

## Assessment of the Causes of Poverty and Unemployment in Omala Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Despite Nigeria's abundant human and natural resources, its poverty profile paints a discouraging and grim picture of a nation in decline. Additionally, unemployment rates remain high and are showing an upward trend. Nigeria's situation presents a paradox: a country rich in resources, yet its citizens grapple with poverty. This study aims to investigate the root causes of poverty and unemployment in Kogi State, focusing on Omala Local Government as a case study. Drawing on qualitative research methods, and stakeholder perspectives, the study identifies several key factors driving poverty and unemployment in Omala. These include limited economic diversification, underdeveloped infrastructure, educational disparities, lack of access to finance, weak governance, environmental degradation, and inadequate healthcare access, the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers has resulted in loss of life, property, farmland, provision stores, warehouses, and religious unrest in the area. The findings underscore the importance of addressing these underlying challenges through targeted interventions and policy reforms. Strategies aimed at promoting economic diversification, improving infrastructure, enhancing educational opportunities, expanding access to finance, strengthening governance structures, addressing environmental concerns, and improving healthcare services emerge as critical pathways towards sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Omala Local Government. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics underlying poverty and unemployment in a specific local context. By offering actionable insights and policy recommendations, this study aims to inform decision-makers, development practitioners, and community stakeholders in their efforts to foster inclusive growth and prosperity in Omala and similar regions.*

**Keywords:** Poverty, Unemployment, Government initiatives

### Introduction

Poverty and unemployment pose a significant challenge for both developing and underdeveloped nations (Kang, 2021). Nigeria is currently grappling with this issue as well (Imtiaz 2020). Addressing the root causes of poverty and youth unemployment is crucial for fostering economic and social development within the country. According to the World Bank, Poverty and unemployment rate ranks among the highest globally (Bank, 2013), signaling profound economic and social repercussions.

Insufficient government investment in the economy emerges as a primary driver poverty and unemployment in developing nations like Nigeria (Kassem, 2020). The government's inability to generate sufficient employment opportunities exacerbates the challenge, particularly with a growing influx of young individuals entering the workforce.

Additionally, limited access to finance, as well as constraints in economic development and infrastructure initiatives, further impede job creation efforts.

Political instability and security challenges in Nigeria have spurred significant population displacement, leaving many people unemployed and compelled to seek opportunities abroad. The lack of job prospects in the formal and informal sector exacerbates poverty and unemployment (Ukpong, 2020), as this sector offers limited regulated employment opportunities.

Nigeria's burgeoning population presents another critical factor contributing to poverty and unemployment. With the population continuously expanding, the job market becomes increasingly saturated, intensifying competition and making it challenging for young individuals to secure viable employment opportunities. The problem of chronic youth unemployment in Nigeria extends beyond mere statistics; it deeply affects the socio-economic fabric of the nation. Despite the country's abundant human and natural resources, the failure to adequately address unemployment perpetuates a cycle of poverty, social unrest, and political instability. One significant aspect of this challenge is the mismatch between the skills possessed by the youth and the demands of the labor market. Many graduates lack the practical skills required by employers, leading to underemployment or unemployment. Additionally, the informal sector, which traditionally absorbs a significant portion of the workforce, faces its own challenges, including limited access to credit, inadequate infrastructure, and regulatory barriers. The prevalence of youth unemployment not only robs individuals of economic opportunities but also undermines the nation's development efforts. Unemployed youth often resort to menial jobs or engage in informal and sometimes illicit activities to survive, thereby contributing little to the overall productivity of the economy. Furthermore, the frustration and disillusionment experienced by unemployed youth can fuel social unrest and pose a threat to peace and stability. Addressing unemployment requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses education reform, skills development programs, entrepreneurship initiatives, and investment in job-creating sectors. It also necessitates policy reforms aimed at improving the business environment, expanding access to finance, and promoting inclusive growth. Additionally, efforts to enhance infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, can unlock economic opportunities and reduce the urban-rural economic divide.

Moreover, addressing the root causes of unemployment requires a concerted effort from both the public and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations. Collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and international partners is essential to design and implement sustainable solutions (United Nations (2020)). Poverty and unemployment in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted challenge that requires comprehensive and coordinated interventions. By investing in education, skills development, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its youth population and pave the way for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

### **The Concept of Poverty and Unemployment**

One of the key macroeconomic goals for nations is to attain full employment, ensure a socially equitable distribution of income, maintain price stability, foster economic growth, and secure a favorable balance of payments. Many developed nations have successfully pursued these objectives through initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and addressing unemployment. However, poverty and unemployment persist as fundamental challenges for both developing and certain developed nations in contemporary times. The apparent correlation between these two variables suggests a twin dilemma, particularly evident in countries experiencing elevated unemployment rates, often accompanied by high levels of poverty.

Countries often approach these issues separately, which is why Oni (2019) suggests that addressing both unemployment and poverty requires a multifaceted approach. While macroeconomic stability is essential for fostering economic growth, it is insufficient for effectively managing the labor market, especially considering factors like limited access to credit, lack of competitiveness, weak infrastructure, and other constraints. Oni's research

underscores that macroeconomic stability alone cannot alleviate poverty. Therefore, it should be complemented by job creation initiatives to reduce unemployment, alongside other anti-poverty strategies aimed at reducing poverty levels.

### **Poverty**

The definition of poverty is inherently complex due to its multi-dimensional nature, lacking a universally accepted characterization. Poverty is often construed as a state of insufficient income to meet basic needs or as a condition encompassing various factors such as low education, health, and vulnerability to a multitude of risks including natural disasters, crime, and societal marginalization (e.g., lack of access to resources and mistreatment by institutions). Individuals classified as impoverished typically struggle to secure adequate income, stable employment, attain sufficient education, and fulfill basic necessities. Consequently, per capita income serves as a crucial metric for gauging the extent of poverty. When defining poverty, a common distinction is drawn between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty pertains to a dire lack of basic physical necessities essential for human existence, reaching a state so extreme that affected individuals or households are unable to maintain a standard of living consistent with human dignity. Additionally, Odusola (2017) characterized absolute poverty as the inadequacy of resources to obtain and consume a specific set of goods and services. This definition underscores two critical considerations: firstly, the establishment of an objective minimum threshold below which an individual or household is deemed impoverished, and secondly, the challenge of determining a standard for basic necessities such as food and housing, which often vary based on cultural norms, personal preferences, and prevailing economic circumstances.

Conversely, relative poverty relates to individuals or households whose access to goods and resources falls below that of others within the same income bracket or social stratum. Unlike absolute poverty, relative poverty does not necessarily entail an inability to lead a life in accordance with human dignity. Instead, it signifies a disparity in provision compared to others. Thus, relative poverty is evident when individuals or households are deemed poor relative to their peers or counterparts.

Various theories have been proposed to elucidate the mechanisms of poverty. The Orthodox Western perspective, encapsulated in the "Vicious Circle" hypothesis, posits that individuals remain in poverty because they are predisposed to it and will continue to do so unless there is a significant increase in their income levels to break free from the poverty trap. Conversely, the classist viewpoint contends that sustainable improvements in income and living standards are contingent upon curbing population growth and removing the constraints on growth.

Furthermore, early classical theorists sought to elucidate the concept of poverty by grounding their analytical frameworks in the laws of diminishing returns, which were perceived as universally applicable. However, this perspective was later refined by Alfred Marshall and his contemporaries, who introduced the notion of increasing returns in industrial settings, thereby enhancing our understanding of economic dynamics. (Adeyeye 2014). The Marxist perspective introduced a radical shift in the understanding of poverty by emphasizing the principle of labor exploitation. According to Marxists, the economy is predominantly controlled by a small group of wealthy capitalists, while the majority of the population consists of impoverished workers. This exploitation is further exacerbated by technological advancements, which, while labor-saving, lead to the displacement of workers and the expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed. As technological progress displaces workers, it contributes to a surplus of labour, driving down wages and exacerbating poverty levels. This downward pressure on wages further perpetuates economic inequality and hampers overall development within the country. Thus, from a Marxist viewpoint, poverty is not merely a consequence of individual shortcomings but rather a structural feature of capitalist economies characterized by the exploitation of labor and widening income disparities.

## **Unemployment**

Concerning the concept of unemployment, there appears to be a general agreement on its definition. Simply stated, unemployment refers to the state of individuals who are without employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) provides a definition of the unemployed as those within the economically active population who are not engaged in work but are available for and actively seeking employment. This includes individuals who have lost their jobs as well as those who have voluntarily left their employment (World Bank, 2022). Similarly, Adebayo (2016) characterizes unemployment as the situation where individuals in the workforce desire employment but are unable to secure jobs.

Unemployment, therefore, can be understood as the collective of people from diverse backgrounds who are willing and able to work but are unable to find employment opportunities. When the supply of labor surpasses the demand for labor, it results in joblessness and unemployment. Due to insufficient employment opportunities in the formal sector, young individuals may find themselves compelled to seek casual work and alternative sources of livelihood, thereby experiencing underemployment (Echebiri, 2020). The literature has extensively discussed various forms of unemployment, each with its unique characteristics. These forms include seasonal, frictional, cyclical, and structural unemployment (Adebayo, 2019). Measurement of unemployment typically focuses on individuals within the labor force (Obadan, 2019). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2019) defines the labor force of a country as comprising individuals who are willing and able to offer their services for gainful employment at any given time. Consequently, the unemployed are those individuals who are without work but actively seeking employment during any study period. While unemployment is indeed a global issue, its prevalence is notably pronounced in developing nations, carrying with it a myriad of complex ramifications across social, economic, political, and psychological spheres. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported a persistent increase in global unemployment rates, reaching a staggering 6.6 percent in 2020, marking an all-time high (ILO, 2020). During this period, regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa exhibited particularly high unemployment rates, with figures nearing 12.2 percent and 10 percent respectively, while East Asia maintained the lowest rate at 3.6 percent. The report highlighted that burgeoning population growth, notably in South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa, was exerting immense pressure on the creation of job opportunities.

Furthermore, the ILO report underscored a stark reality wherein approximately 1.4 billion individuals, constituting half of the global workforce, were categorized as working poor, subsisting on less than US \$2.15 per day per person (ILO, 2020). These individuals predominantly operated within the informal sector, ranging from agricultural activities to urban informal economies, devoid of essential benefits such as social security and healthcare. Alarming, an estimated 550 million of these working poor were surviving on less than US \$1 per day. Within the African context, the sub-saharan demographic is particularly significant, with an estimated 122 million people on the continent (Echebiri, 2021). Projections suggest a continued growth in the proportion of unemployment, a trend that economist AKE, C (2022) attributed partly to the ongoing migration of people from rural to urban areas in pursuit of economic opportunities. This rural-urban migration exacerbates the challenge of unemployment.

## **Types of Poverty**

### **i. Absolute poverty**

Absolute poverty refers to a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, encompassing essentials such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health care, shelter, education, and access to information. This definition emphasizes that poverty is not solely determined by income levels but also by access to vital services (United Nations, 2020). The concern for absolute poverty is particularly pronounced in situations where individuals

face a risk of destitution, highlighting the critical importance of addressing acute deprivation (Laderchi 2003).

### **ii. Relative Poverty**

Relative poverty is a concept that is defined in relation to the societal context in which individuals live, and as such, it can vary significantly across countries and change over time within the same society. Unlike absolute poverty, which focuses on meeting basic needs regardless of the societal context, relative poverty is concerned with the economic status of individuals relative to others in their society. One common way to measure relative poverty is through an income-related approach. For example, in the United Kingdom, a widely used measure of relative poverty is living on less than 60% of the median household income. This measure takes into account household size and housing costs to provide a more accurate reflection of economic deprivation. By using a percentage of the median income rather than an absolute income threshold, this approach accounts for the relative economic position of individuals within their society. For instance, if the median household income in the UK is £30,000 per year, a household with an income of less than £18,000 per year (60% of £30,000) would be considered to be living in relative poverty. This measure allows for comparisons of economic status across different income groups within a society and helps to identify those who may be struggling economically despite not experiencing absolute deprivation. It's important to note that relative poverty measures can be influenced by various factors, including changes in income distribution, social policies, and economic conditions. As a result, what constitutes relative poverty may evolve over time, making it essential to regularly update and refine measurement approaches to accurately capture economic disparities within society (JRF, 2013).

### **iii. Generational poverty**

Generational poverty is a distinct form of poverty characterized by a family's prolonged experience of living below the poverty line for more than two consecutive generations. What sets generational poverty apart is its profound impact on individuals' thought processes, behavioral patterns, and overall worldview. When individuals grow up in poverty-stricken environments, they develop unique ways of thinking, behaving, and understanding the world around them that differ significantly from those raised in more affluent households.

Living in poverty often forces individuals into a perpetual state of survival mode, where the immediate focus is on meeting basic needs rather than planning for the future or developing long-term strategies for problem-solving. This constant struggle to secure necessities creates an environment of chronic stress, known as toxic stress, which can have lasting effects on individuals' physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, the effects of generational poverty extend beyond individual experiences to shape entire family systems and communities. The cycle of poverty becomes deeply ingrained, making it exceedingly challenging for families to break free from its grip. As a result, generational poverty perpetuates itself over time, creating a cycle that is difficult to escape. Breaking the cycle of generational poverty requires holistic interventions that address not only immediate material needs but also provide support for long-term economic mobility, education, healthcare, and social services. By addressing the root causes of poverty and providing opportunities for economic empowerment and social mobility, it becomes possible to interrupt the cycle of generational poverty and create pathways to a brighter future for affected families and communities (Kenya Wolff 2021).

### **iv. Poverty Line**

The poverty line serves as a critical benchmark for assessing economic well-being and determining the minimum income required to meet basic needs within a specific country. Originally conceptualized by Ravallion in 1992, the poverty line reflects the income threshold considered necessary for individuals or households to afford essentials such as food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education. To enable international comparisons and promote a standardized approach to measuring poverty across diverse economies, the World Bank

undertook efforts to revise the global poverty line. In 2008, the World Bank revised its international poverty line to \$1.25 per day at 2005-based purchasing-power parity (PPP). This means that the poverty line is set at the equivalent of \$1.25 in real terms, adjusted for differences in purchasing power across countries and regions. By using a common poverty line based on purchasing-power parity, the World Bank aims to facilitate comparisons of poverty levels and trends across countries with varying income levels and cost-of-living standards. This standardized approach allows policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners to assess progress in poverty reduction efforts, identify regions or populations in need of targeted interventions, and allocate resources effectively to address global poverty challenges. Ravallion and colleagues' work in establishing and refining the poverty line, alongside the World Bank's efforts to update and standardize it for international comparisons, has played a crucial role in advancing our understanding of poverty and informing policy decisions aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable development on a global scale.

#### **v. Situational poverty**

Situational poverty is a prevalent phenomenon that many individuals or families may encounter at some point in their lives. Unlike generational poverty, which spans multiple generations, situational poverty arises from specific events or circumstances that disrupt a person's or family's economic stability. These events can include job loss, divorce, illness, or other unforeseen crises that result in financial hardship. For instance, a sudden job loss can significantly impact a family's income and stability, forcing them to contend with financial insecurity and struggle to meet basic needs. Similarly, a divorce may lead to the division of assets and resources, leaving one or both parties in a precarious financial situation. Additionally, health crises, such as medical emergencies or chronic illnesses, can result in substantial medical expenses and loss of income, further exacerbating economic instability. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the prevalence of situational poverty, particularly among families working in service and tourist industries. Many individuals and families who were living paycheck to paycheck prior to the pandemic found themselves facing unprecedented challenges when businesses closed, jobs were lost, and income streams dried up. As a result, they experienced heightened economic instability and struggled to make ends meet.

Addressing situational poverty requires targeted interventions that provide immediate support and assistance to individuals and families facing economic hardship. This may include access to unemployment benefits, emergency financial assistance, affordable healthcare services, and job training programs to help individuals re-enter the workforce. By addressing the root causes of situational poverty and providing comprehensive support, it becomes possible to help individuals and families regain economic stability and overcome temporary setbacks.

#### **vi. Poverty Trap**

A poverty trap represents a persistent state of poverty perpetuated by self-reinforcing mechanisms, as identified by Azariadis and Stachurski in 2005. These mechanisms create negative feedback loops that contribute to the entrenchment of poverty, making it difficult for individuals or communities to escape its grasp. One key aspect of poverty traps is the presence of feedback loops that exacerbate existing conditions of poverty. For example, undernourishment can lead to poor health outcomes, which in turn hinder individuals' ability to work and earn a living, perpetuating their impoverished state. Similarly, the lack of access to insurance can leave individuals vulnerable to financial shocks, pushing them further into poverty. Population growth can strain resources and infrastructure, exacerbating poverty by increasing competition for limited resources. Environmental degradation can degrade natural resources, further undermining economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty. Even economic growth can contribute to poverty traps if it disproportionately benefits certain segments of society while leaving others behind.

Identifying and addressing these feedback loops is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting sustainable development. Interventions aimed at poverty alleviation

must target not only the symptoms but also the underlying causes of poverty, addressing factors such as inadequate healthcare, limited access to education, and environmental degradation. By addressing these root causes and disrupting the self-reinforcing mechanisms that perpetuate poverty traps, it becomes possible to create pathways out of poverty and foster long-term economic development and prosperity.

### **Causes of Poverty and Unemployment in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State**

**i. Limited Access to Education:** Education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty and facilitating economic mobility. However, in Omala Local Government, educational opportunities are often limited due to factors such as inadequate school infrastructure, shortage of qualified teachers, and high dropout rates (Ojo & Ajani, 2019). Many children in rural areas may have to travel long distances to access schools, leading to low enrollment and attendance rates. Additionally, the quality of education may be compromised, further hindering students' ability to acquire the necessary skills for future employment opportunities.

**ii. Basic Infrastructure Deficiencies:** The lack of basic infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and water supply, poses significant barriers to economic development and employment opportunities in Omala Local Government. Poor road networks make it difficult to transport goods to markets, hindering agricultural productivity and access to essential services (Ojo & Ajani, 2019). Additionally, unreliable electricity supply and inadequate water infrastructure limit the growth of industries and small businesses, further constraining job creation and economic growth in the region.

**iii. Inadequate Resource Allocation:** Limited financial resources allocated to poverty alleviation and employment generation programs constrain their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of socio-economic challenges. Omala Local Government may face budgetary constraints, resulting in underfunded initiatives and insufficient support for critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. As a consequence, opportunities for socioeconomic advancement remain limited, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and unemployment.

**iv. Corruption:** Corruption permeates various levels of government, diverting resources away from poverty alleviation initiatives and undermining public trust in governance structures. In Omala Local Government, instances of embezzlement, bribery, and nepotism may divert funds meant for development projects, further exacerbating poverty and unemployment. Corruption not only distorts resource allocation but also perpetuates a culture of impunity, hindering efforts to foster transparency and accountability in governance.

**v. Fulani Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict:** The conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers has emerged as a substantial catalyst for poverty and unemployment in Omala Local Government. Tensions surrounding land use, grazing rights, and access to resources have led to tragic loss of life, community displacement, and extensive damage to farmlands and livelihoods (Abu & Balarabe, 2018). Moreover, the pervasive insecurity stemming from these conflicts severely disrupts economic activities, exacerbating the cycle of poverty within the region.

### **Conclusion**

The issue of poverty and unemployment in Omala Local Government presents a significant challenge for both the region and its youth population. To tackle this pressing issue, concerted efforts from the government and various stakeholders are essential. Priority should be given to improving access to quality education and creating viable employment opportunities for young people. Additionally, fostering a conducive environment for businesses and investments is

crucial to spur economic growth and generate new job opportunities. By focusing on these key areas, the government can pave the way for a brighter future for the youth of Omala Local Government. It's evident that multiple factors have contributed to the current crisis of youth unemployment in the region. Therefore, addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that targets both the root causes and immediate effects of the problem. In conclusion, addressing poverty and unemployment in Omala Local Government necessitates proactive measures from the government to enhance education, create employment opportunities, and facilitate economic growth. By addressing these challenges, the youth of the region can have improved prospects for a better future.

### **Recommendations**

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government authorities, educators, communities, and other stakeholders. Investments in school infrastructure, teacher training programs, and transportation infrastructure can improve access to quality education in rural areas. Moreover, initiatives aimed at reducing dropout rates, promoting parental involvement, and enhancing the relevance of the curriculum can enhance educational outcomes and empower students to pursue their aspirations. By prioritizing education and addressing its underlying challenges, Omala Local Government can unlock its human capital potential and pave the way for sustainable development and prosperity.

Addressing these infrastructure deficiencies is essential for unlocking the economic potential of Omala Local Government and enhancing employment opportunities for its residents. Investments in road construction and maintenance, electrification projects, and water supply infrastructure are crucial for improving market access, stimulating economic growth, and fostering job creation. Additionally, prioritizing the development of sustainable infrastructure solutions tailored to the specific needs of the community can contribute to long-term socio-economic prosperity and enhance the quality of life for residents.

To address the challenges posed by the over-reliance on agriculture in Omala Local Government, efforts should be made to promote economic diversification and create opportunities for non-agricultural employment. This could involve supporting the development of small-scale industries, promoting entrepreneurship, and investing in sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and services. Additionally, initiatives aimed at improving access to education, skills training, and financial resources can empower residents to explore alternative livelihood options and reduce their dependency on agriculture. By diversifying the local economy and enhancing employment opportunities, Omala Local Government can build a more resilient and inclusive economic landscape for its residents.

To overcome these obstacles and promote inclusive development in Omala Local Government, targeted interventions are necessary. Firstly, enhancing the capacity of government institutions through training and capacity-building initiatives can improve policy implementation and strengthen accountability mechanisms. Additionally, anti-corruption measures, such as increased transparency in budgetary processes and robust oversight mechanisms, are essential for combating corruption and ensuring efficient resource utilization. Furthermore, prioritizing adequate resource allocation to key sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure can facilitate socio-economic growth and enhance opportunities for employment and income generation. Investing in vocational training programs, entrepreneurship development initiatives, and small-scale enterprises can empower local communities to participate actively in economic activities and reduce dependency on external aid. Addressing the challenges of ineffective implementation, corruption, and inadequate resource allocation requires concerted efforts from government authorities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. By adopting targeted interventions that address the specific needs and challenges of the local population, Omala Local Government can unlock its socio-economic potential and foster sustainable development for all residents.

Finally, to address the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Omala Local Government, a comprehensive strategy encompassing dialogue and conflict resolution,



livelihood diversification, infrastructure development, security and law enforcement, community empowerment, capacity building, awareness-raising, and cross-sectoral collaboration is needed to promote peace, stability, and sustainable development.

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