increasing the level of extreme poverty among the people of the region.

The destitution or deprivation of basic human needs,

which includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education as well as economic inequality among the Kanuri's in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria put together amount to what Wikipedia (2014) refers to as both absolute and relative types of poverty. This social phenomenon among this particular group of people can be observe in the high rate of street hawking of school going children and persistent increase in the number of people coming on board the begging wagon as street beggars on daily basis in the region. The pleasure for begging rather than struggling among the people is also contributing to poverty finding a permanent abode among them and in the region. In addition to increase in the rate of street begging, poverty among this group of people may be finding more bases as a result of some other causes which are different from street hawking and begging.

Being a social phenomenon, Miffin (2013) submits that trying to find the causes of poverty is equally complicated. But then, in most nations today, inequality-the gap between the rich and poor which is quite high and often widening, including lack of individual responsibility, bad government policy, exploitation by people and businesses with power and influence, or some combination of these and other factors as Shah (2013) observes are some of the causes of poverty. Over population, birth rates, distribution of resources, lack of education, environmental degradation, high rate of unemployment, corruption, social inequality, etc. as Juknys (2008), Bivainis and Tuncikiene (2007) as well as Moldan and Dahl (2007) posits are some of the major causes of poverty and the inability to progress to sustain development initially achieved. High rate of illiteracy, joblessness, poverty and the highly encroaching sahara desert are some of the causes of poverty and impediments to sustainable development among the Kanuri of the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. And these to a larger extent seem to be affecting the lives of this group of people negatively.

The effects of poverty are most often interrelated so that one problem hardly occurs alone. Poverty has effects on people and society as a whole. Alcoholic and substance abuse, crippling accidents due to unsafe working environment, poor housing and living conditions as well as water and food related diseases are some of the effects of poverty on the people. On the society as a whole, poverty is a major cause of social tensions and threatens to divide a nation because of the issue of inequalities, in particular income inequality (Poverties .Org 2013). Unequal or poor distribution of wealth or even sanitation where tiny minority has all the money as among the Kanuri's of the region under study explains this better. The Kanuri children, women and their health are greatly affected by poverty and the problem of sustaining initially achieved development for the future. The state of emergency rule declared in the area by the federal government of Nigeria to counter insurgency which the people and region are experiencing and which is seriously threatening the unity of the Nigerian nation is also

believed to have been partly ignited by poverty; reason why efforts must be intensified to eradicate poverty and sustain achieved development for the future among this group of people.

Poverty eradication is a major goal and issue for many international organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank. Although, economic growth alone will not eradicate poverty, improve quality and produce jobs unless it is inclusive. Inclusive growth is also essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) (Wikipedia 2014 and UNDP 2013). Although, it has been argued over the years that poverty can never be eradicated but can only be reduced. The reduction of poverty to its nearest minimum level in the African context to me is equal to poverty eradication. The ability to satisfy the basic requirements of life such as food, cloth, housing and also be opportune to have access to education, health, electricity, pipe bore water, transportation, security and protected environment is poverty eradication. And these are what the Kanuri in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria are yawning for. IFAD, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP as well as the World Bank and other Non-Governmental Organizations have demonstrated interests in improving the condition of the people of this region over the years. Especially in the areas of reducing infant/maternal mortality rate, Fadama Irrigation development projects, women empowerment, rural infrastructural development, promotion of the girl child education and environmental protection as in the North East afforestation and roll back Sahara programs. All these are welcome development which were soon thwarted by insecurity, governmental policies and the attitudes of some of the Kanuri themselves towards innovation and foreign expatriates working on their soil. Not however withstanding these facts, multi-sectorial efforts and approaches need to be employed in the eradication of poverty and sustaining development among the Kanuri people of the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria.

## Sustainable Development

Sustainability is a process which tells of a development of all aspects of human life affecting sustenance. Sustainable development implies the ability to meet the needs of the present while contributing to the future generations' needs. Sustainable development is development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs. Sustainable development is the rational management of human, natural, and economic resources that aims to satisfy the essential needs of humanity in the very long term. It implies the fulfillment of several conditions; preserving the overall balance, respect for the environment, and preventing the exhaustion of natural resources. Reduced production of waste and the rationalization of production and energy consumption must also be implemented. Sustainable development is presented as a more or less clean break from other modes of

development, which have led and are still leading to worrying social and ecological damage on both a worldwide and local scale (Hasna 2007, Needham 2011 and Brundtland 2014). This is the type of development that the Kanuri in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria as well requires. A growth that will reduce the risk of desert encroachment, create adequate knowledge of environmental impact assessment on their lives and soil, built a secure region for socio-economic and political development to thrive as well as create an environment devoid of discrimination and enabling environment for the people to realize their best God given talents and how to harness them for personal and societal benefits are actually what the people of this region deserve. But the efforts to enable this group of people achieve these development and sustain it for their usage and those of their future generations unborn are often confronted with a number of challenges incubated by they themselves on one hand and the development partners and governments on the other; reason why lasting solutions are required in this respect.

## Challenges

Challenges are faced in all three dimensions of sustainable development; economic, social and environment. In the field of sustainable development, there are several challenges to be addressed. Some of these include; climate change, energy consumption, waste production, threats to public health, poverty, social exclusion, management of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and land use. Sustainable development must be able to respond to the various problems raised by demographic growth, the planet limited capacity, and social inequality. Greenhouse gas emissions are one of the main consequences of human activity that accelerate global warming. This warming carries risk of shortages and the disruption of certain natural cycles such as fresh water, improvement of agricultural soil, deforestation, and reduced biodiversity. This means that the future development of all species living on earth, ultimately including human beings, is under threat (Bobb 2014, UNDP 2014 and Stiftung 2013).

There are several factors which accounts for the challenges confronting poverty eradication and sustainable development among the Kanuri of the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. Basic among these challenges is the issue of insecurity and insurgency which the north eastern region of the country is suffering from. Both Yunusari and Geidam have once served as the harbingers for the popular 'Boko Haram Group'; a group that has continued to hold the national armed forces of Nigeria to ransom in fierce combatant and guerilla war fares as attempt to establish an Islamic state and government in Nigeria since 2009 till date.. The group tactics of attacking civic institutions, burning down schools which are not even sufficient, attacking villages, barricading highways and slaughtering innocent citizens as well as hostage taking of elites and foreign expatriate workers have been affecting the level of

poverty eradication programs and sustainable development among the Kanuri. Poverty eradication and developmental agencies like IFAD, DFIB, UNESCO, World Bank, etc. involved in poverty eradication and rural development programs in the region were forced to pull out their workers and agents from the region for security purposes. This withdrawal of personnel and aid are negative development. Established poverty eradication and development programs are crumbling and new ones are not coming up to replace them.

Environmental factor is another challenge facing poverty eradication and sustainable development among the Kanuri's of the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. The Sahara desert is encroaching into this region at alarming velocity. Several villages have been lost to this encroachment. Farms and large grazing land have been buried by sand dunes and people forced to migrate to new areas. Little governmental afforestation program to roll back Sahara from further encroachment have translated in rise of joblessness among the people whose farming land were buried by dunes.

Ineffective public and governmental policies promoted by political instability are also a challenge which is affecting the eradication of poverty and sustainable development among this major ethnic group in the area under study. Age long military regime and party politics occasioned by lack of continuity and implementation of initially adopted poverty eradication policies have contributed seriously to the inability of eradicating poverty and enhancing sustainable development among the Kanuri's in both Yunusari and Geidam local government areas. Every regimes witnessed in Nigeria abandoned inherited policies and adopt new ones in their places which are not also implemented to the letter before they quit office and power. In some other cases, policies adopted do not create adequate room for partnership and multi sectorial approach. This has also translated in foreign partners of development pulling out of the region leading to the failure of several projects due to government inability to fund the implementation of the policies and programs. The withdrawal of funds and technical expertise by the World Bank and other foreign partners culminated in the failure of the North East Arid Zone Development Program (NEAZADP) in both Yunusari and Geidam local government areas as well as the entire North Eastern region of Nigeria. The NEAZADP project already started impacting positively on the lives of the Kanuri's and others in the region before state policy of the then military regime resulted in the pull out of foreign partners and the collapsed of the project as a whole.

Attitudes of the political elites and men of higher profile from the area of not showing seriousness and committing their wealth philanthropically towards eradicating poverty and sustaining development is also a challenge truncating the empowerment of citizens and promoting development among the Kanuri in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. The government alone is left with most of the task of eradicating poverty and sustaining development in the area.

This unwelcome development is one of the omens crippling the progress of the people of this sensitive region of the state, country and the world. Personal grudges and hatred for the success and progress of each other's on the part of the ordinary citizens themselves are additional challenges why poverty has continue to prevailed among this group of people. The retrogressive attitudes of demonizing initiatives and programs inclined with western ideologies themselves are making it difficult for stake holders to sustain development in this region. Poverty eradication and sustainable development requires both public and private partnership to be successful. High rate of illiteracy and anti-western ideologies of some people among this ethnic group in the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria is a challenge to the eradication and sustenance of development in the region. Illiteracy seems to be deluding some of the people into conceiving western education and initiatives directed towards poverty eradication as anti-religious and contaminative to cultural heritage of the people of the region. These perceptions affect joint efforts to eradicate poverty and sustainable development in the region. International efforts towards women and youth empowerment as well as promotion of the girl child education by international bodies like IFAD, USAID, DFID, UNESCO, UNICEF, ADB,. Among this group of people seems to be witnessing serious rejection and demonization from some people of this ethnic group.

Socio-economic and political inequalities which are greatly pronounced among this group of people are also part of the challenges hampering poverty eradication and sustainable development in the region. The disparities in income distribution and access to social and basic amenities directed towards improving standards and condition of living are just too glaring and high. The ratio in terms of accessibility to education, health care, transportation, pipe bone water, good housing, electricity, etc. are not in any way impressive. The ratio of those who have access to these facilities is negligible compare to those who do not. Inequality which undermines progress in health and education can also cause political and economic instability which according to Cha (2014) also tends to reduce the peace and durability of growth among the people.

Insecurity, poor governance and unemployment which are ravaging the Kanuri speaking people in the Sahel region of Yobe state are challenges which are hampering efforts directed towards eradicating poverty and sustaining development in this region of the world. But then, far from the issues of security, governance and employment, minimal partnership and joint efforts as well as the lack of interest and desire for transformation and change on the part of the people themselves are some of the contributing challenges to the efforts to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development among this group of people in both Geidam and Yunusari local government areas of Yobe state of Nigeria. Eradicating poverty and sustaining development in this regard by stake actors would to a reasonable extent required

a number of efforts both private and public in nature as well as the willingness to accommodate such efforts must be demonstrated by the people of this region if positive returns and dividends are to be anticipated in the area of transformation in the region.

## Panacea

In order to be sustainable, development must be harmonious. At least a certain amount of social cohesion must exist on a planetary scale in order to create the conditions for the peace needed. Major differences between the economic players and political elites which are often causes of tension and conflicts must be reconciled. Development must be designed to combine three main elements; fairness, protection of environment, and economic efficiency. A development project must be based on a better-developed mode of consultation between the community and the members it comprises. The success of such a policy also depends on consumers accepting certain constraints and citizens observing certain requirements with regard to transparency and participation (Brundtland 2014, Edwards and McKibben 2010). These submissions are indeed good role models that can eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development among the Kanuri of the Sahel region of Yobe state of Nigeria. Green (2014) further opines that if larger international NGOs and other aid organizations can be more systematic in supporting innovation in their advocacy work, then poverty can be eradicated and development sustained.

Indeed, if there is one thing that has been stressed from the countless global experiences of mismanagement, it is the need to involve citizens in decision-making process. Consequently, the publishing of data is a key agenda for multilateral agencies as well as NGOs. Access to information, including contracts and sharing agreements, is considered best practice. The direct distribution of some of the cash revenues from natural resources to citizens is also often recommended as a means to fight poverty more effectively and increase accountability of decision-makers and politicians. These are good principles based on participatory process that form the back bone of democracy (Morisset and Gaddis 2014). Politicians in Geidam and Yunusari local government areas which make up the Sahel region and those in Yobe state and Nigeria must be willing to adopt the above stated strategies as attempt to eradicate poverty and enhance sustainable development among the Kanuri people of the area. The current SURE-P project which is resulting in distribution of money to youths and women as a means of empowering them and reducing poverty is a welcome development. But the question of how long this development can be sustained by the government is another issue. The government should endeavor to sustained the program for as long as is possible because it is encouraging school drop outs to return back to school in order to be able to access the program; thereby reducing the

outstanding larger number of illiterates among the Kanuri people.

## Conclusions

Political elites must be willing to adopt inclusive politics which would bring both the people and leaders closer to each other in terms of accessibility to basic and essential needs of life. The people themselves would have to tolerate and welcome innovation by showing commitment and willingness to participate in the development of their region. They must also be prepared to accommodate outsiders because they alone cannot develop their region. Their attitudes towards their environment must also be directed towards afforestation rather than destroying the vegetation and allow further desert encroachment to swallow their territory. Sacrifice must replace individualism and greed on the part of the few influential elites. Dialogue must also replace violence and confrontation which are creating insecurity problems in the region. The government as well as other development partners must demonstrate their willingness to eradicate poverty and enhance sustainable development among the Kanuri people of Yobe state of Nigeria by not only formulating good policies on these matter but also implementing them to logical conclusion and by making funds sufficiently available for poverty eradication and sustainable development purpose among this group of people.

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