

## OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY TO DEMOCRACY THROUGH CONTINUING EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed increase in poverty level in Nigeria with aftermath of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and several calls for secession. The military is also under pressure to topple democratically elected government as a result of political abysmal and executive recklessness. In view of this situation, this paper highlights the pivotal roles of continuing education to re-orient leaders and the citizen for true democratic participation, political stability and sustainable democracy. It also underlines its strength in equipping every adult with relevant knowledge and skills for gainful employment, employment creation and self-reliance. Adequately propagating appropriate continuing education could significantly contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable democracy. Therefore, it is recommended that, continuing education should be integrated and deeply entrenched into all approaches and methodologies employed for adult and youth education for it to equip every adult with the needed skills and knowledge for self-employment, self-reliance, good citizen and leadership. Furthermore, as good governance is critical to sustainable democracy, continuing education should cater for every administrator to refresh and update their knowledge and learn from other countries good governance that would maintain and sustain democracy.

### Introduction

Poverty is a social phenomenon that affects people in terms of inability to meet the basic needs of life such as food, shelter and clothing. It is a concept that measures various dimensions of deprivation which ranges from social, economic and environmental to political deprivation (Sharlamanov & Petrusheva. 2022; Guio, 2018). According to Deveau (2018), it is denial of rights and privileges through in-access to socioeconomic resources, political involvement and negotiations. This phenomenon is one of the major human social catastrophes of our time, coupled with environmental challenges, weighs deeply on our planet; 'earth' and the future of human race.

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In the last two decades, it has reached unmatched and impermissible height in Nigeria, glaringly evident in abysmal decrease in economic index and trends, suffering and hardship among Nigerians.

The chronicity of poverty in Nigeria remains misery. Nigeria as a nation is endowed with many natural resources like crude oil and gold among others. Aside being oil-producing nation, she is equally blessed with other natural and human resources that are enough to put her on the path of economic development and advancement (Musibau, Shittu, & Yanotti, 2022). However, Nigeria is submerged in extreme poverty in spite of her stupendous wealth. This has generated deep concerns and fears about the continued sustainable democratic process in Nigeria, as poverty induced agitation and violent conflicts frequently sprout and spread across the country thus threatening the country's sovereignty and oneness in the face of various secession agitations by various groups and tribes (Awotokun, Nwozor & Olanrewaju, 2020). Political stakeholders in Nigerian democratic business seemed to be at crossroad on the means and ways to alleviate poverty, being generally regarded as monumental threat to a budding democratic process. Majority of the population are craving for dividends of democracy as poverty index continually grows in the nation. There are regional outcry against impoverishment and marginalization. Endless ethno-cultural associations and groups are being continuously formed to annex interest and demands for better share of the national resources, even when such demands are inimical to the basis of the country's democracy.

It is no longer ambiguous that the rising cases of poverty in Nigeria constitute serious danger to the democratization process. This paper therefore concerns itself with the highlights of the challenges posed by poverty to democracy in Nigeria and how continuing education could play a paramount role. Conceptual discourse are presented, the consequences of poverty on democracy is x-rayed, and suggestions for combating and reducing poverty across the length and breadth of country are also made with the major potential lying in continuing education to eradicate poverty and sustain democratic rule

### **Poverty**

Globally, Poverty is a phenomenon that spares no continent, nation and people but affects them differently. It impacts on people in different ways, dimensions and degrees. There is no nation without a taste of poverty, meaning that freedom from poverty in any given nation is rare. The difference is the intensity and prevalence among the people within time and place (Bossert, Chakravarty & Ambrosio, 2019).

Poverty could be conceptualised as an acute state of deprivation in both social and economic sense. Its extreme is seen in an individual or families who could not afford the minimum acceptable level of standard of living in their society. To this end, Okolie, Onyema & Baseey (2019) described poverty inability of a person or group to acquire material resources for subsistence and protection of human dignities. The inability to provide physical needs leads to inability to take part in normal activities and possession of materials that could bring improvements in living conditions. Similarly, Olamejeye in Oluwatusin and Abolarin-Egbebi (2015) put poverty as extent of difficulty experienced in making ends meet, especially daily basic needs. Also, Fabrizi & Mussida (2020), revealed that poverty is marked by either total lack of or inadequate access to basic amenities that make life easy and livable. This brings dichotomy between the poor in the rural and urban areas through the types of food they eat and the environment they live in. Gweshengwe & Hassan (2020) posited that it is a way of life distinguishable by consumption of poor and imbalanced diets, low calories, lack of access to health care, poor educational, decrease in life expectancy, high infant and maternal mortality, poor income generation, youth unemployment and under-employment and lack of access to housing and other societal facilities.

Many studies have x-rayed the causes of poverty and revealed that the causes of poverty are many and varied. Xie (2018) submitted that bad governance, mismanagement of public resources and laziness on the part of the citizens to hold leaders accountable could lead to poverty. Rural-urban migration of various categories of people

(both unskilled, semi- skilled, educated uneducated) in search of opportunities with unascertained assurance of better living in the city is one of the factors responsible for poverty. On many occasions, the migrants get to discover that they were only living in assumption and myths as unemployment, underpayment, retrenchment, high cost of living stare at them. Many at times, the migrants end up squatting or living in the slums. Porter (2019) also argued that socioeconomic status of parent at early life determines poverty status of children in most cases. That is, if the parents are poor, the children would suffer deprivation in many areas within the ages between toddler and teenage. In most cases, many children might not be able to get themselves out of the poverty status until they start working. Therefore, some individuals inherited poverty from their parents.

The consequences of poverty are numerous and enormous. It ranges from acute lack of material resources, recreational means, economic and political power, lack of self esteem, to isolation and social degradation. Poverty gives rise to the rate of hunger, imbalanced diets and low-life expectancy, abuse of human socio-political rights, sicknesses and diseases, illiteracy and poor education, ignorance and hopelessness, uncertainty and all that creates a blinking human future (Brooks-Gunn, Klebanov, Liaw & Duncan, 2021; Duncan, Magnuson & Votruba-Drzal, 2017; Mood & Jonsson, 2016).

### **Democracy**

Democracy as a concept has no generally accepted definition. Different people and scholars have discussed and interpreted it differently due to differences in ideology, culture and historical contextualization of the concept of democracy. The diverse adherents of different political philosophies and ideologies always enjoy the term 'democratic' because democracy comes with good and better life for the people. Democracy as a form of government started in Ancient Greek -city states where adult males enjoyed same rights in direct participation in decision-making on matters affecting governance and their societies. The 'direct' democracy attained in Greek city- states was attainable due to small population and geographical territories (Kumar, 2017). In today's large societies and modern nation state with large population and geographical territories, institutionalization of democracy becomes imperative, hence, indirect and representative government. Therefore, democracy has given opportunity for election of few who represent others on the principle of equal and universal franchise.

O'donnell, Cullell & Iazzetta, (2016) described democracy as 'set of rules, political ideologies and practices with responsibilities that allows participation in public and private affairs'. Also, Parvin (2018) perceived democracy 'as the political and economic empowerment of the majority of the ordinary people for effective participation in the decisions that affect their lives, their individual and collective rights and the way in which their society is governed'. Thus, effectiveness of democracy lies in the people's actually involvement in decision-making on how they are being governed. The current situation in some quarters where majority of the people are only recognized during election to formalize democratic rituals is an aberration and inimical to acceptable and meaningful democracy.

Participation of the generality of the people in decision-making is based on availability of qualitative information cannot be undermined in any democratic process that would be regarded as a real democracy. Accordingly, Iyayi (2002), opined that democracy only exists, when rural populations participate fully in decision-making and the leadership do not ascribe all wisdom to itself for manipulation or hoard information but rather provide quality information for group power and debate before decision is made.

Finally, true democracy engenders an appreciable level of socioeconomic development that could facilitate people's basic potential and means to be involved and participate in social and political activities in their societies (Dahl, 2023). Democracy must include the right of people to fulfill their social, economic and political aspirations (Dewey, 2024). The question therefore is, "Does the environment exist in Nigeria for the above democratic practices to thrive".

### **Continuing Education**

Continuing education is such an important concept in education that all fields of education, medicine, agriculture and beyond are allying with it on daily basis in order to push forward frontier of knowledge and encourage progression in learning, research and science for sustainable development (Blossfeld & Von Maurice, 2019). It is a process of ongoing learning and professional development that an individual engaged in irrespective of the initial contact with education (formal) (Mlambo, Silén, & McGrath, 2021; Hussain, Alhassan & Kamba, 2013). It involves acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and competencies to be up-to-date and relevant with the work place developments especially in technology and technical know-how

Continuing Education is a form of adult education that means to carry forward and progress earlier gained. It is similar to lifelong learning - a mindset of continuous learning and self-improvement and usually within and outside the formal school system (Rubenson, 2019; Laal, Laal & Aliramaei, 2014). Osuji in Hussain, Alhassan, & Kamba (2013), submitted that continuing education is educating and re-educating, training and re-training chances for out-of-school individuals irrespective of class and status for them to cope with new demands of life. Continuing education programmes are likely not to be on full time basis but rather part time such as evening classes, night classes, weekend programmes, summer programme, vacation classes, or even self studies in their homes through correspondence study or through blended learning of synchronous and asynchronous (Billett, 2020). To Laal, Laal & Aliramaei (2014), it is summarily a post secondary school learning for all and sundry.

Continuing Education programmes specifically meant to address recognized and pinpointed needs thus the possibility of associating continuing education with vocational, occupational skills development. Thus, the benefits of continuing education are numerous and overwhelming. It cut across aspects of human endeavours. It benefits the individuals, organizations and the society at large. Through continuing education, individuals could achieve personal and professional growth, stay competitive, and enhance their overall well-being. These benefits are limitless and include; career advancement and competitiveness, enhanced job satisfaction and performance, increased earning potential, apt ability to changing work environments, networking opportunities, personal growth and fulfillment, industrial relevance with industry developments, trends, and best practices and job security (Blossfeld & Von Maurice, 2019; Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2014; Laal, Laal, & Aliramaei, 2014; Hobbs, 2010)

### **Continuing Education, Poverty and Democracy in Nigeria**

The issue and challenges of poverty in Nigeria is endemic and overwhelming that the people could not examine their culture to see if there are elements that prevent fairness, equitable and true democracy. 2023-2024 Human Development Report (HDR), revealed a grim picture of poverty in Nigeria. The highlights of the Human Development Index were that life expectancy was 56.05 years, infant mortality stood at 53.67 deaths per 1000 live births, 50 % of children less than 5 years of age were stunted due to imbalanced diets and only 53% of the adult population was literate. Other highlights were that 70% and 53% of the population had no access to portable water and healthcare respectively. The summary was that over 60% of the population lived below the absolute poverty level of \$ 1 per person in a day and 39.9% living below the international extreme poverty line of \$2.15 per person per day (World Bank Group, 2024).

Several administrations in the past and present (both military and democratic) have made frantic moves to eradicate poverty in Nigeria with each administration implementing programmes and establishing agencies to address the ugly situation but little has been achieved. Some of these initiatives are; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976, Green Revolution (GR) of 1980s, Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) and Poverty Alleviation Programme. Worthy of note is the late Yar'Adua's 7 - point agenda which had wealth creation and poverty alleviation as parts of its features. In spite of all these interventions, abundant

resources and oil wealth of the nation, 70% of the population live below the poverty line and 35% live in abject poverty (Ojobanikan, 2019).

Ever increasing and unabated poverty propelled by massive unemployment, is a clog to the wheel of Nigeria nation pursuit of true and sustainable democracy (Oluwatusin, &Abolarin-Egbebi, 2015). Individual or group denied of basic material needs would find it impossible to participate fully in any democratic political process. As poverty renders people poor and incapable of being a full-fledged social being, denied of freedom to fulfill his/her aspirations, one could therefore conclude that poverty hinders true and sustainable democracy. Consequently, many people bury their heads in struggle for daily economic survival rather than engaging in abstract term democracy, which brings no food to their table at the moment.

Nigeria's reward system, perhaps the global poorest, contributes to poverty of majority (Manjo, 2023). Workers 'pay per month of N70, 000.00 is one of the poorest in the world over which could not feed a family of 4 successfully for two weeks in the present economic realities in Nigeria (International Social Alternative (ISA), 2024). The retired are dying while waiting for their retirement benefits, consequently incapacitating an important segment of the society. To get daily living thus becomes a difficult task, resulting in disillusionment and apathy among the citizens. For the sustainability of a democracy like ours, a vibrant civil society is a sine qua non. A situation whereby workers wages do not sustain them, do not help the cause of democratization in Nigeria, as it could lead to poverty, inequality, and weak civic participation.

Omar & Hasanujzaman, (2021) reported strong multi-faceted linkages between poverty, education and democratization. Therefore, illiteracy and its consequents; ignorance and inferiority complex adversely affect effective participation of Nigerians, mostly the poor persons, in political process. In view of limited access to sources of information about political process, the poor illiterates that constitute majority in Nigerian societies cannot contribute effectively to the decision making process, that thereafter affects their lives through the outputs (policies) of the political process. Hence, depriving the people of effective decision making power is the bane of democracy in the country (Nwinya, 2024). Liberal democracy thus becomes the business of the state while the people are pushed aside. The few privileged ruling elites dictate the pace of things in society and control individuals who participate in the government processes, all to the access to economic power they have, which the poor Nigerians absolutely lack.

This situation has continually subdued the poor to the manipulation of the rich. This further underscores why the unemployed youths are recruited as political thugs and militias during electioneering campaigns and elections to serve the political interest of the rich for stipends. And upon elected into positions of power, the rich quickly and completely forgot the poor youths, only to be remembered in another elections period. It has been observed and confirmed that when a politician buys his way into office, he becomes irresponsible and unacceptable to the electorate; after all, he has paid and fed them for their services once and for all during the election (Szwarcberg, 2015).

In addition, corruption contributed immensely to impoverishment of the people. Nigeria is a nation where political leaders that have access to the national treasury convert public funds for private use, a nation with parliamentarians that works to undermine anti-corruption campaign, and it is a society with a highly corrupt judiciary. Political corruption is a pandemic in Nigeria conspicuously visible in bureaucratic and electoral malpractices, bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favoritism and nepotism within the political scene. Public officials thrown away service to humanity (Caiden, 2019).

This is the more reason why various poverty alleviation initiatives which were highly politicized and used to throw money to party loyalists failed, furthering ordinary Nigerians distrusting the democratic process. As the country battles various social vices, insurgency and secession threat occasioned by poverty among other factors,



it would be of great advantage to embrace continuing education to address firstly the menace of ignorance and poverty and thereby manage secession threats of the most populous and largest Africa nation.

Globally, continuing education is vital to democracy survival because it informed citizenship. Continuing education helps citizens stay informed about political issues, fostering informed decision-making, critical thinking, information analysis and informed choices. It also helps civic engagement and participation in the democratic process, adaption to changing social, economic, and political landscapes. It empowers citizens to advocate for their rights, hold elected officials accountable, and participate in public discourse. It instills democratic values like tolerance, pluralism, and respect for diversity. It gives opportunities to the marginalized groups, fostering political literacy, encourages active citizenship essential for a healthy democracy and ensuring democratic renewal (Baça, 2023).

In Nigeria particularly, continuing education could be of immense benefit to the democratic process if embraced and appropriately propagated. By prioritizing continuing education, Nigeria can strengthen its democratic institutions, promote active citizenship, and ensure a more informed and engaged citizenry. It would build capacity, skills and knowledge for effective governance and leadership. It would encourage active citizenship-fostering a sense of responsibility and engagement among citizens. It would support democratic reforms by educating citizens on democratic reforms and their role in implementing change (Kahne, Hodgin & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016).

In the fight against poverty for democratic survival, continuing education plays important roles. It brings about poverty reduction by enhancing employability through acquisition of new skills and knowledge to secure better paying jobs, become employers of labour by developing entrepreneurial skills to start and manage businesses in individuals. Improved education and skills increases earning potentials and income. It also brings about improved health status. It gives opportunities to access health education and information for better health participation and outcomes. Financial literacy through continuing education brings informed decisions. By prioritizing continuing education, individuals and communities can break the cycle of poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth and development as it helps individuals and communities in acquiring skills and knowledge to improve livelihoods, adapt to changing economic environments and improve overall well-being (Woessmann, 2016))

## **Conclusion**

It is not deniable that poverty and democracy have a high level of correlation and they influence each other in great dimensions. Indeed, high rate of poverty creates public indifference and apathy in democratic process, as democracy that is expected to improve quality of life for the citizens through its dividends has turned out to be a profound failure in Nigeria nation. However, the situation can be changed through appropriate strategy - continuing education. It is therefore recommended that; the educational policies should be reviewed to place importance on continuing education for all and sundry irrespective of class and status to address the hyper inflation rates, unemployment, food insecurity and poverty in the country. Also Policies must provide more than capacity building for the people by creating capabilities that match access to opportunities. In this connection, government should establish adult and continuing education centres in the rural communities for the rural community dwellers to update their knowledge and upgrade their skills for self employment, self-reliance and sustainable development in agriculture, technologies and social investment. It would foster linkages between self-reliance, assertiveness, civility and sustainable democracy.

Furthermore, the out of school children and youths from both primary and secondary should be catered for in the propagation of the continuing education to forestall illiteracy and aftermath effect of thuggery and touting that is dangerous to democracy. Also, there should be increase in public funding of continuing education in the

area of vocational education for women and youths to enhance empowerment. The vocational training centers should enhance and equip youths specifically, for self-employment and reliance. More also, good governance is critical to sustainable democracy, continuing education would allow every administration to refresh and update their knowledge and learn from others, the principles of good governance that would maintain and sustain democracy.

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