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**J.G. Adewale and  
L.T. Ogunniyi  
G.S. Umoh and A.J. Adegeye**

*Assessment of the Rural Banking Scheme in Ogbomoso Zone of Oyo State  
Optimal Farm Plan and Risk in Wetlands (FADAMA) Agriculture: The Case of Inland Valleys*

**M.A.V. Rahji**

*An Analysis of the Determinants of Agricultural Credit Approval/Loan Size by Commercial Banks in South Western Nigeria.*

**F.A. Kuponiyi**

*Mass Media in Agricultural Development: The Use of Radio by Farmers of Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria.*

**B.O. Agbeja**

*Production Efficiencies in Forest Exploritation and Regeneration in Ago-Owu and Shasha Forest Reserves, Osun State*

**A.O. Akinsorotan**

*Government withdrawal of Fertilizer Subsidy and Its Effects on Use by the Small Scale Farmers in Kajola Local Government, Oyo State, Nigeria*

**Tunde Ajayi**

*Analysis of Motivation Factors for Agricultural Trainees at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture's Human Resource Development Programme*

**T.O. Oni**

*Responsiveness of Cotton Output Supply to Price and Non-Price Factors in Nigeria: An Econometric Analysis*

**S.O. Odebode and C.G. Ajala**

*Fortification of Wheat Flour with Soyabean in the Preparation of Snacks by Women in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria*

**B.T. Omonona, E.J. Udoh,  
and M.I. Owoicho.**

*Urban People's Perception and Causes of Poverty: A Case Study of Agbowo Community in Ibadan.*

**V.O. Akinyosoye**

*Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) and Food Crops Production in Nigeria since the 70s.*

March, 2000

## URBAN PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION AND CAUSES OF POVERTY: A CASE STUDY OF AGBOWO COMMUNITY IN IBADAN

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*This study analysed the urban people's perception and causes of poverty in Agbowo community in Ibadan, Nigerian. A total of 80 respondents was randomly sampled such that there are equal number of young and old males and females. The data were analysed using tables, charts and percentages.*

*The analysis showed that all the groups perceived poverty as an undesirable condition of life in which an individual or household is incapacitated to provide and sustain all his basic needs. The causes of poverty identified by the respondents are unemployment, lack of adequate formal education, bad government policies, overpopulation and corruption among others. In order to alleviate poverty, education or training of children, birth control and reduction of unemployment were suggested by the respondents.*

Key words: Urban poverty, perception, causes.

### INTRODUCTION

Poverty, no matter how it is perceived or defined, is a state of life that is not desirable. Recent estimates show that the level of poverty has been on the increase in Nigeria. FOS (1999a) shows that the incidence of poverty has increased sharply between 1980 and 1985 on one hand and between 1992 and 1996, but decreased in between 1985 and 1992. The 27.2 percent incidence of poverty in 1980 translated to 17.7 million poor people, whereas there were 34.7 million poor people in 1985. Despite the drop in the incidence in 1992, the population of the poor was 39.2 million. By 1996, 157.1 million people were in poverty category. This situation is disturbing if one considers the abundant human and natural resources that the country is endowed with, hence the paradox "poverty in the midst of plenty".

The income/consumption expenditure approach to poverty analysis has been found to be inadequate in telling us the living standard of the people. This is based on the fact that poverty is multi dimensional in nature and there is now a greater recognition that indicators of measurement of poverty should be dimensional. Such dimensions apart from income/expenditure include health, life expectancy, education, access to safe water and other social infrastructures, vulnerability and risk, crime

and violence, etc. A qualitative poverty assessment, rather than a quantitative one, may better capture these dimensions.

Several studies (FOS 1999 a and b, World Bank 1996, Appleton 1998, Dercon and Krishnan, 1998 etc.) have used the conventional approach to poverty measurement, which utilizes estimates of income or consumption to construct summary measures of the extent of poverty in a sample population. The argument for this is that an objectively determined poverty line is the most appropriate means of measuring poverty (Greeley, 1994). In further defense of this approach, Ravallion (1992) maintains that although poverty is a multifaceted concept, its characteristics (poor nutritional status, lack of physical assets and inability to work, among others) are sufficiently correlated with income and consumption expenditure to allow us to focus on these two variables. But Chambers (1995) rejects the income or consumption approach on the ground that it furnishes a narrow and revolutionist view that fails to understand the complex, universe and local realities in which the poor live. But they use multiple, more objective measures as indicators of poverty status. They also aim at eliciting local people's own perception of poverty/deprivation and to harness their own priorities in the complex and heterogeneous societies in which they live (Chambers, 1992 and 1995). In addition, the results of the traditional income/consumption approach have been argued to be usually unhelpful and positively misleading. Johda (1988) for example, found that in two villages in Rajasthan, farmers' own criteria for well-being were very poorly correlated with changes in their per capita income and expenditure.

For the effective alleviation of poverty in Nigeria, there is the need to understand the perception and causes of poverty from the standpoint of the poor. This is against the fact that the poor have been said to be the best poverty expert (World Bank and DFID, 1999). Hence this study hopes to elicit the perception of poverty and its causes by age and gender in an urban community of Ibadan.

### METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Agbowo, an urban community in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. A total of 80 respondents were sampled in such a way that there are equal number of young males and females, men and women.

The information was collected by interviewing the respondents via the open-ended questionnaire. The data were analysed using tables, charts and percentages.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Local Definitions of Poverty**

The term poverty has been defined differently by the various groups of people interviewed. The respondents' definitions of poverty are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Percentage distribution of respondents based on local definitions of poverty**

Definition	Young		Adults		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Lack of Money	5	5	7.5	2.5	20
Lack of material possession	2	2.5	-	-	7.5
Lack of basic amenities	5	10	7.5	10	32.5
Inability to earn a living	5	7.5	5	5	22.5
State of suffering	-	2.5	2.5	-	5
Insecurity/violence	-	-	-	2.5	2.5
State of joblessness	1.25	-	2.5	-	3.75
Low standard of living	1.25	-	2.5	2.5	6.25
					100

Source: Field Survey, 1999.

Table 1 shows that the modal definition of poverty is the lack of basic amenities (32.5 percent). This is followed by the inability to earn a living (22.5 percent), and lack of money (20 percent) respectively. It is interesting to note that only the women defined poverty as insecurity and violence while only the young male and female subgroups defined poverty in terms of lack of material possession. Also, some the males defined poverty as a state of joblessness. The various definitions reflect the various perceptions of poverty in the community.

**Economics Status of Urban People**

The respondents in the study area gave three economic status of the people. These are the rich, the average and the poor, each with its criteria for identifying which group a person belongs. These criteria, for identifying those in these categories vary from one group to another.

**Economic Status as Categorized by Adult Males**

Table 2 below shows the various economic status and the criteria for the categories as presented by the adult males sampled.

**Table 2: Economics Status of Adult Males**

Category	Percent before	Percent now	Criteria
Poor	30	50	Inadequate and poor diet, live in unhygienic places, has no landed properties borrow to feed, uneducated (illiterates).
Average	40	35	Moderate feeding, work in government parastatals and ministries, live in rented apartment, enjoy moderate modern facilities.
Rich	30	15	Adequate and nutritious diets have stock of capital, well-educated, own big business and own houses.

Source: Field Survey, 1999.

From above, the poor are those whose living conditions are not desirable. They do not eat enough nutritious diets. They lack landed properties and sometimes beg for money to survive. The average people are those characterized by moderate feeding and are junior staff in government service while the rich are those who can afford adequate nutritious diets, have houses and are educated.

The adult males believed that the proportion of the poor in the community has increased from 30 percent to 50 percent while that of the average and rich witnessed various levels of from 40 to 35 percent and from 30 percent to 15 percent in the last 15 years. This shows that poverty has increased while well-being has decreased.

**Economic Status as Categorized by Adult Females** The economic status as described by adult females in the community showed that poor people have increased from 40 to 60 percent within the period under consideration. Those in the average category witnessed a reduction from 55 percent to 35. There is, however, no change in the proportion of the rich now and 15 years ago as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the adult females see economic status in terms of physical appearance and manner or behaviour of an individual. To the adult females, a poor person is one who appears miserable and dejected and cannot feed well. The average category are characterized, according to adult females as those whose children attend only public schools and are mainly junior public servants whose monthly pay is very small. The rich are those that have a nice and decent accommodation and can afford qualitative education for their children, among others.

**Table 3: Economic Status of People as Perceived by Adult Females**

Category	Percent before	Percent now	Criteria
Poor	40	60	Appear miserable and dejected, wear worn out and dirty clothes, cannot feed well, lack good jobs.
Average	55	35	They are junior public servants, live in rented one or two bedroom apartments, children attend public schools, own small scale businesses and feed but not adequately.
Rich	5	5	Live in modern houses, own investments, afford quality education for children, children are in private school or abroad, financially buoyant and feed very well.

Source: Field Survey, 1999

**Economic Status as Perceived by Young Males**

Table 4 shows the categorization of people into well being groups by the young males in the study area.

**Table 4: Young males' perception of economic status**

Category	Percent before	Percent now	Criteria
Poor	30	60	Lack adequate and nutritious diet, lazy and idle, have little or no education, have a lot of children or large household size, live in over crowded apartment.
Average	40	30	Feed moderately, own motorcycles or old cars, struggles to train children in school, they are mainly traders and teachers.
Rich	30	10	Work in banks and blue chip companies, own buildings with modern furnishing, children attend good schools.

Source: Field Survey, 2000.

The young males gave the criteria for recognizing the poor in the community as those households in which members live in overcrowded apartments, have a large household size, have little or no formal education, etc. Those categorized as average are mainly traders and teachers and some senior civil servants. They own motorcycles or old cars and struggle to send their children to school. The rich, on the other hand, are those who work in blue chip companies such as banks, own personal houses that are tastefully furnished and are highly educated.

The proportion of the poor over the last 15 years has increased by 30 percent from 30 to 60 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of people in the average category has decreased to 30 percent from 40 percent. While for the rich, the male youths asserted that the proportion has also fallen from 30 percent, 15 years ago, to 10 percent now. The analysis shows that more than half of the population is poor according to the male youths.

**Economic Status of People as Perceived by Young Females**

The poor according to the female youths are those who live from hand to mouth, dress shabbily and are chronic debtors of very small amounts of money. They constitute 30 percent of the population of the community about 15 years ago. But now, they are 70 percent as shown in Table 5. The average group is made up of those who work in government establishments. They feed and dress moderately and may have old cars etc. They constitute 25 percent of the population now having declined from 60 percent. The rich, on the other hand, are those who own landed properties, have fat bank account, can afford qualitative education for children and have modern cars. Their percentage in the population has been reduced from 10 to 5 percent over the last 15 years.

**Table 5: Economic status of the people as perceived by young females**

Category	Percent before	Percent now	Criteria
Poor	30	70	Live from hand to mouth, dress shabbily, cannot afford good meals, are chronic debtors of small amounts.
Average	60	25	Work in government establishments, feed and dress moderately, fairly educated, have old cars.
Rich	10	5	Eat good food, own landed properties, and fat bank accounts, children have good education, they have modern cars.

Sources: Field Survey, 2000

**Causes and Impacts of Poverty**

Poverty is caused by several factors and its impacts are many and varied. These causes and impacts vary across the subgroups. Generally, the causes of poverty include laziness, business failure, unemployment, financial mismanagement, illiteracy, poor orientation, conservatism, polygamy, over population, corruption and lack of family planning. Others include bad economy, bad leaders, economic recession and uneven distribution of wealth. The impacts of poverty on the other hand, include

ill health, lack of basic necessities of life, poor feeding, begging for alms, doing odd jobs indebtedness, bad shelter, and bad clothing among others.

The causes and impact of poverty according to the specific groups: adults and youth (males and females) are shown in figures 1 to 4.

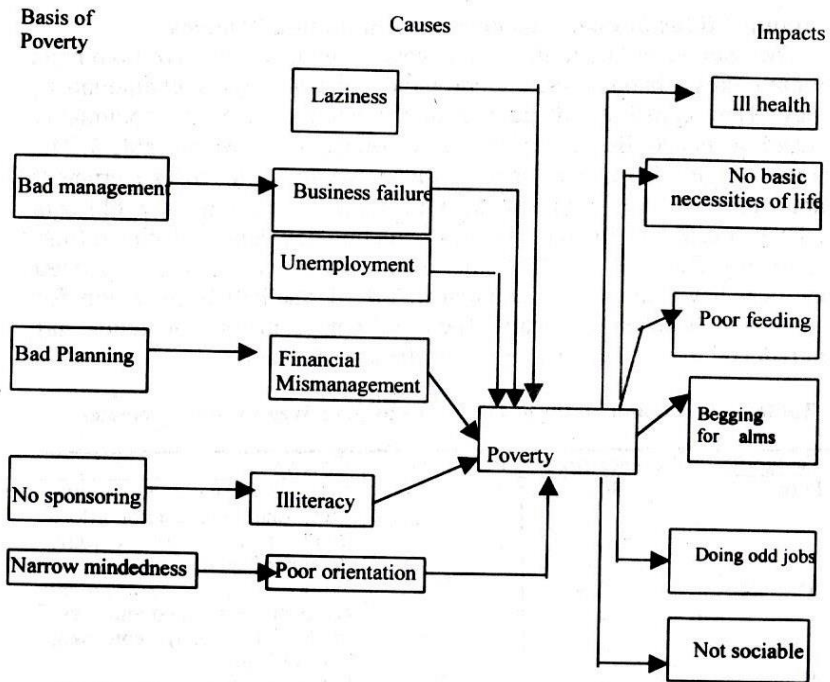


Figure 1: Cause-Impact Analysis as given by Adult Males

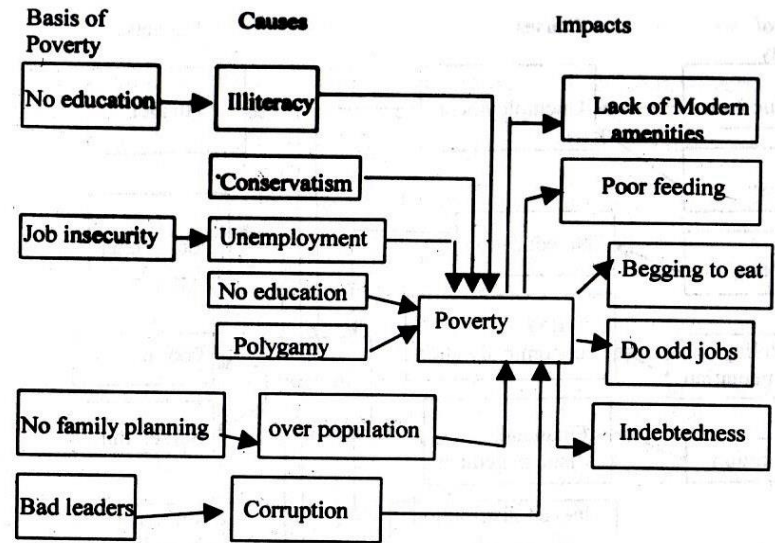


Fig 2: Cause - Impact Analysis as given by Adult females

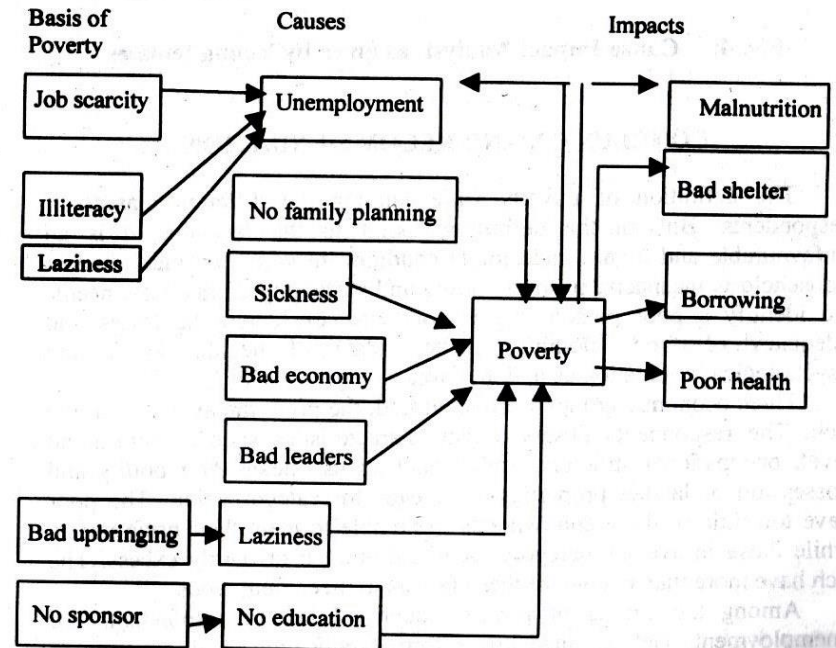


Figure 3: Cause-Impact Analysis as given by Young Males

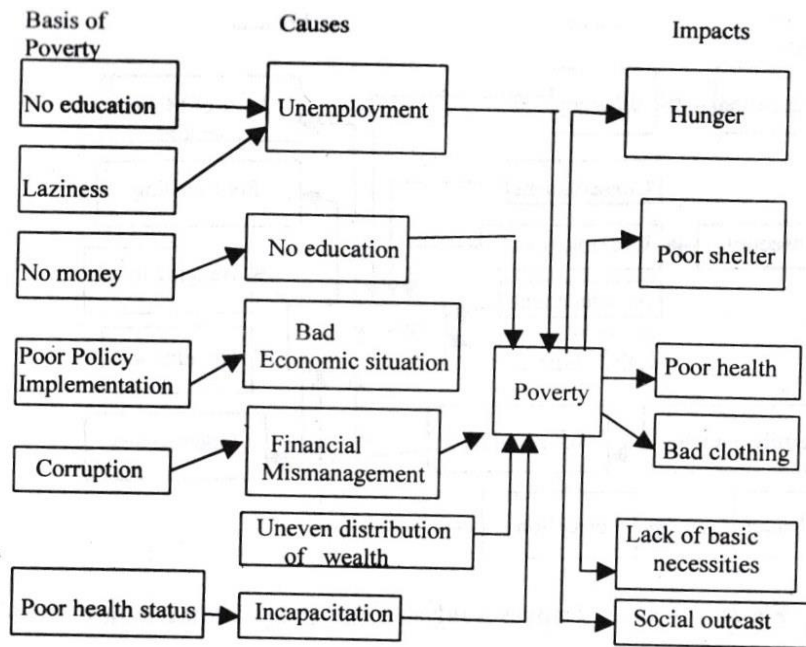


Fig. 4: Cause-Impact Analysis as given by Young females

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The definition of poverty varies among the different classes of respondents. But all the definitions point to the fact that it is an unfavourable and highly undesirable condition in which an individual or household is incapacitated in providing and sustaining all his basic needs. To identify a poor person, the respondents considered the levels and adequacy of food, clothing, shelter, state of health, social and psychological orientation as major factors.

Three economic groups were identified: the poor, the average and the rich. The respondents observed that characteristics such as nutritional level, occupational structure, educational status, means of mobility and possession of landed properties are means for categorization. The poor have too little of these endowments to be able to meet their basic needs, while those in average category have just enough or hardly excess. The rich have more than enough of these factors to meet their needs.

Among the causes of poverty identified by the respondents are unemployment, lack or inadequate formal education, bad government policy over population, corruption, and polygamy. These factors combined

together, lead to poor feeding, ill health, poor clothing, poor shelter, indebtedness, and lack of other basic needs.

In order to alleviate poverty, the government and non-governmental agencies must address the following:

- (i) The poor must be empowered to train their children in schools and in trade.
- (ii) There is the need to identify efforts at population control, as large household size is one of the reasons why people are poor. There should be enlightenment campaign to encourage people to adopt family planning.
- (iii) The level of unemployment in the country should be substantially reduced. This is to increase the number of people working. In addition, the wage rate should be commensurate with the labours marginal products so that household needs for food, clothing, shelter and other needs can be met.
- (iv) The reduction in the inequality in the distribution of income is inevitable. Instruments such as taxation can be used in our efforts towards equalization.

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