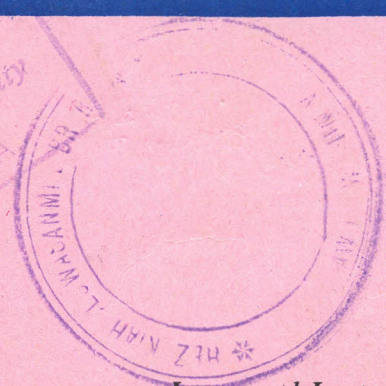


OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA

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*Inaugural Lecture Series 109*

**THE CHALLENGE OF  
UNDERDEVELOPMENT  
AND POVERTY**

By Simi Afonja

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# THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY

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## INTRODUCTION:

At a time like this, when the whole region of Africa is experiencing political and economic crises and Nigerians look back at the good old days of the oil boom with so much regret and helplessness, one cannot but turn national attention to the phenomenon of poverty and its major cause, this country's underdevelopment. For an academic who has been studying these issues for twenty six years now, it started as an academic exercise. But considering the rapidly increasing pauperisation of large proportions of our populace and the devastating impact of poverty on the quality of life in this country, my interest in these issues transcends merely contributing to knowledge. In this lecture, I will attempt to sensitise this academic community to the phenomenon of poverty, the greatest malady of our times, so as to contribute to increasing national awareness and commitment to poverty eradication. I hope this inaugural lecture achieves this goal.

The inevitability of economic growth and social development was bequeathed to the whole world by the founding fathers of Sociology during the 18th century. This prediction derived from the law of progress in the natural sciences (Goldenweiser, 1933) and was first validated by the First Industrial Revolution in Europe. Second generation industrial countries of Europe and Japan re-affirmed the universality of progress and raised expectations in all Third World countries after their independence. The founding fathers of Sociology would turn in their graves today if they knew that the majority of the countries in the Southern Hemisphere are still **underdeveloped** and predominantly **poor**.

The predicament of the African continent has been of particular concern for about a decade and a half because the little progress made during the First United Nations Development Decade, 1960-1970 has not been sustained. Therefore, African underdevelopment and raging poverty have been the targets of socio-economic policies particularly since the collapse of the global economy, the crisis of development on the continent and the economic restructuring programmes of the 1980s.

This inaugural lecture is a treatise on **underdevelopment** and **poverty** in Nigeria, Africa's largest, most populous and prosperous nation. The lecture summarises my concern to explain why some nations, industrialised and developed and others are stagnant or

retrogress since I entered graduate school twenty eight years ago. The concepts underdevelopment and poverty articulate my theoretical and empirical work in industrial sociology and in gender and development studies. Analysing these concepts from a sociological perspective for this inaugural lecture is an opportunity to present to this august gathering my very modest contributions to sociology; a discipline that has suffered from several paradigmatic crises since I was christened into it in October, 1964 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Underdevelopment and poverty are like two sides of a coin. But in this lecture, my emphasis is on poverty because the poor: the urban working classes, poor farmers, poor women and children have been my subjects of research since my first initiation into empirical research as an undergraduate in 1966.

I pay a special tribute to these poor men, women and children in this lecture because by allowing me to penetrate their lives, they have reshaped me as a sociologist and sharpened my analytical skills in the search for appropriate theory, methods and development paradigm for the continent.

## HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS AND GLOBAL TRENDS

Poverty is a very visible part of human society. Due, probably to the Biblical "fall of man in the Garden of Eden" and plausibly because of the reality of the evolutionary theory of the "survival of the fittest", some categories of mankind have always suffered in the midst of plenty. Every civilisation has had its class of the poor, those marginalised from society and its resources by culture, ideology, and power. In feudal England, poverty was an estate, but membership of that estate did not generate as much anxiety as it has since the industrial revolution. After the First Industrial Revolution, the poor became more visible in society and poverty took on a very negative connotation in the affluent society created by the factory system of production.

This new system of production was accompanied by innumerable human problems including poverty. Everywhere the new system of production was introduced, poverty, like other problems followed suit. The precipitators were the inequalities generated by the *laissez-faire* economic doctrine of Adam Smith (1937) and the Great Depression of

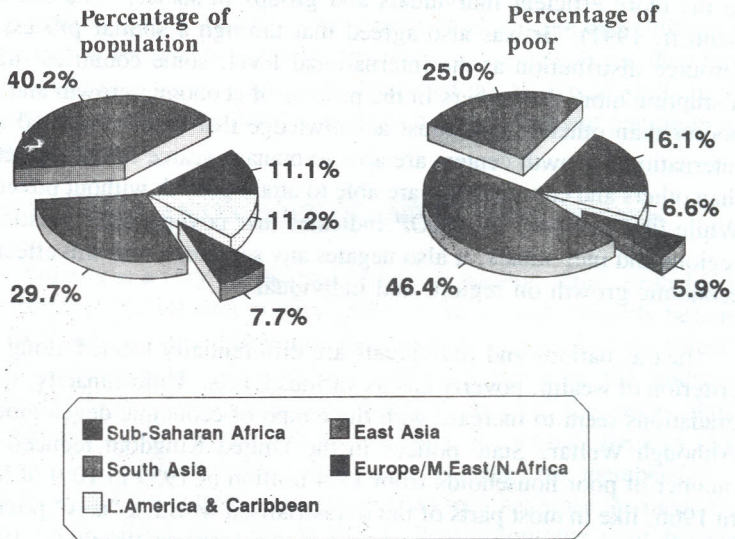


1929 which was the first major crisis of capitalism. The introduction of progressive taxation and similar policies for income redistribution ushered in the Welfare State and several systematic attempts to integrate the poor into society. As explained by Galbraith (1958) in the *Affluent Society*, the contrasts between the opulence of the rich and the squalor of the poor justified a shift in the direction of economic policy.

Although this and other studies perceived poverty as a problem of economic growth and development, more recent studies, acknowledge it is also a problem of economic decline. In a summary of the first International Social Science Council seminar on Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP), it was the consensus that "economic growth is inevitably followed by changes in the pattern of poverty, for growth implies that resource distribution, shifts from the less efficient to the more efficient individuals and groups in society" (Larsen and Bennett, 1991). It was also agreed that through a similar process of resource distribution at the international level, some countries suffer disruption more than others in the process of economic growth and are poorer than others. One must acknowledge that certain national and international growth centers are able to manage scarce resources better than others and consequently are able to attain growth without poverty. While this summary by CROP indicates that poverty affects nations, regions and individuals, it also negates any sense of a uniform effect of economic growth on regions and individuals.

Just as nations and individuals are differentially located along the criterion of wealth, poverty has its various levels. Unfortunately, these gradations seem to increase with the tempo of economic development. Although Welfare State policies in the United Kingdom reduced the number of poor households from 13.4 million in 1959 to 10.9 million in 1966, like in most parts of the industrialised world, a "new" poverty is emerging among the unemployed. Latest reports (Watkins, 1995) suggest that the increase in economic growth led to a decline in income inequality until the mid-1970s. Thereafter and particularly between 1979-1992, the poorest quarter of the population failed to benefit from economic growth. It is estimated that the proportion of the population with less than half the average income has trebled since 1977. And today, 12 million people live on less than half the average income, more than double the number in 1979. The number of individual living below

the poverty line increased from 5 million to almost 14 million. The United States of America which was protected from poverty for a long time by its high level of wealth has registered increasing proportions of the poor since it defined the first poverty line in 1965. In 1980, 14% of the population was caught below the poverty line of \$1,203. This includes an additional 4 million children. In 1992, child poverty affected 22 percent of all children. In the European Union, the number of people living below the poverty line is estimated to have increased from 38 million to 52 million between 1975 and 1988 (Watkins, 1995). Japan and Switzerland have been lucky and have been the only countries able to maintain growth without significant poverty.



**Fig. 1:** Population and poverty in the developing world, 1985 *World Development Report*, 1990

Poverty is thus a global problem of the present capitalist system of production that has been aggravated in the Third World countries by



their development, the several crises of capitalist development, political instabilities, wars, famines and devastating environmental problems. The total population estimated to be below the poverty line all over the world, according to a 1988 estimate is about 1 billion.

About 633 million were in Asia, 204 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, about 76 million in Latin America and the Caribbean and the rest in Near East and North Africa (Figure 1). While there is evidence that the urban poor is growing rapidly in number, close to 36 per cent of the total rural population fall below the poverty line (Jazairy *et al*, 1992). In Asia, 31 per cent of the total rural population are poor, 60 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 61 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean and 21 per cent in the Near East and North Africa. A total of 564 million rural women were estimated to fall below the poverty line, thus, the feminisation of poverty is now a major consideration in studies of poverty.

Data from 41 countries suggest a decline in the proportion of the rural poor living below the poverty line from 35 per cent to 33 per cent between the 1960s and 1980s. Thereafter the proportion increased by 201 million from 511 million to 712 million (IFAD, 1995). If rural poverty is unchecked, the rural poor is expected to increase to 1,310 million by 2000.

The poor in Africa has increased substantially over 200 million in 1988 to about 300 million in 1990. This is apparent in the decline in per capita income, in wages and employment in the face of population pressure, fragile national resources, weak institutional and financial structures (IFAD, 1995).

The picture on the home scene is equally alarming, with an estimate of 51 per cent of the Nigerian population below the poverty line in 1988. This estimate was based on an integrated index of macro indicators:

- \* the annual growth rate of gross national product (GNP) per capita,
- \* the annual rate of inflation,
- \* the long term debt service ratio as a percentage of exports of goods and services,

- \* a composite index of resource availability based on average arable land per head and agricultural land irrigated,
- \* the percentage of agricultural labourers in the total labour force,
- \* the percentage of households headed by women in total rural households and
- \* the percentage of the rural population with access to local rural health services.

Using household expenditure surveys for 1984-85 and 1992-93, the Federal Office of Statistics and the World Bank suggest that about 45 per cent of Nigerians are now below the poverty line, an underestimate that may be rooted in conceptual and definitional problems.

### **PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT**

Eradicating poverty calls for effective social policy. In order to be effective, social policy must distinguish the poor from the non-poor and must focus on the areas of deprivation defined by the poor themselves. Unfortunately poverty research and poverty alleviation programmes have been plagued by conceptual problems arising from the fact that poverty is an elusive and controversial concept (Zweig, 1948).

Also, poverty is a common sense word which is implicit to the user, thus leading to as many definitions as there are users. As a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted concept, definitions cut across the social sciences and sometimes differ from administrative definitions invoked by policy makers. Dealing with poverty evokes emotions, which sometimes make it difficult to separate subjective from objective definitions and operational indicators. Poverty is time and culture-bound causing shifts in the reference point against which poverty is measured. For these reasons, there is a lot of disagreement about what poverty is and how it should be measured.

The visible definition of poverty has had a very long history and continues to dominate research and policy design. Usually, it projects an identifiable group whose total life situation displays such features that they are intuitively labelled as poor (Oyen, 1993). Although



considerable progress has been made in developing quantifiable indicators, the visible definition is still widely used (Wilson, 1987; Hindeide, 1990). One of the limitations of this method of identifying the poor is its neglect of the not so visible. As Aboyade (1975) once remarked; poverty like beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The wrong target group may be the recipient of poverty alleviation programmes causing leakages of benefits to unintended families. Yahie (1993) believes that such leakages owing to the use of the wrong criteria for identifying the poor have reduced governments' ability to address the urgent needs of the poor.

**Visible definitions are culture and time specific, hence they lack the precision and universality required for operationalising and quantifying poverty (Aboyade, 1975; Townsend, 1979; 1985; Oyen, 1993). However, quantification always requires a reference point, against which an individual's or group's standard of living is evaluated. Determining this minimum has been a major pre-occupation of researchers, making it imperative to determine appropriate indicators, the unit of analysis and advance poverty research beyond the descriptive level.**

This minimum is determined in two major ways; using a single indicator or using a multidimensional indicator. The first assesses individual's resources or income sufficient to obtain enough food, clothing, warmth and shelter (Bibangambah, 1985; The World Bank, 1990; Atkinson, 1991) and is a single broad indicator. The procedure adopted usually leads to the construction of a poverty line; that minimum required for a person to keep out of poverty.

Although this absolute definition is more popular in studies of poverty in advanced countries (Atkinson, 1991), it is considered inadequate for societies where the standard of living is well above mere subsistence level and therefore of very limited use for comparative analysis. There is therefore preference for a social definition that takes cognisance of essential items of basic consumption and a basic needs income for the purchase of food with a specified number of calories. As a social definition, it is a multi-dimensional measure of consumption that includes the costs of nutrition, housing, health and education. To overcome the difficulties in assessing these costs, the basic needs income level of households which fulfil the minimum requirements of

food consumption is estimated from household expenditure.

There are problems with these measures of poverty. They are based on the premise that poverty is due to lack of commodity command and neglect other important measures of inequality and power (Lanyouw and Stern, 1991). Because they measure only the potential or realised purchasing power over goods and services rather than actual consumption, they are concerned with only some of the possible inputs into the standard of living rather than the standard of living itself (Hicks and Streeten, 1979). In addition, there are important differences between income and life style which cannot be captured by one-time quantitative studies (Lanyouw and Stern, 1991). Thus, the most popular indicators simplify poverty and reduce it to an index of economic deprivation.

To Sen (1982), the approach is not sensitive enough to changes in absolute levels of deprivation and distributional changes from the poor to the non-poor. In fact, Chambers (1988) believes the approach expresses the priorities and convenience of professional number crunchers rather than the realities of the poor. Another important limitation is that inconsistencies may arise between a household's income and welfare as a result of the social welfare functions of households and the State. Kabeer (1989) therefore recommends moving beyond monetary measures of poverty and looking at the class and gender biases in the receipt of household and state welfare. This should correct the assumed equitable distribution of resources and poverty in households, explain the feminisation of poverty and the position of women and children among different categories of the poor.

How to identify the poor is a major problem for current poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. Since none of the definitions and measurements considered so far is adequate, it is necessary to be eclectic in defining the targets of poverty alleviation programmes. The poor in the slums are too visible, so are the victims of famine, ethnic conflict, street children, the elderly, the unemployed, victims of environmental disasters, and the disabled.

Poverty line estimates are desirable to guide policy, for sub-regional and regional comparative assessments, but do not explain it all. We must also allow for administrative definitions which are sometimes



imposed by public policy and are also responses to pressure groups. It must be emphasised however that difficulties in defining poverty and identifying the poor in our society are inherent in our political and cultural lives. These difficulties also arise from the use of inappropriate Western theoretical models of development and the dominance of poverty assessment by economists.

Poverty alleviation necessitates the redistribution of resources from the non-poor to the poor. This is a political issue which is negated by several aspects of our culture, religion and political ideology. Consequently, we are unable to identify the poor because we do not want to see them or because we take them for granted as a lunatic fringe that makes society what it is. They are recipients for our philanthropic gestures by which eternity is guaranteed.

In Nigeria, there has not been enough academic discourse on poverty, hence we have problems identifying the poor. Only once in 20 years has there been an adequate focus on poverty by a local academic organisation and at a time when poverty is most disturbing, it has been side-tracked by other more lucrative subjects. As a consequence of this, little or no contribution has been made locally to help clarify the conceptual and theoretical issues surrounding poverty research. Little should we wonder then that poverty which is so 'close' to us all is, like most aspects of social development issues left in the hands of Western economists whose conceptualisations are tinted by the reality they know in their societies.

Unfortunately, the small crop of social scientists who analyse poverty borrow substantially from Western economics and are isolated from other social scientists with whom they need to present an integrated framework by their specialisation. Two decades ago, Akeredolu Ale (1975:46) chastised economists for confining their efforts to the endless elaboration of the theory of value, for working at an analytical abstract level without the complementary analysis which should give flesh to their models and explain the real causes of poverty. As he asserted humorously, poverty has been handled by economists with "economysticism".

The phenomenon of poverty in other Third World countries has stimulated similar reservations about economic approaches and

quantification. Perano (1989), suggested that the criteria for measuring poverty now derive from Western cultural values which give us figures but obscure the persons.

To overcome the conceptual problems of poverty research in Nigeria, the point of departure is to introduce economic and non-economic parameters relevant to the local situation. The second is to understand the issues involved and how they relate to each other. In this regard, I suggest applying Atkinson's (1978) conceptual framework which is amenable to comparative research (Figure 2).

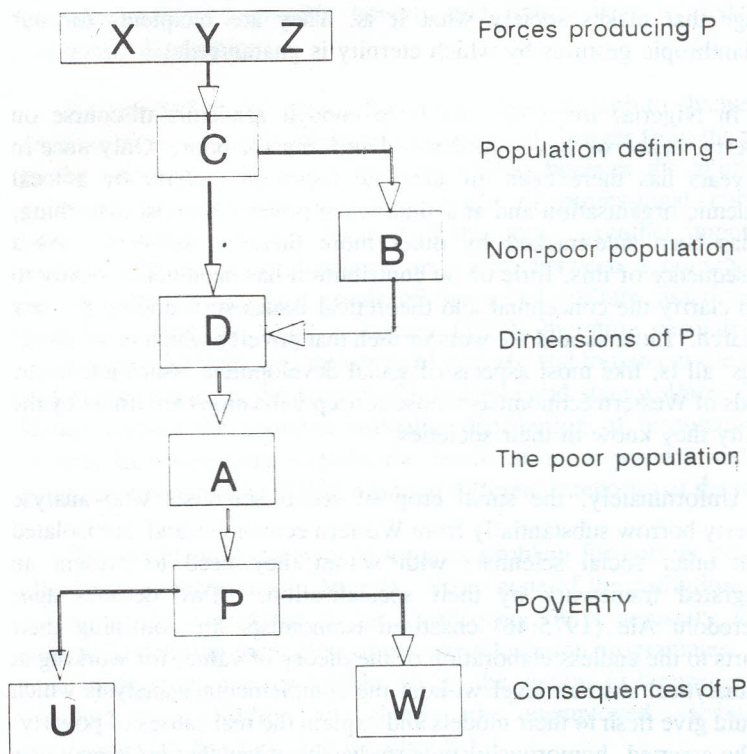


Fig. 2: Illustration of a simple poverty course. (Else Oyen, 1992).

Users of this framework will have to separate the forces (processes, causes, groups) X,Y,Z, creating poverty P from the population expressing that A is poor. The non-poor B and the poor A are to be analysed as different categories while the dimensions of poverty, D and its consequences, U and W should be identified as different elements. T represents the time dimension and M the magnitude of the phenomenon. Using these elements, poverty can be defined as X,Y,Z, the forces creating the dimensions, D during time T a specific time period of the magnitude M1 which implies that the life of A, the poor population and that of B, the non-poor cannot be the same and that the possession of D1 and D2 which B has equals zero or takes on the value M2.

I consider this appropriate for the analysis of poverty in Nigeria because each of these parameters can be defined in relation to the specific characteristics of the society thus overcoming the issue of theoretical relevance. Considerable bias is avoided because the poor and the non-poor are expected to be involved in the analysis of the situation; the minimum required for adequate living and the criteria for determining deprivation.

## **TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Poverty research is an aspect of social change and development. It is therefore troubled by the paradigm crisis which has pervaded the social sciences globally and here at home. The several crises of development have made it clear that a new development paradigm is needed to guide policy on the continent. Poverty research is in dire need of such a paradigm to make poverty alleviation measures effective. Unfortunately, there is no one acceptable theory. Although the social sciences are the seed-bed of the theories of poverty, very little has been achieved in synthesising their different perspectives which overlap considerably. As observed by Oyen (1993) synthesising them has been made difficult by their location at different levels of analysis, macro, meso and micro. Also, while some theories explain the causes, others deal with manifestations and yet others with coping strategies and poverty alleviation programmes. But there is a general bias for macro theory and economic growth perspectives tend to be predominant. That has been a problem in Nigeria.



Very little was known about poverty in Nigeria in the period before 1975. The oil boom obscured poverty and raised expectations that economic growth would stimulate development among all sectors of the population. The marginalised in society, the unemployed, the disabled, orphans and destitutes were the targets of social welfare programmes, thus poverty was very narrowly defined in the context of the welfare approach to development.

Marxist paradigms threw some more light on the issue of poverty in Nigeria. A small crop of Marxist social scientists who had been influenced by the Latin American experience of socio-economic development (Baran, 1957; Sweezy, Frank, 1975) perceived poverty as the outcome of the underdevelopment of the country caused by the extraction of its surplus for the development of the more developed countries (Onimode, 1975, 1982). Other refinements of this Marxist framework, dependency and the political economy models also associated poverty with unequal terms of trade (Wallerstein, 1974) and more recently with the debt burden and structural adjustment programmes (Onimode, 1989). Unfortunately, even among Marxists, identifying the poor was controversial. Adherents of the labour aristocracy thesis presented the urban working class as members of the petite bourgeois class and included among the poor only the unemployed, small scale traders and the peasantry. Following Fanon (1967), the peasants, the Wretched of the Earth, constituted the core of the poor although they were not given as much attention as the working classes by Marxist scholars. In fact, working class consciousness and revolutionary potentials were the centrepiece of the work of Marxist scholars in that epoch.

Marxist methodology objectified poverty, thus, there were few empirical studies of the poverty phenomenon other than those which concentrated on causal factors such as underdevelopment and dependency theories. Political economy approaches elaborated these and concluded cursorily that working class poverty was manifested in:

- \* decrepit slums of the workers
- \* low wages
- \* undernourishment

- \* poor housing
- \* poor health facilities
- \* low education/occupational aspirations for their children.

Rural poverty was taken as given and was merely seen as a consequence of the structural imbalances between rural and urban areas.

The Marxist framework did not seek sophisticated quantitative analysis, but like the economic growth and modernisation paradigm, it could not offer us a complete picture of poverty beyond the impact of global economic processes. It did not penetrate households to explain the differential placement of members with respect to resources, the impact of the community power structure and processes and how individuals either contribute to or cope with poverty. These issues lay beyond Marxism which is a macro theory that does not explain household level processes (Stanmore, 1994). Marxism is a theory of structures and like the functionalist theory of development does not incorporate "actors" into explanations of social processes.

Integrating "actors" into "structures" within the context of critical Marxist theory has been the major focus of my theoretical and empirical work since the mid 1970s. My first encounter with the Nigerian working class in the early 70s, an empirical study of Textile Factory Workers had refuted the suggestion that society was being modernised (Afonja, 1979). Like similar critical approaches at the time it had suggested that development was unlikely to trickle down to the working class as theorised by the popular basic needs approach. It also dismissed any inclination towards lifetime commitment to paid employment in such an unfavourable economic climate like that of Nigeria. In interpreting this data and existing studies of the African working class, I suggested that the working class must be understood in the light of the following political economy factors:

1. a colonial and a post-colonial economy that is based on the exploitation of human and natural resources by the more advanced nations and our dependency on them for the capital



and technological know how;

2. an inflationary economy that generates rising costs of living under persistent conditions of unemployment;
3. structural imbalances in the level of development in rural and urban areas;
4. high aspirations built into an elitist education policy;
5. limits placed on human motivation for efficient performance by national integration mechanisms such as Federal character and ethnic balancing which undermine the principles of meritocracy.

Thus, working class instability and low commitment to work were interpreted in Weberian terms. They were explained as outcomes of the attempts of the working class to overcome these political economy constraints in a variety of ways; searching among existing occupational choices for the more lucrative sector, moonlighting to subsidise earnings, protesting and going on strike against humiliating and inhuman treatment. Working class participation in politics was also seen as an attempt to defend their interests, and ethnic loyalties were used to ensure access to the job, progress on it and security of employment. The greatest aspiration of the typical working class therefore was to be an independent worker (Afonja, 1981, 1982, 1986).

These studies indicated that the urban proletariat in Africa is a different type of 'actor' from that predicted in the literature. He is conscious of his poverty and powerlessness and thus develops a wide range of coping strategies. My various studies of alienation and those of my students confirmed the high degree of powerlessness and instrumentalism that is characteristic of the poor in Nigeria (Afonja, 1978; Alo, 1984; Mgbé, 1991).

By concentrating on the survival strategies of the poor and the political economy in which they operated, I was able to integrate two hitherto distinct theoretical perspectives, Marxist and Weberian interpretive sociology. The less visible sectors: agriculture and the informal sector had not been my areas of interest. I was more



interested in the urban poor, but a theoretical foundation had been laid and this was strengthened by my incursion into the impact of development on women.

The studies I carried out on the impact of social change on Nigerian women contradicted the expectation of the liberal reformists that modernising women through education, health, employment etc would improve their status. The political economy approach which had proved to be useful in my studies of the working class had provided a more appropriate interpretation of the impact of development on women. The most notable contribution of these studies is the pointer to aspects of the pre-capitalist society which are reproduced in the capitalist modes of production to negate the development of women (Afonja, 1979; 1981; 1984, 1990). Like in the studies of the working class, women were perceived as 'actors' who have throughout history contributed to their own subordination as guardians and sustainers of culture and who adopt various strategies to cope with their situation and overcome it.

The data on these two different areas of development, working class behaviour and gender analysis challenged existing theories of social change and created the need for a paradigm shift. It was obvious that the political economy approach and Weber's interpretive sociology could be fruitfully synthesised to provide a better understanding of the issues of development in our society. This had a remarkable influence on how poverty was analysed in my work subsequently. By concentrating on the survival strategies of the poor and the political economy which determine their situation, I was able to integrate macro and micro level factors, Marxist political economy and the Weberian actors' model.

### **CONSOLIDATING THE THEORETICAL SHIFT**

Studying the urban working class was a mere academic exercise initially. No intervention programmes were envisaged for the improvement of the conditions of the poor. At best the studies would guide policy, but it was an exercise that bore fruit. A better understanding of the urban working class and political economy provided the impetus to wade into the paradigm crisis in African

sociology and to take a stand on the issue of a relevant development paradigm; the functionalist paradigm which is still dominant, Marxism which is in smoulders or something else. By contrast, wading into the lives of women was to create change in their lives. Their poverty was too staggering to be untouched, the search for a new development paradigm was thus to ensure sustainable development. Thus in the book *Social Change in Nigeria* edited by Afonja and Pearce (1986), we appraised the existing paradigms and rejected functionalist based theories of development and traditional Marxist approaches which rest only at the macro-level of analysis.

Evidence from the sectors discussed in the book by the different contributors confirmed the results of my work on the working classes that functionalism and Marxism presented structures without actors and did not sufficiently explain underdevelopment, the influence of pre-colonial modes of production in shaping the present economy and polity, the legal system etc and the role of the individual in shaping the social structure. In this book, we opted for a post-structuralist Marxist perspective, an open systems perspective which allowed us to take into consideration the country's underdevelopment and dependency, the interpretive models of Weber and its emphasis on the role of the actor in social change. For a region with a low level of development theorising, an open paradigm was considered necessary to guide development.

Unfortunately, we did not have the ingredients for the new paradigm. All we could offer was a theoretical exploration of the path and goal of social change in Nigeria. We emphasised the need to understand our society first before incorporating its modes of thought into macro theory. Also, we argued for an open systems paradigm and Weber's model because he shows that the individual is significant in the process of social change and development. He is able to make choices between the old and the new as well act as an innovator in synthesising aspects of the old and new. He is also capable of sabotaging the system. This element of rationality in Weber's work was superimposed on post- structural Marxist analysis which Weberians allow for and which also recognises the particularism of structures.

This outline of the path and goal of social change in Nigeria



amounted to an unfinished work when the book was completed in 1984. It was however a major impetus for more empirical verifications of this theory, this time among the rural populace. From about 1984 onwards my research subjects changed and so did my methodology. But these developments coincided with the crisis of development in the African region and the more vigorous search among academicians and policy makers for an alternative development paradigm.

In the discipline of sociology itself, efforts were being made about the same time to re-establish its multi-paradigmatic character. As summarised by Alexander in his article of the New Theoretical Movement in Sociology in 1988, this phase of development of the discipline was marked by an effort to link theorising about action and structure once again and such efforts came from both sides of the macro and micro divide causing paradigmatic shifts in each one. Such revisionism swept through Germany, England and France causing the new post Marxists and Parsonian sociologists to accept phenomenology and its emphasis on individual action. In symbolic interaction theory and ethnomethodology, the traditions of Goffman (1959) and Blumer (1969) recognised that actors are located in structural and cultural contexts that cannot be divorced from their action. Also Homan's (1961) exchange theory and similar rational choice models responded to the shift by interpreting individual action as an element of collective action rather than solely as an intended purposive action and as preliminary steps to understanding the structure of society and interpersonal relationships.

These developments are very significant for the status of Sociology in non-Western cultures. Much as the end goal is to generate a universal theory of society, they indicate that the first step is to develop theories appropriate to each society; as Weber had proposed being particularistic before being universalistic. An appropriate theory of development *suis generis* for Nigeria must shift from the dominant economic growth or modernisation perspective and so must any theoretical analysis of poverty.

In view of the appropriateness of these open paradigms, it is more fruitful to conceptualise poverty broadly as lack of command of economic and non-economic resources, brought about by economic and

non-economic processes, as a state that is measurable at a specific point in time and as a process that can be reproduced from one generation to another and persist through a life cycle. Poverty as a state projects the levels of economic deprivation, but it is a static concept that only defines physiologically-determined levels of survival. To fill this gap, the qualitative dimensions are extended beyond basic needs for food, shelter, health and education to include powerlessness, inequality, dependence and isolation. These intrinsic elements and others such as job security, autonomy, self-respect are usually missing in the lives of the poor.

Conceptualising poverty as a process presents a more comprehensive image of poverty, for one is examining the causes and the mechanisms of the generation and transmission of poverty (Fergany, 1981). According to Sen (1982), people's claims on the social product are determined by a complex system of entitlements, which are in turn shaped by the social relations and practices which govern possession, distribution and use in a particular society. Possible entitlements include those based on trade and exchange, those based on production using one's resources, those based on the state distribution system. Kroeber (1989) refines the understanding of the process by suggesting **deterioration in the value of endowments and exchange entitlements** since these determine the household's or individual's capacity to function at acceptable levels of well-being and achievement.

However, this description of process focuses only on the micro level (household or community) but does not reflect the mechanisms of the generation and transmission of poverty in the global economic system and in each country. For instance, it would be incomplete to explain poverty in Nigeria without recourse to the processes of appropriation and disposal of the investible surplus of the country, the pattern of private and state government investment, the speed and nature of technical innovation (Bibangambah 1985). We must also bear in mind population pressure, political conflicts and environmental factors. Integrating these into the analytical framework presented above also enables one to examine the under-development of this country, the impact of global capitalism and state policies.



## MANIFESTATIONS OF POVERTY

Using the above theoretical framework mandates the use quantitative and qualitative data to discuss the manifestations of poverty in Nigeria. Unfortunately there is very little systematic quantitative data. The different attempts made derive from rather disparate methodologies and measures such as food poverty, basic needs and the Human Development Index. Since the quantification of poverty for Nigeria is a recent exercise, we tend to know more about poverty through those broad issues which do not restrict poverty to economic deprivation.

One of the earliest attempts to quantify poverty by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD,1992) relied on macro statistics and 1988 base figures of an integrated set of variables which included:

- \* the annual growth rate of gross national product (GNP) per capita.
- \* the annual rate of inflation
- \* the long term debt service ratio as a percentage of exports of goods and services.
- \* a composite index of arable land per head and agricultural land irrigated
- \* the percentage of households headed by women
- \* the percentage of agricultural labourers in the total labour force and
- \* the percentage of the rural population with access to local health services.

Based on these indices, 51 per cent of the population was estimated to fall below the poverty line in 1988, two years after the introduction of the structural adjustment programme (SAP). The poverty indices adopted in this study took into consideration the elements of our underdevelopment which affect individual or household income and

expenditure patterns. The effects of inflation and the debt burden were reflected while the underlying causes of poor agricultural productivity were also taken into consideration.

In an analysis of rural and urban incomes from 1973 to 1979, Jamal and Weeks (1988) also attempted to quantify poverty using rural and urban incomes. They reported a decline in urban incomes over the period and suggested that urban poverty increased from 33 per cent in 1973 to 38 per cent in 1979. It was clear from their analysis that the poor did not benefit from the oil boom.

A World Bank Study of Household Food Security and Nutrition published in 1990 also provided insights into the nature of the phenomenon of poverty in Nigeria. With a set of variables related to both household food security and nutrition, the study defined the threshold income of ₦150-200 per month for urban households in 1985-86 and ₦100-150 for rural households. With these threshold incomes, it estimated that 22 per cent of urban and 17 per cent of rural households were food poor. To show the positive impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), higher threshold incomes were estimated for 1989; ₦3,600 for urban and ₦2,400 for rural areas.

Food poverty appears to have increased between 1989 and 1992-93. Based on the food share of total household expenditure, a UNICEF (1994) study of Household Food Security and Nutrition (1994) which I coordinated, indicated that about 65 per cent of the sample studied in the ten focus states were food poor. Households which spent about 60 per cent of total expenditure on food were considered to be food poor and those which spent over 70 per cent to be ultra food poor. Zone A, Cross-River and Benue States fell in the category of the food poor and B Zone, Oyo, Osun and Ondo and Zone D, Adamawa, Bauchi and Taraba States were ultra food poor. Zone C, Kaduna and Niger States appeared to be more food secure.

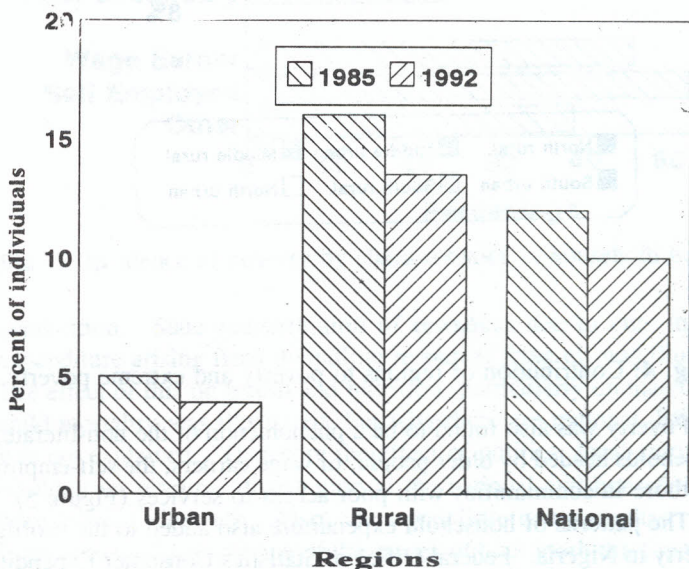
The most recent attempt to quantitatively measure poverty in Nigeria is the current Federal Office of Statistics and the World Bank initiative using the consumer price index for 1985/86 and 1992/93.

Calculations were based on two parameters; per capita food expenditure and the share of expenditure devoted to food expressed in constant prices of a reference region and time.

This study estimated a poverty line of N395 and an extreme poverty line of ₦198 for both periods. The data suggested that 45 per



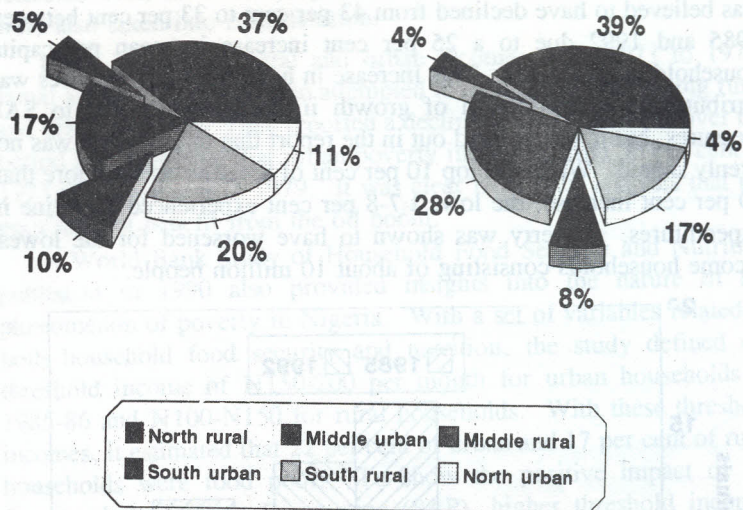
cent of the population were below the poverty line in 1993. Poverty was believed to have declined from 43 per cent to 33 per cent between 1985 and 1992 due to a 25 per cent increase in mean per capita household expenditures. This increase in household expenditures was attributed to a resumption of growth in the economy due to SAP measures, but it was pointed out in the report that this increase was not evenly shared. While the top 10 per cent of households had more than 50 per cent increase, the lowest 7-8 per cent experienced a decline in expenditures. Poverty was shown to have worsened for the lowest income households consisting of about 10 million people.



**Fig. 3:** Incidence of Extreme Poverty, 1985 and 1992.

**Source:** *Evolution of Poverty and Welfare in Nigeria, 1985-92.*

Quite expectedly, poverty was found to be a rural phenomenon with 8.4 million of the 10 million of the extremely poor being from rural areas (Figure 3). There were also regional differences in the distribution of poverty. Household expenditures were found to have increased by 30 per cent in the South and Middle Zones and by only 2 per cent in the North. Thus poverty declined in the South from 42 to 26 per cent and in the North, extreme poverty declined from 36 per cent to 32 per cent.



**Fig. 4:** Contribution of regions to poverty and extreme poverty.

Poverty was also found to be a phenomenon of the non-literate, of households headed by older people, of wage earners, the self-employed and those in communities with poor access to services (Figure 5).

The patterns of household expenditure also added to the profile of poverty in Nigeria. Federal Office of Statistics Consumer Expenditure Surveys for 1992/93 showed that the non-food expenditures on health and education of the non-poor was much higher than for the poor. The reason adduced is that non-poor households are driven to the more expensive services by the poor quality of services offered by the public system.

Much as this study has filled a major gap in providing a poverty profile for Nigeria, it suffers from some of the limitations of similar quantification efforts described already and undoubtedly underestimates the phenomenon of poverty in Nigeria.

Data on the access of the poor to social services was definitely used to overcome the emphasis of similar poverty profiles on economic



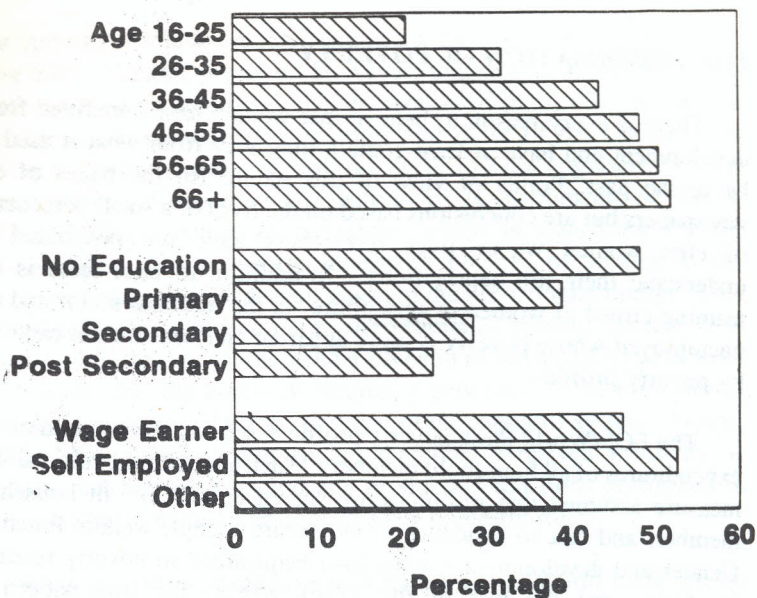


Fig. 5: Incidence of poverty by characteristics of household head.

deprivation. State redistribution of resources due to cuts in public expenditure arising from dwindling resources from oil was illustrated. The effect of this on health and nutrition, particularly on maternal and child mortality was illustrated, but why there are regional differences was not explained. Therefore the effect of politics, local culture and ideology on resource distribution at the national and household level were missing elements. Also, there was little or no emphasis on the feminisation of poverty one of the causes of high morbidity, mortality, low female literacy and school enrolment in Nigeria.

Time does not permit me to discuss all these missing elements of poverty, but I will focus on the feminisation of poverty, a subject matter on which I have devoted a substantial part of my academic career and which is currently of global concern. To understand the poor conditions of our women today, I have had to go back historically and reconstruct how the old and new socio-political systems and ideologies have shaped the place of women in our society today and generated the feminisation of poverty.

## THE FEMINISATION OF POVERTY

There is every reason to believe that women have benefited from development and have at least come a long way from what it used to be in the past. Points of view of this nature fill the pages of the newspapers but are conclusions based on the lives of a small percentage of elite women whose lives researchers have not penetrated to understand their life deprivations. In addition to this, there is the teeming crowd of women in agriculture, in the informal sector and the unemployed whose poverty is more apparent and who are not captured by poverty profiles.

The FOS/World Bank poverty profile described above relied on the expenditures of all household members. Such a household vulnerability measure assumed that resources are shared equally by all household members and that co-residence would ensure a single welfare function. Gender and development studies have bequeathed to poverty research in Africa and the rest of the Third World, the true pattern of intrahousehold dynamics under capitalism and patriarchy and emphasised the need to revisit these measuring instruments. The rationale is that the gender division of labour has changed from a complimentary to a competitive one with increasing specialisation of products between men and women and differentials in the control of resources.

Another major contribution is that the poverty and low status of Third World women are part of the underdevelopment of these countries since the cheap and unpaid labour of women helps the capitalist system to survive. The low wage regimes of the formal labour market, the competition and low incomes in the informal labour market, the low prices of agricultural products are mechanisms which supports surplus extraction. Without paying for family labour including the labour of women and without fixing a family wage, the capitalist and the state can increase its appropriated surplus through low prices, and tax measures and control of household consumption. The recent increase in petroleum prices is undoubtedly a dimension of such exploitation. So is the imposed value added tax (VAT).

Since women subsidise the low wages and incomes of household heads, they are unwittingly helping the capitalist system to survive.

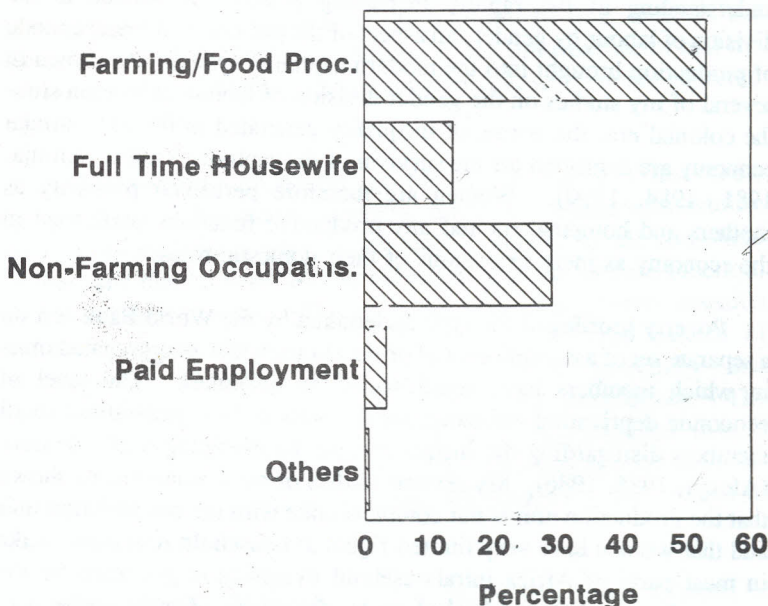


But they are unable to operate beyond subsistence level or capitalise to raise their economic position. However, this pattern of exploitation is made possible by the continuous interaction of indigenous patriarchal ideologies and hierarchical structures and those of the capitalist era (Afonja, 1981). In this regard, we have to take cognisance of the internal political economy and patriarchy as instruments of female poverty. One element of patriarchy which is significant for the understanding of the rapidly increasing poverty of women is the division of labour by gender, an aspect of the pre-colonial lineage mode of production brought into the modern capitalist system. As shown in several of my studies on the gender division of labour in Nigeria since the colonial era, the norms of inequality generated in the pre-colonial economy are exploited for the survival of the capitalist system (Afonja, 1981, 1984, 1990). Women are therefore perceived primarily as mothers and homemakers and any productive functions performed in the economy as mere extensions of their domestic roles.

Poverty profiles of the type undertaken by the World Bank rest on a separate set of assumptions and project households as aggregated units in which members have equal access to resources. The level of economic deprivation estimated for the household is generalised to all members disregarding the inequalities in the distribution of resources (Afonja, 1985, 1986). My several studies of rural women have shown that the production unit is not commensurate with the consumption unit and that women have very limited rights to household resources. Like in most parts of Africa intrahousehold dynamics is governed by the norms of inequality and backed up by the norms of male preference, unequal gender division of labour, the control of women's reproduction by men, their limited rights over their lives and restricted access in inheritance. These are important elements of the feminisation of poverty which any poverty profile must take into consideration. The FOS/World Bank poverty profile should have disaggregated the data by gender and age to give a more comprehensive analysis of poverty in Nigeria. The poverty of children was also conspicuously left out of the analysis.

There are other ways in which the internal political economy and ideological factors contribute to the feminisation of poverty. One of these is the low level of development of women as part of the nation's human resources. This is apparent in low literacy and school

enrolment rates, poor access to health, heavy work load, poor access to productive resources, low participation in the formal labour market and in politics. (The World Bank, 1992).



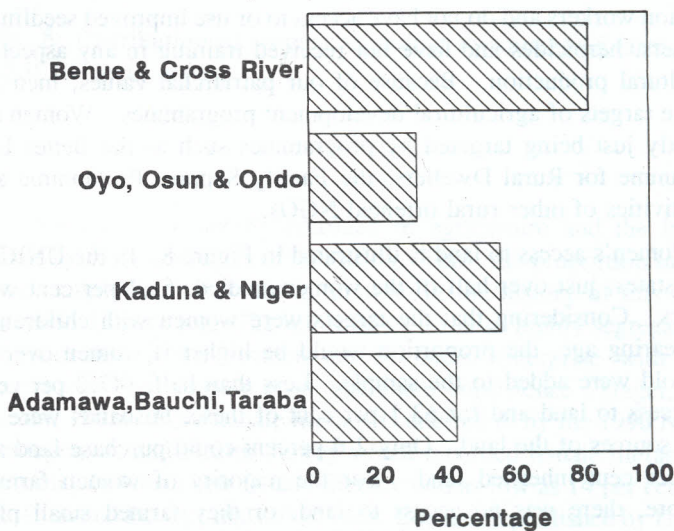
**Fig. 6:** Major occupations of women in UNICEF's ten focus states.

That women are the major food producers in this country today is no longer in doubt. In fact, the majority of the productive labour in rural areas are women who are in a wide range of rural occupations. Although there are doubts in some quarters about this pattern of gender division of labour, it should be realised that the rapid rate of male migration into urban centres for wage employment was one of the earliest causes of this phenomenon. Although there are variations from one part of the country to another, the abandonment of agriculture to women is widely accepted as one of the causes of the food shortage in the 1970s. The low returns to agriculture continue to make the sector



unattractive to men. But the high demand for food products, and agricultural raw materials is currently increasing the involvement of women in a wide range of agricultural processes including new forms of agro-industry. It is therefore not far fetched to conclude that 60 - 70 per cent of women dominate food production and processing in this country today.

There are many empirical verifications of this phenomenon and one of the most recent data is from UNICEF's Food and Nutrition Study (Figure 6), which I coordinated in 1992 (NPC/UNICEF, 1995). Farming and food processing are the most popular occupations of the women studied. If we add the proportion who claimed to be housewives and who presumably undertake some form of farming activity or the other, the proportion engaged would be as high as 66.9 per cent. There are interesting regional variations as shown in Figure 7. Benue and Cross River States have the highest proportion of women farmers (82.3 per cent) and Oyo, Osun and Ondo states the lowest proportion. One should expect a higher proportion from these south-west states since a significant proportion of the women traders are also involved in some farming activities.



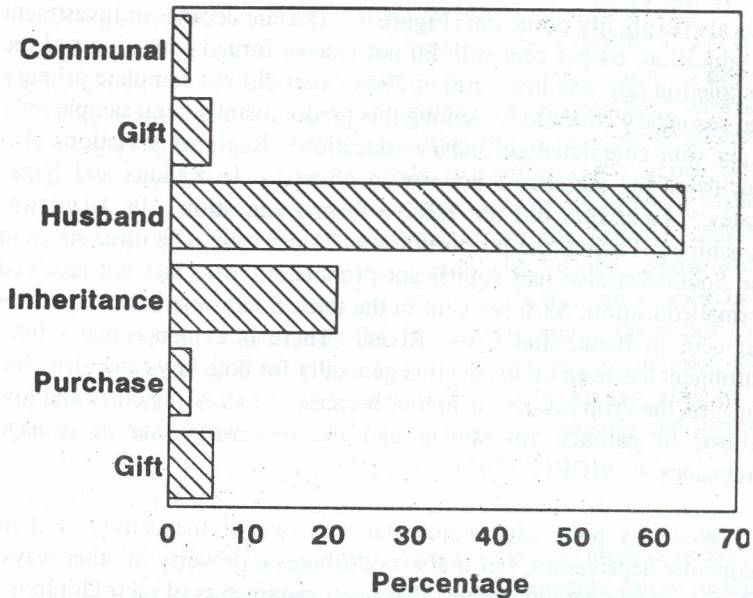
**Fig. 7:** Regional distribution of women in farming occupations in UNICEF focus states, 1992-93.

The proportion of women who are independent producers has increased very rapidly as a result of a number of factors; the relaxation of inheritance laws among some ethnic groups, thus allowing women to inherit farmland and cash crops; unfavourable conditions, particularly the competition and instability of the informal sector, and new occupational opportunities in farming as the demand for food crops and agricultural raw materials increased (Afonja and Aina, 1995). Such women independent producers add to the proportion who work as family labour and confirm the suggestion that women will remain the major agricultural producers as long as African agriculture is not mechanised (Afonja and Aina, forthcoming).

An earlier investigation of the range of agricultural duties performed by women showed a breakdown of traditional complementary patterns whereby women performed the light duties and men the heavy duties (Afonja, 1985 ; 1986 ). Today, women producers undertake all forms of agricultural tasks in the absence of the labour to support their work. This poor access to resources is not confined to labour. The greater proportion of women agriculturists who do not have access to or own plots of land, are hardly visited by extension workers and do not have access to or use improved seedlings, fertilisers, herbicides and have not received training in any aspect of agricultural production. Because of our patriarchal values, men are still the targets of agricultural development programmes. Women are currently just being targeted by programmes such as the Better Life Programme for Rural Dwellers, the Family Support Programme and the activities of other rural oriented NGOs.

Women's access to land is illustrated in Figure 8. In the UNICEF focus states, just over half of the women studied, 53.1 per cent were farmers. Considering that the targets were women with children of childbearing age, the proportion would be higher if women over 45 years old were added to the sample. Less than half, (47.2 per cent) had access to land and for 63.1 per cent of these, husbands were the major sources of the land. Only 2.6 percent could purchase land and 20.7 per cent inherited land. For the majority of women farmers therefore, there was no access to land, or they farmed small plots which cannot guarantee household food security on account of their temporary rights to land which runs through the husband's lineage (Figure 8).





**Fig. 8:** Distribution of women according to sources of farm plots in UNICEF focus states.

Women are generally confined to agriculture and the informal sector by their low levels of education. Thus, the proportion in formal sector employment has not at anytime in the history of this country exceeded 15 per cent. The informal sector is so highly segregated that the majority of the women are in micro enterprise with capital investments that cannot even guarantee subsistence (Trager, 1991; Soetan, 1995). Low female literacy is attested to by the 1990 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey which recorded female literacy at 42 per cent. In Northwest female literacy was as low as 14 per cent. The Situation and Policy Analysis of Basic Education published by UNICEF also reported gross gender differentials in primary enrolment with a male/female ratio of 56/44.

In the 10 UNICEF focal states, women's poor educational status was also explicitly borne out (Figure 9). Despite decades of investment in education, 64 per cent still did not receive formal education and the completion rate was low. About 29 per cent did not complete primary and secondary education. Among this predominantly rural sample only 7 per cent completed secondary education. Regional variations also elucidated the pattern of poverty in Nigeria. In Kaduna and Niger States, 74 per cent did not receive formal education. In Adamawa, Bauchi and Taraba, the proportion was 71 per cent. The three states in the Southwest also had significant proportions who had not received formal education, 53.0 per cent in the three Southwest States and 58.9 per cent in Benue and Cross River. There is evidence that school enrolment has been on the decline generally for both boys and girls, but for girls the drop out rate is higher because of increasing costs and low returns to parents' investment and the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy (UNICEF, 1993).

Women's poor educational status is one of the causes of their economic deprivation, but it also contributes to poverty in other ways. There is ample data to suggest that many parameters of their children's health and nutritional status are negatively influenced by the educational status of mothers. The NDHS (FOS 1990) for instance showed that mother's level of education varied with immunisation status of mother and child, with the prevalence of the major killer diseases particularly diarrhoea and measles and with low nutritional status, measured by the anthropometric method. Women's reproductive health behaviour has also been shown to be influenced by educational status with the poor having more children than the non-poor (The World Bank, 1994). UNICEF's Food and Nutrition data underscores this showing variations in the prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight with mothers' level of education.

That enough resources have not been invested in women as part of the nation's human resources was very apparent in the low incomes of this group of women. Only 6.0 per cent earned an income that was above ₦5,000. The majority, 72 per cent had an income that was below ₦2,000, an income which would put them among the category of the extremely poor considering the poverty line recently applied by FOS and the World Bank.



There are other aspects of women's deprivation that time does not permit me to develop in full. These include a wide range of social and cultural practices which are detrimental to their health, which erode their legal rights, and deny them equal representation at decision making levels. The rationale for drawing attention to the feminisation of poverty in this lecture is to show that this is the core of poverty in Nigeria. When we think of how poverty manifests itself in our society, we must remember our mothers, sisters and wives and how valiantly they have protected their households from the crisis of capitalist development since the trans-atlantic trade with Europe. Those who are not familiar with that history, or who never witnessed women in cash crop production cannot deny that women are taking the major shocks of SAP, working 9-10 hours a day without leisure without rest to ensure that their households survive. If only for the sake of poor women, we must invigorate the crusade against poverty and its causes.

## CAUSES OF POVERTY

The success of any poverty alleviation programme depends on an adequate understanding of its causes. Unfortunately causal analysis is confused by the fact that there are many plausible causes of poverty. Since poverty researchers tend to agree that it is a phenomenon of the capitalist system of production, it is important to understand how the structure and operations of this system have enforced poverty on Nigeria.

An old school of thought in sociology and anthropology viewed poverty as an inevitable element of society. Their perspective was occasioned by the evolutionist principle of the survival of the fittest or the functionalist theory that one's status in society is a function of his contribution to the survival of the system. The medical doctor is for instance placed on a higher wealth and status ranking than a janitor because of his professional role in society. But these are simplistic explanations which trivialise poverty and are unable to explain its rising trend in modern societies.

A more plausible explanation is that offered by psychologists, (McClelland (1961) Hagen (1962) and Levine (1966)). They suggested that poverty could be associated with the unequal distribution of

individual attributes such as aptitudes, skills and motivations and in particular the unequal distribution of the need for achievement. This individual attribute theory does not also exhaust the issues involved and cannot be used alone for developing poverty alleviation programmes.

The geographical location and natural environment in which people live are also relevant to considerations of poverty, but this is only one of the immediate predisposing conditions of poverty which cannot be isolated from the more proximate and underlying causes which are concerned with the way resources are distributed in modern industrial societies.

More radical explanations of poverty therefore attribute the phenomenon to the structure of power and perceive it as a feature of any system in which those in control of power use various strategies to control the resources. With this theory of power, Akeredolu Ale (1975) traced the structure and incidence of poverty in Nigeria to the exploitation of the rural sector for the development of the urban sector by the indigenous capitalist class assisted by the international capitalist elite. Although his explanation raised some of the relevant political economy factors, it did not relate poverty to the external political economy which had set the conditions for this type of exploitative relationship.

In my book *Industrial Sociology* (Afonja, in press), I suggested that the mode of surplus extraction and utilisation and the relationship between those in power and other sectors of society determine the shape of a nation's industrial development. The underdevelopment of the African region was therefore associated with the diversion of the investible surplus to the industrial nations either through direct exploitation or the unequal terms of trade and dependency, the debt burden and/or structural adjustment programmes.

The mission of the colonial administrations was clear, therefore colonialism did not allow the necessary structure for accumulation to develop (Mkandawire, 1988). Most colonial governments paid their way and generated considerable surplus for export home. Similarly, import substitution from 1945 to 1970 merely served the interests of the metropolitan countries. Although 1960-1970 were years of significant



growth in African economies, aided by growth in the global economy, the high rate of growth recorded for Nigeria was not sustained into the following decade. The fact that there were large proportions of the impoverished during the period of boom suggested that for the political economy explanation to be complete one would need to examine the national political economy and how resources are shared between different classes.

The African region was unable to pursue vigorous industrialisation for the following reasons:

- \* the continents' ideological orientation bent towards nationalism;
- \* the poor level of foreign investment in the region;
- \* the assumption that the state would provide the social and economic infrastructure and private investment for financing much of the industrialisation process;
- \* the absence of a capitalist elite committed to the process.

Mkandawire (1988) picked out the latter as the most important factor, the fact that industrialisation was not a class project as it had been in other countries. He pointed out that the state and international conglomerates took charge of the industrialisation process based on non-economic success indicators such as national integration, regional balance, employment, profitability, indigenisation, accumulative national development and patrimonial obligations. Politics rather than economy had been the most important social development priority in the region since governments control the economy.

The underdevelopment of African economies was intensified in subsequent decades due to the unequal terms of trade for oil producing countries like Nigeria, high interest rates and short term loans particularly after 1979. According to Sutcliffe (1986), such borrowing was not to support industrialisation but to preserve investment in production in the face of falling earned import capacity. The ensuing debt burden, economic crisis and structural adjustment are familiar

aspects of a structurally defective economy. We must remember that in the process of exploiting natural resources for the capitalist market, environmental degradation occurs and large masses of the population are displaced, exposed to health risks and impoverished.

These macro-economic and political issues are undoubtedly the precipitators of poverty, but like all structural analysis, they do not penetrate lower levels such as households and communities to complete the picture of the impact of change on living standards. However, at this lower level of analysis, we see actors perpetuating poverty and developing coping strategies which may be to their own advantage, but to the disadvantage of others. In this regard, one cannot but mention that ethnicity, patrimonial relations, religion and cultural ideologies have all been used as tools to perpetuate poverty. These have blocked egalitarian policies and programmes and created new forms of stratification in the society. Thus, elements which generated inequality in the pre-capitalist society are reinvigorated in new forms to destabilise the national planning and development process. Perhaps, this is the very crux of the matter, an explanation of the bad management of the national economy which is very often neglected.

At the household level, the strong patriarchal ideology of the majority of the cultural groups have been a tool for engendering inequality with age and gender being the criteria as in the African lineage mode of production (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1975). But gender and age considerations do not comprehensively explain poverty unless viewed in their interaction with capitalism. Their co-existence over time has continued to ensure the underdevelopment of women and encouraged gender blind SAP policies which have increased the feminisation of poverty. Although there is still a great deal of aversion to gender issues in this country, gender inequality like any other form of inequality is one of the apparent causes of poverty.

Religion and culture often go together to perpetuate inequity. These are features of the Nigerian secular state which determine attitudes to poverty and the willingness to change the situation. The non-poor are likely to justify poverty on religious and cultural grounds and the poor develop a feeling of resignation and allow their poverty into succeeding generations. This has intensified the feminisation of poverty, providing cultural and religious reasons for not educating



women, for the gender stereotyping of occupations, for denying them legal and reproductive rights and participation in decision making. They have also been used to regulate the access of minority groups to resources particularly in the feudal states where there was a hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups.

Ethnic conflicts and rivalries also play an important role in creating poverty. Those in power also control the resources creating inequality in the distribution of national resources. In this country, the distribution of infrastructure is politically determined and leads to unequal access to health, education, and employment in one sense creating poverty and in another sustaining it. Ethnic conflicts and wars also upset the natural lifestyles of people, lead to the destruction of lives and property and also generate a different type of poverty. But the major damage is that by making politics the central issue in development, insufficient attention is given to increasing national productivity. How to repair the damaged economy has become secondary to the organisation of the political system and unwarranted national expenditure on non-productive political programmes.

## **POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES**

Poverty is an issue which has generated a lot of statements of intent and attracted policies targeting the poor. Such statements are unwittingly populist in nature and due to lack of basic data and understanding of the issue, policies and programmes have been inappropriate or have ended up benefiting the elite rather than the poor. The failure rate of such programmes is high and some end up being cancelled. The farm settlement schemes, cooperatives, integrated rural development programmes and agricultural development programmes, urban housing and transportation schemes influenced by economic growth and basic needs models failed because they were designed by the elite without recourse to the needs defined by the poor and ended up to the advantage of the elite (Afonja, 1995).

Between 1985 and 1995, there was a flurry of grassroots development programmes such as the Directorate of Roads and Rural Infrastructures, the National Directorate, of Employment, the Community Banks Scheme, the Peoples Bank, the Better Life

Programme for Rural Dwellers and the Family Support Programme. The impacts of these vary and although they may not have provided answers to the problems of the poor they have generated more awareness about poverty and to some extent mobilised the poor for development, but in very limited geographical areas.

The greatest problems of these programmes are their ad-hoc nature, poor grasp by their designers of the problems of poverty, identifying the right targets and programmes. Although the majority were introduced to temper the negative impact of SAP, they have only scratched the problem on the surface. The nation's primary health programme is in trouble, the educational system has collapsed while agriculture is not responding to the several attempts to increase productivity. These are signs of a system that cannot sustain growth, but more importantly of a system which is gradually moving towards total collapse. The onus has been on the national and international policy makers to reassess the underlying principles of development and suggest a more appropriate model.

The critical perspectives of the 1960s and 1970s have been found useful, leading to several critiques of economic growth models and the acceptance of some of its perspectives. In an assessment of the development process in the countries of the Southern Hemisphere, the South Commission (1990) concluded that the models of development adopted by the countries of the South were borrowed from the developed countries which had banished poverty, disease and starvation a long time ago. The Commission noted that the South was so encouraged by these successful models that there was "too much confidence in the theory that growth would trickle down" hence, there was little direct action to improve productivity, raise incomes of the poor and ensure a less unequal distribution of the benefits of growth.

About twelve years earlier, Aboyade (1976) had stepped out of the gab of neo-classical economic theory to call for a development paradigm that would guarantee sustainable development. Sustainable human development (SHD) has emerged as an appropriate model to guide development and eradicate poverty in Africa. SHD as defined by the UNDP (1994) puts people at the centre of development, regards economic growth as a means not an end, protects the life opportunities of future generations as well as the present generations and respects the natural systems on which all life depends" (UNDP, 1994). At the core of SHD strategies are poverty reduction, employment creation and social integration which are defined in the boxes below.



## POVERTY REDUCTION

- \* Widespread distribution of social services
- \* Equitable distribution of land & agricultural resources
- \* Equal access to credit
- \* Sustainable livelihood through employment
- \* Decentralisation of and participation of the poor in poverty reduction.
- \* Increased productivity of the poor.
- \* Content of growth should be less material intensive and energy intensive and more equitable in its distribution.

## EMPLOYMENT CREATION

- \* Having investment in education, training & skill formation
- \* Fair & equitable economic policies legal framework to stimulate private sector investment
- \* Use of labour intensive technologies
- \* Offer of employment through public works programmes
- \* Targeted interventions or programmes of affirmative action for women & other disadvantaged groups.
- \* Innovative and flexible working arrangements including job-sharing.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION:

- Equality before the law
- Protection of Minority Rights
- Anti-discrimination policies
- Education
- Governance.

SHD promotes a series of philosophies that differ from those associated with economic growth perspective. These are:

1. Concentrating on wealth exclusively is wrong because we do not need wealth to satisfy all human choices which extend far beyond economic well-being.
2. Human development involves much more than human resource development, but accepts that human capital can increase human productivity
3. Current consumption should not be financed by incurring debts for future generations to pay
4. Emphasises equity and does not perpetuate the inequities of today for future generation;
5. Recognises the complementarity of individual action and public policy and emphasises participatory development.

SHD is consistent with the paradigm which has evolved from my research; the emphasis on the structure and the actor and on economic growth and social development. The participatory development strategy is in fact based on the principle that individuals can reshape their lives and those of their communities as actors. What the SHD model needs



which I have been promoting since the 1980s to correct less attention to politics by encouraging power sharing and allowing more attention to economic and social development issues.

As a new paradigm, SHD incorporates into its agenda elements of previous poverty alleviation approaches particularly the Basic Needs Approach, Redistribution with Growth and Structure Change approaches. Each approach on its own did not solve the problems of the poor. They were either reductionist, residual or incrementalist approaches which ended up providing benefits to the non-poor and/or left the unequal system of resource distribution unchanged. SHD attempts to overcome these and other limitations and is therefore worth being put to test.

However, SHD is a tall order for Nigeria because it requires **rethinking** development; commitment to new challenges and a great **deal** of innovativeness in policy and programme design. These are the **challenges** of our underdevelopment and poverty. Are we ready to take up the challenge?

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mr. Vice Chancellor sir, ladies and gentlemen, there are some basic steps which can facilitate this enormous task. These involve all sectors of the population so that the poor are participating as much as the non-poor in clarifying the issues, identifying the programmes and targeting the right people.

It is important to raise society's level of awareness about the nature, causes and consequences of poverty in Nigeria. We must break the secrecy that surrounds this phenomenon and use the existing data (however sparse) to sensitise the nation to this predicament. Apart from apartheid, poverty is the major enemy of man on the continent today and it should be widely discussed to ensure better government and public commitment to poverty eradication programmes.

SHD as a new paradigm for poverty alleviation is a global concept which should be tailored to the Nigerian situation. It should rescue development from the economysticism in which it has been shrouded by economists. It challenges social scientists to integrate their

specialisations to support the definition and operationalisation of SHD in Nigeria. There are greater challenges for Nigerian economists. Now that the traditional contradiction between economic growth and equity is abolished, new economic principles need to be formulated to guide Nigeria back to economic growth without compromising human development. The thick line between disciplines will have to be wiped out to facilitate theorising and the development of appropriate policies.

Since poverty in Nigeria is closely tied to the level of development of the economy, the economic crisis and the debt burden, more pressure should be exerted on the International Monetary Fund not just to reschedule, but to cancel some of the debts. It is a sacrifice worth making to save the millions who are poor. This should be the contribution of the industrial countries to our development, a means of reciprocating what this region had contributed to building and consolidating industrial development in these countries. It should also serve as a means of fostering global integration and peace.

Economic progress is as important as political stability. An appropriate democratic system of government is the only means of devolving power to the people. SHD emphasises political decentralisation and this cannot be achieved under a military system of government. Political stability has been threatened by ethnic conflicts which are encouraged by the centralisation of resources and by the dominance of the political instance in a setting where the economic instance should prevail. This is an element of underdevelopment characterised by the reproduction of the past in the present but with devastating effects. It is time to switch the national debate from politics to economic and social development and exploit our rich human and material resources to advantage. To achieve this, government must encourage private sector participation in development. Both foreign and indigenous enterprises must actively promote increased productivity and also invest in social sector development.

There are greater challenges for the indigenous capitalist class. The first and second industrial revolutions were made possible by those entrepreneurs and innovators who invested their surpluses in their own countries, creating employment opportunities and generating growth in the lower sectors. Those who have made money legally and illegally in this country since independence should avail society the benefits of their



wealth by establishing small and medium enterprises which will thrive better in this environment. They should also support social development programmes at the community level and research and development efforts at the Universities rather than stack their wealth in other countries.

A coherent national policy is required for grassroots development to improve the productivity and well being of the poor in urban and rural areas. Government should set up a high-powered committee of professionals and not politicians to articulate such a policy. In view of the important role of women in agriculture, the resources required to assist women farmers should be provided through community based programmes rather than through highly centralised programmes which hardly reach the grassroots.

To reduce the current rate of increase in the feminisation of poverty, the National Policy on Women Development should be signed into law to provide an integrated framework for current gender and development programmes.

Sociologists face a major challenge arising from the fact that their input is essential to defining and operationalising SHD. The shift towards human development parameters of development was occasioned by theoretical shifts in sociology. Sociologists should therefore provide the much needed backing to government, international agencies and NGOs in interpreting SHD, designing relevant programmes and monitoring intervention programmes put in place.

Nigerians are despondent, morale is low, there is a feeling of powerlessness and unexpressed alienation everywhere because one month's income only lasts one week, food is scarce, the roads are poor or unavailable, health centres are unmanned or inaccessible, there are no drugs, schools are dilapidated, classrooms are empty, there are no jobs, life is insecure etc. The anger, either expressed or unexpressed can be justified because people who have seen good times are now witnessing bad times. Their wives die at childbirth, the children are dying in large numbers, there is disease and starvation in a land flowing with milk and honey. How do we comfort ourselves, how do we stop this rapid wave of pauperisation? I believe the answer lies in our own hands.

We must openly discuss poverty at different levels if only to release the anger. But in a technical manner, we must analyse the problem and its causes, suggest answers and actually develop plans of action to eradicate poverty in our communities. We must initiate those new forms of social organisation which can ensure participation in decision making or revitalise old ones so that we can contribute to government by planning and executing community based development programmes. These are the true forms of democracy which can safeguard our resources, ensure accountability and promote community wealth and well-being.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, there is a lot of individual wealth in this country. We must challenge our sons and daughters to invest in community projects so that our development can be based on internal resources rather than on borrowed money.



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