

# Poverty Management among Rural Women in Bende Local Government of Abia State, Nigeria

**G.E. Ifenkwe**

Department of Rural Sociology and Extension, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,  
Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

E-mail: [godwinifenkwe@yahoo.com](mailto:godwinifenkwe@yahoo.com).

**E.S. Kalu**

Department of Rural Sociology and Extension, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,  
Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria

## Abstract

Except if it is well managed, poverty will breed poverty, and its effect will be transmitted through time from one generation to another. This realization prompted this study which assessed the poverty status of rural women in Bende Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. One hundred and twenty (120) randomly selected women served as respondents, while data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and probit regression model. Results showed the mean capita expenditure of the respondents as N10,038.13, indicating that sixty (60) percent of women in the study area were poor. The probit regression result showed that age (-1.755\*), education (8.608\*\*\*), household size (2.239\*) and income (2.5485\*\*\*) affect poverty status of the rural women. The study recommends, among other things, promoting opportunities for empowering educationally-disadvantaged women to diversify into non-farm, income-generating activities in order to reduce their vulnerability to poverty, and as a means of managing or alleviating poverty in the area.

**Keywords:** Poverty line, Empowerment, Per capita expenditure, Absolute poverty, Vulnerability.

## Introduction

The world has abundant natural and human resources harnessed for the benefit of mankind. Nigeria is one of the most endowed nations in Africa in terms of these resources. Unfortunately, there is disparity among the inhabitants in ownership of, and access to these resources, a situation that creates a divide between the deprived, marginalized and vulnerable (the poor) on the one hand, and the affluent or privileged (the rich) on the other.

Poverty is one of the social maladies that constantly threaten the existence and survival of mankind. The circumstances of the poor is pitiable, as it paints a gloomy picture of hunger, shocks, malnutrition, stress, human deprivation and marginalization. Poverty has been described as conjectural or structural (Hiffe, 1987); relative (subjective) or absolute (Pokharel, 1992); physical or spiritual (Good News Bible, 2007), and it exists at individual (micro) or national (macro) level in Nigeria (Ajayi, 2009). Absolute poverty, as defined by Pokharel (1992), is a condition of life so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any rational definition of human decency.

Generally, poverty level is determined by availability or non-availability of requisite resources that guarantee good living, maintain good health and physical efficiency, namely, food, clothing, shelter, education, security, leisure and recreation (Quibria, 1990; Haralambos and Head, 2006). It is however, not uncommon to see instances describes as of ‘arrogant poverty’ whereby certain people who have abundant resources to live upon compare their situation with that of the hideously poor folks who, on account of their sordid and miserable conditions, live at the mercy of fate. The understanding and measurement of poverty indicators vary with time, between and within societies, and across cultures. (Brettel and Sargent, 2005).

Very often, poverty measures are based on level of income or consumption i.e poverty gap index (WorldBank, 2001). The poverty gap in index is;

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^Q (\bar{y} - y_i)^\infty, \text{ where}$$

N = The total population.

$\bar{y}$  = *The poverty line.*

$y_i$  = income of individual

Q = the total population below the poverty line, and

$\infty = 0$

### **Vicious cycle of poverty**

This vicious cycle of poverty has been emphasized in a number of studies. Its résumé shows that an individual who is poor suffers serious deprivation. His poverty status jeopardizes his access to education, housing, health services and leisure. A network of relationship or cycle that tends to perpetuate the poverty situation is created. This is because his limited access to empowerment opportunities and productive resources stifles his initiative, limits his productivity, as well as his investment potential and capacity.

In practice, therefore, the combination of arbitrary and repressive economic behavior, modified by successive generations of poverty, make it almost impossible for such a person to break out of poverty. (Stack, 2005).

At the macro level, when a nation is poor, its capacity to embark on development projects becomes grossly limited. Programmes that would enhance the welfare and standard of living of

the people are either not initiated due to inability to fund them or are poorly implemented due to poor funding. This results in such indicators as low level of industrial investments, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and political vulnerability.

A world free of poverty is desirable, yet difficult to attain. IFAD (2001) report shows that a good proportion of the world population (about 1.2 billion people) lived below the international poverty line of one dollar a day, and that majority of these impoverished people were in developing countries, 44% in South-East Asia, 24% each in Sub-Saharan Africa and East, and 6.5 in Latin American and the Caribbean's.

**Table 1: Framework for poverty Reduction**

Action plan	Poverty Reduction Strategies.
Promoting opportunity	Expanding economic opportunity for poor people by stimulating overall growth and by building up their assets (such as land and education) and increasing the returns on these assets through a combination of market and non-market actions.
Facilitating empowerment	Making state institutions more accountable and responsive to poor people, strengthening the participation of poor people in political processes and local decision making, and removing the social barriers that result from distinctions of gender, ethnicity, race, religion and social status.
Enhancing security	Reducing poor peoples vulnerability to ill-health, economic shocks, crop failure, policy-induced dislocations, natural disasters, and violence, as well as helping them cope with adverse shocks when they occur; and ensuring that effective safety nets are in place to mitigate the impact of personal and national calamities.

Source: World Development Report, 2001.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has embarked on multi-faceted poverty alleviation programmes tailored towards attaining poverty reduction through such measures as highlighted in the World Development report 2000/2001 (Table 1). These include the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Fadama Development Programme (NFDP) and the National Special Programme for Food Security (NSPFS).

Others are the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Family Support Programme, Adult Literacy Programme, Nomadic Education Programme. The rest include the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the National Directorate of Employment, (NDE), National Programme on Immunization and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS).

The desire to ascertain the efficacy of these programmes in rural communities was part of the motivating force for conducting the study from which this paper was derived.

## Study Objectives

The paper assessed the level of poverty among rural women in Bende LGA, and determined the relationship between their socio-economic characteristics and poverty status.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in Bende LGA, one of the rural communities in Abia State, the population comprising all women in the study area. There is research evidence that majority of the poor live and work in rural areas (World Bank, 1999; FOS, 1999; IFAD, 2001; Khan, 2001); and that poverty affects women more than men (World Bank, 1990: Brettel and Sargent, 2005).

Bende is bounded in the north by Cross River State, Afikpo and Ohaozara, and in the South by Arochukwu and Ohafia. It is made up of thirteen (13) communities, namely, Bende, Ozuitem, Uzuakoli, Item, Itumbauzo, and Ntalakwu. Others are Umu-imenyi, Umuhu-Ezechi, Igbera, Ugwueke, Ezukwu, Nkpa and Alayi.

To generate data for this study, structured questionnaire were administered to one hundred and twenty (120) randomly selected women from three purposively selected communities in Bende LGA. These are Bende, Ozuitem and Umuhu-Ezechi. Information obtained from this exercise were supplemented with data from secondary sources – books, journals and internet.

The level of poverty among the respondents was determined through per capita household total expenditure (Solomon and Adeyemi, 2005), using the formula below.

Per capita household expenditure =  $\frac{\text{Total household monthly expenditure}}{\text{Household Size}}$ .

Mean per capita household expenditure =  $\frac{\text{Total Per capita household expenditure}}{\text{Total number of households}}$ .

Households that spent  $< \frac{1}{3}$  of MPCHE and  $< \frac{2}{3}$  of MPCHE were considered to be extremely and moderately poor respectively. In the second phase of the analysis, probit regression was used to determine the relationship between respondents characteristics and poverty status. The model was specified thus:

$$U = a + BX_1 + BX_2 + BX_3 + BX_4 + BX_5 + e$$

Where:

U = 1 for those whose MPCHE is equal or greater than  $\frac{2}{3}$

U = 0 for those whose MPCHE is less than  $\frac{2}{3}$

B<sub>1</sub> = Vector for regression coefficients

X<sub>1</sub> = Age

X<sub>2</sub> = Level of education

X<sub>3</sub> = Occupation (Farming =1; Non-farming = 0)

X<sub>4</sub> = Household size (Number of persons in the household)

X<sub>5</sub> = Income(Naira)

### Results and Discussion

Findings show that 22.5% of the respondents who earn above (N15,000) monthly, while 20% earn N5000 and less (49.7%) monthly. Sixty one percent of the respondents belonged to cooperative societies. Sixty seven percent of respondents' total expenditure constituted  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the MPCHE (N6,692.08), while 33 percent constituted  $\frac{1}{3}$  of MPCHE (N3,346.04).

The results also showed that majority of the rural women were poor. Table 2 shows that 68% of the rural women fell below the estimated poverty line. While 31.67% of the rural women were classified as non-poor, 13.33% were extremely poor, and 55% moderately poor. This corroborates the findings of Ajayi (2001) that 73% of female smallholders in Nigeria are poor.

**Table 2: Classification of Respondents by Poverty Status**

Group	MPCHE (N)	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely poor	<3346.04	16	13.33
Moderately poor	3346.04 ≤ 6692.08	65	55.0
Non-poor	>6692.08	39	31.67
<b>Total</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Traditionally, men are breadwinners in Nigeria, and their contributions to the material well-being of the family is more significant than that of women. Engels in his book **The Origin of the Family, private property and the State** observed that changes in gender relations were linked to changes in material conditions because the ownership of productive property was concentrated in the hands of men (Brettel and Sargent, 2005). Synder and Tadesse (1995) had earlier on identified educational opportunities and economic empowerment as the two most pressing areas that must be addressed in Africa to improve women's status.

The probit regression results (Table 3) shows that age was a significant and negative factor influencing the poverty status of the rural women, while education, household size and income level were significant but positive factors influencing their poverty status.

Education or literacy improves the status of the people due to its influence on the financial status of the people. Okojie (2002) observed that the higher the educational levels of the household head, the better the household welfare and the lower the probability of the household being poor.

**Table 3: Results of probit regression**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>T-ratio</b>
Intercept	-2.768	0.266	-10.400***
Age	-0.008	0.005	-1.755*
Education	0.118	0.014	8.608***
Occupation	-0.047	0.139	-0.336
Household size	0.050	0.023	2.239**
Income	0.000	0.000	2.5485***

Source: Field Survey, 2010.

Household size was significant at 5% and positively related to the poverty status of the respondents. D'silva and BySouth (1994) described poverty as a rural phenomenon that correlates with family size. The findings of Iheke (2006), Quartey (2005) and Udoh and Omonona (2002) show that household size positively affect the welfare due to synergies and multiple sources of income from large household size.

Income level was significant at 1% and positively related to poverty status of respondents. This indicates that the greater the income of the respondents, the lower their poverty level will be. A household may increase its income level through different ways, including engaging in multiple economic activities (Sarafat *et al*, 2007).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has shown that socio-economic characteristics that could influence poverty level of individuals include age, educational level, household size and occupation. Women should take definite steps to improve on their educational status, and engage in meaningful occupation so as to improve their level of income. Government should, on her own part, promote opportunities for empowering educationally-disadvantaged women in Bende in order to help them overcome their poverty problem.

The economy of Bende community is, to a large extent, agriculturally-based, and farmers are vulnerable to uncontrollable events such as bad weathers, pests and diseases and natural disasters. Efforts should be made to institute coping mechanisms, reduce women's vulnerability, and increase their resilience to the adverse shocks. The women in Bende LGA need to diversify into non-farm income-generating activities to provide a measure of protection against weather-related risks because non-farm income tends to fluctuate less.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that poverty status can be transient, and that if it is well managed, the status could be changed.

## References

- Ajayi, A.R. (2009). The Role Expectation Agricultural Extension in Poverty Alleviation in a Democratic and Deregulated Economy. In: Perspectives in Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, J.U. Agbamu (Ed) Springfield Publishers Ltd., Owerri.
- Ajayi, C.O.A. (2001). The Role of Adult Education in Rural Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. A long essay submitted to the Department of Adult Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Pp 10-33.
- Brettel, C.B. and Sargent, C.F. (2005). Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pearson Education Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.
- D'Silva, E. and Bysouth, K. (1994). Poverty alleviation through Agricultural projects. Report of a Seminar held Jointly by ADB, CIRDAP and EDIWB, No. 30.
- FOS (Federal Office and Statistics) (1999). Poverty Assessment Profile for Nigeria 1980-1996. Federal Office of Statistics. Lagos, Nigeria.
- GoodNews Bible (2007). Ghana Jubilee Edition. Bible Society Resources Ltd. Ghana.
- Hiffe, J. (1987). The African Poor. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
- IFAD (2001). The Rural Poverty Report (2001). International Fund for Agricultural Development, Rome, Italy.
- Iheke, O.R. (2006). Gender and Resource use Efficiency in Rice Production Systems in Abia State, Nigeria. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike Abia State, Nigeria.
- Pokharel, N. (1992). United Nations Partners in Rural Poverty Alleviation – NGO Cooperation.
- Quartey, P. (2005). The Impact of Immigrant remittances on Household Welfare in Ghana. Research Project Presented in AERC bi-annual Research Workshop.
- Quibria, M.G. (1990). Poverty: Conceptual Measurement Issues. Unpublished Paper presented at a Seminar on Poverty Alleviation through Agricultural Projects. ADP Manilla.
- Solomon, A.V. and Adeyemi A. (2005). Enhancing the Food security of Stallholder in Imo Community through extension Communication and Education Nigerian *Journal of Rural Sociology*. Vol. 5, Nos 1 & 2, Pp 84-96.

Stack, C. (2005). Domestic Networks: Those you count on. In: Gender in Cross-cultural Perspective, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Pearson Education Inc. Brettel, C.B. and Sargent, C.F. (eds) Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Synder, M.C. and Tadesse, M. (1995). African Women and Development: A history. Zed books, London.

Udoh, E.J. and Omonona, B.T. (2002). Perspectives and Characteristics of Poverty in Nigeria; The People's Assessment. *Nigeria Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, 44(1): 95-112.

World Bank (1990). World Development Report Oxford University Press Inc. New York.

World Bank (1999). World Development Indicators, 1999. Washington D.C.

World Bank (2001). World Development Report 2000/2001. Attacking Poverty. The World Bank, Washington DC.