



RESEARCH ARTICLE

POVERTY, POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates poverty, poverty alleviation programmes, and sustainable development in Imo State. The central questions that guided this study are: i. what is the prevalence level of poverty in Imo State, from 2005 – 2025? ii. What are the reasons for this level of poverty in the state? (3) What are the poverty alleviation programmes adopted in the state from 2005 – 2025? iv. How do poverty and poverty alleviation programmes impact on the sustainable development of the state. The Marxist theory was adopted in building the theoretical framework for this study. The methodology adopted for this study was basically a content analysis of the various poverty alleviation programmes adopted in the state from 2005 – 2025. Also, secondary data were utilized for this study. The nexus amongst poverty, poverty alleviation programmes and sustainable development was analyzed and the paper concluded with some recommendations on how to mitigate the issue of poverty in the State. These recommendations include inter alia, the dire need for purposeful, transparent, accountable and competent leadership at all levels of governance in the state. The need to provide critical infrastructure across the state such as a good road network, clean portable water and most importantly reliable and affordable electricity across the state which will have a multiplier effect across critical sectors of the state such as micro, small, medium and large industries and will help to jump-start the industrialization of the state as well as help to drastically reduce poverty and hyper-inflation.

Keywords: Poverty, Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Sustainable Development.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

No region of the world is free from poverty, but sub-Saharan Africa has the highest level, depth, and extent of poverty in the entire world and it is also the least reversible (UN, 2019, World Bank, 2019, World Bank, 2020, UN, 2017, World Bank, 2017). The condition known as poverty is one that is marked by a severe lack of essentials of living, such as food, shelter, water, sanitation and education (UN, 2019). Another definition of poverty is a lack of resources that results in physical deprivation (World Bank, 2019) Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and makes up 47% of West Africa's population, with a population of about 216 (UN, 2022), but the majority of its citizens are afflicted by the disease known as poverty (World Bank, 2020, UN, 2017).

According to the (NBS, 2020), 63% of Nigerians (133 million people) are multi dimensionally poor with 65% of these (86 million) living in Northern Nigeria and 35% (47 million) reside in the South of Nigeria (World Bank, 2020). The ten indicators of MP1 include child mortality, nutrition, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets (World Bank, 2020).

Imo State, the subject of this study had a poverty rate of 20.3% in 2011 (NBS, 2011) and this has been on an upward trajectory till date due to various reasons such as the high rate unemployment in the state, low level of industrialization, poor infrastructure development, limited federal presence, corruption and poor leadership inter alia. To address this issue of poverty in Imo state, various administrations in the state from 1999, have adopted various poverty alleviation programmes and policy interventions to address this issue. A content analysis of these various programmes was done and their effectiveness was x-rayed. The study discussed the nexus amongst poverty, poverty alleviation programmes and sustainable development in the state.

Imo state though blessed with abundant natural and human resources remains undeveloped with many of its citizens wallowing in poverty. This poverty is even more profound in the rural parts of the state. Life in Imo State is characterized by poor living conditions, a dire lack of water, electricity and road infrastructure, very little industrial development, a high rate of unemployment with attendant social problems like insecurity, armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killings, prostitution, cyber-crimes and general lawlessness in the state.

The issue of poverty in the state has necessitated various interventions to tackle this problem but this study submits that these measures have been ineffective and are mere window dressing to say the least. This study tried to appraise poverty alleviation programmes in the state from 1999 till date and also examined how poverty impacts on the sustainable development of the state

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study will be to examine poverty, poverty alleviation programmes and sustainable development in Imo State. The specific objectives are to:

- (1) Determine the prevalence of poverty in the state from 2005 – 2025.
- (2) Determine the reasons for this level of poverty in the state.
- (3) Examine the poverty alleviation programmes in the state from 2005 – 2025.
- (4) Examine the specific measures that can be put in place to address the issue of poverty in the study.



1.2. Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem and the objectives of the study, four research questions will guide the study namely;

1. What was the prevalence level of poverty in Imo State from 2005 – 2025?
2. What are the reasons for this level of poverty in the state?
3. What are the poverty alleviation programmes adopted in the state from 2005 – 2025?
4. What specific measures should be put in place to address the issue of poverty in Imo state?

2.0. OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Operationalization of Concepts

Poverty

The concept of poverty has many different aspects and connotations. However, for the purposes of this study, we define poverty as the inability to meet necessities of life like food, shelter, healthcare, education, clean water, and sanitary conditions. It denotes lack, squalor, privation, pauperism, penury, indigence, need, want, hardship and impoverishment.

Poverty Alleviation Programmes

The government has a number of programmes and initiatives aimed at reducing poverty in the state, such programmes include “the tripod vision” of Achike Udenwa, the “Rescue Mission” of Rochas Okorocha, Poverty Alleviation Bureau” of Hope Uzodinma among others.

Sustainable Development

This is development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It balances economic growth, environmental care, and social well-being.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The Marxist theory of poverty and inequality was adopted in developing the theoretical framework for this study. This theory was popularized by Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and his friend and collaborator Frederick Engels (1820 – 1895). These two theorists traced the evolution of European societies from communalism, slavery, feudalism to capitalism. They submitted that in the capitalist era, the oppression and exploitation of one class by another reached its apogee.

The theory stratified the capitalist society into two major social classes namely the bourgeoisie who owned the factors of production including capital and the proletariat who sold their labour in order to survive. In the “communist manifesto” Marx and Engels posited that “the executive of a modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie”. In their seminal piece, “the origin of the family, private property and the state: they asserted that the family led to the quest for private property and that the state exists to protect the private property of the bourgeoisie.

Applying this theory to the study at hand poverty and inequality exist in Imo State because of the rapacious contradictions of capitalism and the callous exploitation of the people by the bourgeoisie



with the full backing of the ruling class. Marx talks about the “state of the bourgeoisie” because the ruling class utilizes all the instrumentalities of the state to protect private property and the bourgeoisie. The callous, greedy, selfish, satanic and corrupt use of power by the ruling class and the bourgeoisie to exploit, consolidate, reproduce, accumulate and amass wealth by any means possible has led to poverty, inequality, backwardness and lack of development in Imo State.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a content analysis of the poverty alleviation programmes implemented in the state from 2005 - 2025. These programmes were appraised and their successes or failures were manifestly highlighted. Also this study adopted the use of secondary data which were obtained from online sources as well as books and journals.

Research Question 1: What was the prevalence level of poverty in Imo state from 2005-2025?

The poverty figures for Imo State from 2005-2010 were not readily available after intensive online searches but from 2011 the following figures were obtained.

S/N	Year	Poverty Rate (Percentage)
1	2011	20.3
2	2012	21.9
3	2013	23.5
4	2014	25.1
5	2015	26.7
6	2016	25.3
7	2017	25.9
8	2018	31.5
9	2019	28.9
10	2020	31.7
11	Multidimensional 2021-2025	-40.7
	Poverty Index (MPI)	42.1

Source: Extract from www.statista.com/statistics/1121438/poverty-headcount-rate-in-Nigeria-by-state

From the table above, from 2021-2025 40.7% to 42.1% of Imolites were multi-dimensionally poor. The ten indicators of MPI includes child mortality, nutrition, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets. This shows that many Imolites suffer multiple forms of deprivations which is even more profound in rural parts of the state.

Research Question 2: What are the reasons for this level of poverty in the state?

Since the creation of Imo state in 1976, the state has been bedeviled with various challenges, some of the reasons for poverty and backwardness in the state even in the midst of abundant human and natural resources include the following:

Poor quality leadership: The state has suffered massively from inept, visionless, directionless, greedy, corrupt, predatory, selfish, wicked, retrogressive and evil leadership aside from the administration of Chief Sam Onunaka Mbakwe who gave the state purposeful, exemplary, visionary, transparent and excellent leadership, all other administrations in the state both past and present have



failed woefully (Alugbuo and Akpanbia, 2013, Uyuouyo, 2008). Imo state is in dire need of purposeful and visionary leadership.

Corruption: The issue of corruption among our so-called leaders and government officials has become alarming. Across all levels of governance in the state, looting, and wanton embezzlement of public funds has become the order of the day. Funds meant for the development of the state are stolen with impunity by those in the corridors of power (Onimajesin, 2010, Ochienta, 2014).

Poor Infrastructural Development: there is the serious issue of poor infrastructural development in the state in terms of road network, supply of safe drinking water, electricity, hospitals inter alia, even in the face of high growth in population. This has translated to very poor living standards for the people (Obumneke, 2012; Oriahi & Aitufe, 2010).

Lack of industrialization and de-industrialization of the state: Aside from Chief Sam Onunaka Mbakwe who even with lean resources laid a solid foundation for the industrial take-off of Imo state, all other governments both military and civilian have done next to nothing in this regard. After the overthrow of the civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari, the military ruled Nigeria for sixteen years. Several military administrators ruled Imo state during these sixteen years and there was unimaginable looting and embezzlement of public funds by these military rulers.

With the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Babangida regime and the subsequent devaluation of the naira, Imo state began a steady slide towards de-industrialization as at 2011 in Orlu Zone of Imo State, over 43 cottage and medium scale industries folded up. For Okigwe zone, 7 industries folded up in the same period, for Owerri zone, over 56 industries folded up according to Imo State Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2011. This compounded the problems of poverty, unemployment, and crime in the state occasioned by a vast army of jobless and idle youths (Okafor, 2011; Aiyedogbo & Ohwofasa, 2011). For sixteen years, military rulers in Imo state embarked on an unmitigated looting, embezzlement and squandering of state funds.

Insecurity: In the past 8-10 years, the level of insecurity in Imo State has reached an alarming level. The spate of killings, robberies, kidnapping, ritual killings, and cybercrimes have reached a crescendo and has scared away both local and foreign investors from the state and further compounded the problems of poverty and unemployment in the state.

Research Question 3: What are the poverty alleviation programmes adopted in the state from 2005-2025?

With the return of Imo State to democratic governance in 1999, successive Governors beginning from Achike Udenwa from 1999-2007 adopted various poverty alleviation programmes. “The tripod Vision” most commonly refers to the economic development strategy of former Governor Achike Udenwa, centered on agriculture, industrialization and re-orientation. Other contexts include a product leader’s framework (vision, metrics, shipping), or a tripod-based view for MSME growth (entrepreneurial, industrial, institutional). The policy focused on three main pillars; agricultural revolution, industrialization, and re-orientation of values/mindset in order to drive economic growth and development in the state. (Achike Udenwa, The Tripod Vision, Retrieved from Wikipedia, <http://pp:imo Vision.org> 5/3/2025).



Following Udenwa's tripod vision was the Ikedi Ohakim's new face of Imo vision. This vision was initiated in 2007. It was conceived among other things,

“To chart new policy and programme direction for increased food and agricultural production through massive support for agro-allied industries including a focus on providing the enabling environment, policies, materials and financial support for commerce and industrial growth as well as tourism, energy and petroleum development and encouragement of partnership with private sector, so as to achieve the vision's goal”

(Ikedi Ohakim, Face of Imo Vision, Retrieved from Wikipedia Encyclopedia;
www.Economy.org/imo.2000. 5/3/2025).

These two programmes achieved little or nothing in developing Imo state and reducing poverty. Rather they were avenues for the monumental looting and embezzlement of state funds.

Governor Rochas Okorocha (2011-2019) adopted several initiatives under the “Rescue Mission” agenda and the initiatives including the following;

1. Education and Social Welfare.
2. Youth and Women Empowerment.
3. Agricultural and Rural Development.
4. Infrastructure and Job Creation.
5. Bureaucratic/Structural Changes.

Essentially, the Rochas Okorocha administration was an unmitigated disaster. It was a stupendously corrupt and insincere government to say the least.

Uzodimma Administration (2020-Date)

Key programmes from (2020-2025) include: One kindred One Business Initiative (OKOBI) launched in 2024 to foster community-based entrepreneurship and agro-industrialization.

1. Skillup Imo Programme; a digital skill acquisition initiative aiming to train 300,000 youths by 2026, has trained over 25,000 in digital skills, coding and entrepreneurship.
2. Empowerment Programmes for youths, women and vulnerable groups.
3. Project One Youth Farm.
4. Imo State Special Youth Empowerment and Intervention programmes.
5. MSME Loan Schemes.

All these programmes from 1999 till date have been poorly conceptualized, co-ordinated, poorly implemented and highly politicized to the extent that they have not had any appreciable impact whatsoever (Okpara, 2010). All these programmes have been avenues for syphoning state funds and for monumental corruption.

Poverty and Sustainable Development in Imo State: The Nexus

Sustainable development includes environmental protection, Economic development and social development. Economic development involves achieving a balance in all sectors of the economy in the process of production of goods and services be it agriculture, finance, manufacturing, health, education etc, the economic challenges in the Imo State economy includes issues such as poverty, low



per capita income, inequitable distribution of income, low capital formation, inefficiency in the mobilization of resources, unemployment, inflation, low level of agricultural development, to mention a few. As long as Imo State remains poorly economically developed, unindustrialized and with low level of agricultural and infrastructural development. The issue of poverty will remain a serious concern in the state.

Social development on the other hand involves social issues such as education, health, social infrastructure, politics etc. In order for Imo State to develop social services such as basic education, functional health care, employment for youths, clean water, security of life and property, and access to quality infrastructure should be provided. In a state where over 40% of the people are multi-dimensionally poor in all of the ten indicators of the MPI, this leaves much to be desired. The implications of all the foregoing for the environment is that we cannot achieve a healthy and safe environment and ecosystem fit for human habitation and where fauna and flora can thrive in a mutually symbiotic relationship.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the proper political will, and a visionary, transparent, purposeful and dedicated leadership coupled with the abundant human and natural resources in Imo State, poverty can become history in the state.

In consideration of the findings and conclusion reached, this study recommends as following:

1. There is a dire need for purposeful, transparent, visionary, accountable and competent leadership at all levels of governance in the state.
2. With the abundant gas reserves in the state, there is a dire need to harness this to provide steady, reliable and affordable electricity for the people of the state. The provision of steady and affordable electricity will have a multiplier effect across critical sectors of the state such as micro, small, medium, and large scale industries and will help to jump-start the industrialization of the state, boost employment as well as help to drastically reduce poverty and hyper-inflation in the state.
3. Basic and critical infrastructure such as roads, clean water, functional health care, basic education as well as security of life and property should be guaranteed to make life livable for the people.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.



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