STUDIA HISTORIAE OECONOMICAE
UAM Vol. 40/2 Poznań 2022
zhg.amu.edu.pl/sho

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POVERTY IN SUB-AFRICA: REFLECTING ON THE FAILURE OF INTERNATIONAL GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Abstract: The paper studies the phenomenon of poverty in underdeveloped/third-world countries, particularly within the context and the failure of international organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa. The article analyzes that the increasing problem of poverty in the region's countries/Africa is a replication of the failure of the organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank policies such countries. Despite some projects such as Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and many more by the United Nations. Many of these programs have failed to eradicate or reduce poverty. Instead, the situation has worsened most, especially in Africa, where the rate of poverty is increasing, with several regions in the continent experiencing the worse hunger epidemic in recent times. Therefore, the research posits that the failure of international institutions, the World Bank, and IMF policies have immensely become a significant contributing factor to the poverty level in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Global Governance, International Organization, Poverty, IMF, World Bank

https://doi.org/10.14746/sho.2022.40.2.006

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the dependency, problems, and poverty in African or third-world countries have been aligned with the impact of colonization and exploitation of these countries by western powers like the UK, France, Germany, and other imperial and colonial powers for several decades. Therefore, colonial legacies have drawn several controversies and debates in Africa and other developing countries regarding historical development and the impact of colonialism. Theorists and radical nationalists such as

Samir Amin (1972) and Walter Rodney (1972) blamed Africa's underdevelopment on the consequences of European colonialism of the continent that resulted in their economic development and the other colonies of America and Australia. On the other hand, despite the independence of these colonies/countries, the exploration continued through policies implemented by the Briton institutions, ensuring that African countries continued to be dependent on these developed nations (Akinola, 2021). The presence of institutions such International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) encompass Bretton Institutions have continuo to generate questions about their impacts, particularly regarding the economic policies these institutions implement. Even though these institutions' policies were meant to improve economic growth and poverty alleviation, which can ultimately improve the living standard in Africa, it has become contrary to that, with a lot of Africans and other developing countries struggling to cope with the negative impacts of the policies from these institutions, particularly the problem of external debt, and other conditions for assistance such as currency devaluation, market structures, and foreign trade policies (Akinola, 2021). Scholars such as Loomba (2005) and Young (2003) of post-colonial theory believed that the present African underdevelopment which the third-world countries are facing now and occupying the agenda of international communities is a direct consequence of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation.

Contrary to the colonial and post-colonial periods, precolonial African states and other nations were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the World capitalist powers in the 18th century, and later imperialists colonized African colonies. The result was economic backwardness due to their economic policies and exploitation (Rodney, 1972). Thus, despite the independence of many third-world countries in Africa or elsewhere, they are underdeveloped compared to the world's developed countries, like the UK, Germany, France, the USA, and so on. This is because their exploitation by the western nations is being intensified in new ways and methods, i.e., through international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, to mention a few (Smith, 1980).

The African continent has the world's highest and richest natural resources. However, currently, it is one of the poorest and most stagnant continents, particularly the sub-Saharan region, which is, in general, static regarding economic growth and development. Thus, in other words, despite all the rich resources of both humans and materials resources, in their possession, African countries remain among the World's poorest countries on earth and have the highest number of civil wars/conflicts (Addae-Korankye, 2014). The height of poverty in Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has reached a dangerous level in which 3/5 people in the region are living in extreme poverty, surviving on less than $1.25 per day, and based on World Bank analysis, 18/20 of the poorest countries are located, Sub-Saharan Africa (Bicaba, Brixiová and Ncube 2016: 3).

Figure 1. shows the highest poverty rate in some regions, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest percentage of poverty.

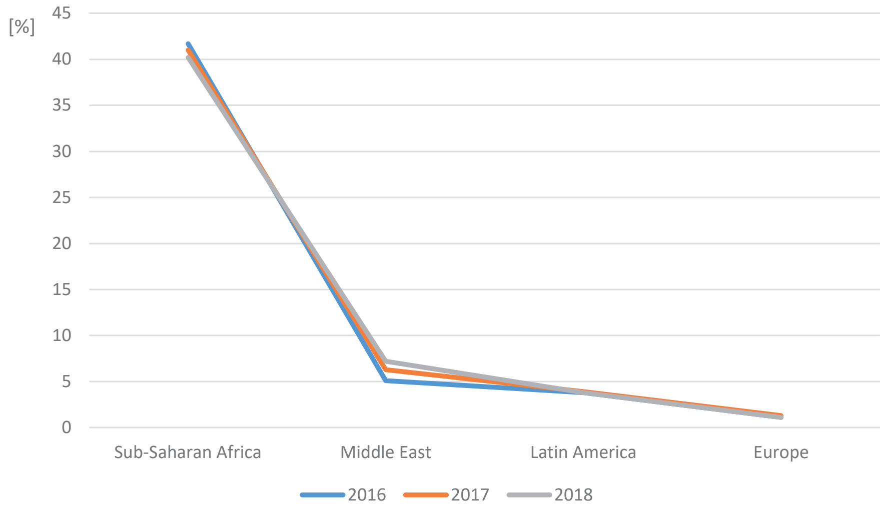

Figure 1. Poverty rates in some regions of the world 2016–2018
Source: Author's calculations based on the AfDB database.

The illustration indicated a higher poverty rate in Africa, with an illustration of one sub-region in the continent. It is eminent that the poverty level facing African counties is vast. Therefore, eliminating extreme poverty for all people globally by 2030 becomes one of the primary goals of both United Nations programs Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially for the African continent, which had the highest percentage of poorest population in the world (Singh and Chudasama, 2020). These policies had African countries and institutions nationally and internationally accepting and implementing policies developed by major world countries under the supervision of international institutions such as IFM and the World Bank. Despite the effort and renewed efforts for several decades or more by numerous institutions, civil societies, and international organizations, those international institutions have failed to yield the expected result. Measures put in place by these institutions did not give or take adequate measures to reduce and, if not eradicate it. This is particularly evident in the extent to which the World is off-track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) globally and in most regions and countries. This is because many countries and organizations see poverty as a third World problem, and there are few attempts to eradicate it; on the other hand, these organizations, especially the financial institutions (IMF and World Bank), are adding more petrol to it through debt, trade, aid policies, and structural adjustment program implemented by most African countries (Sahn, Dorosh, and Younge, 1999: 16).

The aids programs, known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), are constant conditions for giving African countries loans, such as a decrease in public expenditure, deregulation in foreign trade, and currency devaluation, putting many African countries in crises leading to socioeconomic and political problems. However, the WB and IMF only stressed that the failure of the policies was due to the dysfunctional administrative structure and nature of governance in many African countries that undermined the progress of the policies and development in general instead of taking action, citing hostility by African leaders towards the SAPs policies, especially market deregulation policies, and other entrepreneurship regulations (Akinola, 2021). Also, WB's policies on extending loans to African countries that were supposed to improve the bureaucratic efficiency and economic performance and enhance the effectiveness of the SAPs programs could have performed better. Thus, the ineffectiveness of these policies in the 1990s by the IMF and WB became the genesis of the downfall of many African countries economic growth and development.

THEORETICAL CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Britannica says poverty is "a state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possession." It is "a state where an individual or a household cannot fulfill one or several of their basic needs" (Garroway and de Laiglesia, 2012: 2). In short, poverty is a living condition of a person-centered in which his human needs for living standards, such as shelter, food, clothing, health care, education, and even security, cannot be met (Morduch, 2006: 14). Therefore, it is a condition in which a person or individual does not have the financial means to meet their essential need for an average standard of living. Applying to society/community/state/country is a description in which it lacks the financial resources and essentials to provide a minimum standard of living to its population, such as education, water, healthy food, medical as well as other social facilities. Most early definitions of poverty concentrated on attaining good food positions and other socially standard services. However, in the present contemporary era, the definition has intensively focused on material deprivation and the standard of living, which several scholars are given their understanding (Callan and Nolan, 1991).

According to the United Nations *Human Development Report* (1998: 10), poverty is a complex phenomenon that generally refers to a shortage or lack of essential human resources and deprivation of choices that enable people to enjoy decent living conditions. World Bank's concept of poverty is based on the assumption of classic lines such as living within \$3.20 to \$5.50 per day. It implies that those living below \$1.90 a day are considered extremely poor and below the poverty line (Jolliffe and Prydz, 2016). On the other hand, poverty is the denial of human rights relating to fulfilling basic human needs. Poverty can also be viewed as the non-existence of peace in an individual. This could result from hunger, lack of medical care, marginalization, and denial of human rights relating to fulfilling basic human needs, freedom, etc. (Dhrifi, Jaziri, and Alnahdi, 2020).

Nevertheless, the most widely held and understood meaning of poverty is the limited access to basic human needs as well as goods and services, like the inability to maintain good and sound health, gain a qualitative education, have sufficient housing, hygienic or nutritional food, and water and also inability to make or participate in decision making in the society. The key symptoms of poverty were inadequate income and a low level of consumption (Braveman and Gruskin, 2003). In general, poverty designates the lack of good choice across a wide variety of important life choices, the absence of choice to be or what one wants, such as lack of inadequacy and scarcity of many facets of life.

However, poverty can be classified into absolute, extreme, and relative poverty (Garroway and de Laiglesia, 2012: 19). Therefore, conceptualizing absolute poverty is grounded in subsistence, the basic human needs a person or household must meet to sustain a physically healthy existence. People who lack or have little access to these basic human requirements, such as sufficient food, shelter, clothing, etc., live in absolute or extreme poverty. However, it is said that the standards of basic human needs are more or less the same for all people of equivalent age and physique. If these fundamental human needs are not met in any part of the world, any person can be said to be living in extreme poverty (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2010).

Poverty, therefore, can also be chronic, inherited, generational, transitory, or temporary. Some individuals and families inherited poverty from their forefathers, while others handed it over to the generations before them (poverty is passed from generation to generation). This type of poverty becomes chronic or generational poverty. Families and individuals trapped by chronic poverty have limited chances of getting out of this poverty, and they lack any tools to help them escape it. Families and individuals can also find themselves in transitory or temporary poverty because of one or more unfortunate incidents (Kabuya, 2015). This type of person can help themselves out from it quickly if they get little assistance from other individuals, organizations, or the government.

POVERTY CAUSED BY INDIVIDUAL DEFICIENCIES

This theory viewed individualism as the factor responsible for a person's poverty. This conventional theory blames people in poverty for forming problems that can be avoided through more challenging work and better skills. Those who found themselves in poverty could have avoided such a situation. The theory attributed poverty to the lack of genetic talents such as intellect and good thinking that are not so easily reversed, which those people lack. This traditional belief was central to the Protestant Reformation (Dosa, Vázquez, and Molenaers, 2019). Neoclassical economics also supports the individualistic causes of poverty. According to Bradshaw (2007: 12)

> The core idea is that the situation leading to poverty is "that individuals seek to maximize their well-being by making choices and investments, and that (assuming that they have perfect information) they seek to maximize their well-being […] blame the welfare system's generosity on the perpetuation of poverty.

Individualism theory of poverty is also sometimes linked with the cultural theory of poverty called "Culture of Poverty." However, the recent cultural theory of poverty has become so extensively different from its unique concepts. However, still, the theory advocates that poverty is a result of diffusion over generations of a set of beliefs, values, and skills that are socially generated but individually held (Bradshaw, 2007). Individuals are not sure to be blamed because they are victims of their dysfunctional subculture or culture.

POVERTY CAUSED BY ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL DISTORTIONS OR DISCRIMINATION

This theory is also based on individuals as the basis of poverty, not because of individualism but economic, political, and social conditions that limit individual opportunism and incomes with which to realize the income well-being of the individual as the cause of an individual's poverty. Because the economic structures are designed in such a way that the poor remain poor or behind, irrespective of their competency or intellect they are. Bradshaw (2007) highlighted that kind of system in which minimum wages or income do not allow that kind of system in which minimum wages or income do not allow a single mother or their family to be economically self-sufficient. Likewise, the gap in political settings made it difficult or unreliable for the poor to participate or even be interested in political discussion. Such inequality is the main reason the poor remain poor and lack the political impact they can use for economic advantage.

Socially, society is built based on poverty-related features, especially for a particular group of people either because of their race, gender, disability, and so on, which became a barrier for such group to get opportunities to achieve greater height and economic or political equality despite their abilities to achieve it (Dube, 2019). The groups lack the right to everything, even in terms of the legal right to challenge the status quo, and also public policies are not designed in their favor.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND POVERTY IN AFRICA

Even though the World Bank data has shown a decrease in poverty level in Sub-Saharan Africa from 2018–2020, indices revealed that more people are still living in extreme poverty in the region. Over 30% of the population in the region is living below $2 a day, by the 2020 world bank report. Out of 433 million people living in extreme poverty in Africa, 27% are from the West African region, particularly in rural areas (Mattes, 2020: 29). As a result, most of the countries in the region have experienced backwardness in economic development. Meanwhile, they went to multilateral public lending institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, and Western donors. Among the 41 heavily indebted countries around the globe, as reported by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) initiative, 33 are found in Africa with a debt of $50 billion (Geoff et al., 2009: 11).

Today, there are many aids and donor organizations and several international institutions. For example, in Europe alone, about 12 new EU member states established aid programs and some regional aid agencies. In the entire world, there are over 50 bilateral aid donors and more than 200 special funds. Furthermore, according to the UNDP, numerous development financing institutions exist. More than 1,000 many were established in the last ten years. These comprise non-profit organizations, investment funds, and other stand-alone organizational arrangements that are not separate legal units but have their acts, governance structures, and operating techniques, including their fundraising and disbursement modalities (Geoff et al., 2009: 21–23).

Western donors and international financial institutions supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most of these organizations are based or operated in the capital city and are run and much benefitted by people residing there. They may have linkages in the towns and villages but rarely do the local level societies or peoples set NGO agendas or decide how to spend their money. However, people residing in rural communities still relate their activities to local prominent and patrons as they have for generations and may vigorously seek other way options for using infrastructural facilities. This situation has increased poverty in several ways, particularly in rural African societies. National or home governments become suspicious of NGOs, which politicians may manage in waiting. Secondly, the current government of a particular country in

Africa will perceive them (NGOs) as political enemies rather than helping the rural people (Geoff et al., 2009: 8).

All developing nations in the World have reached the aim and objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in reducing the high level of poverty, especially between 1990 and 2015, except in Africa. Nonetheless, MDGs failed woefully in Africa in reducing or eradicating poverty, now the attention of the domestic and foreign governments and international organizations will shift to the new set of global development goals, i.e., the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are aimed at eradicating poverty international by the year 2030 (projection) through policies and programs (Dhrifi, Jaziri and Alnahdi, 2020).

International aid means the international transfer of funds in the form of loans or grants from a foreign government to a domestic government or from international financial agencies to simplify and accelerate the recipient nation's economic growth and development; it emerged to be losing its popularity to flows of private capital in filling the resource gaps in developing countries (Wangwe, 1998: 2–3). Whether financial or not, international aid comes in grants and concessional loans. Usually, this comes with many conditions imposed by western donors regarding how it should be spent, which is referred to as 'conditionality.' However, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), known as Bretton Woods institutions that is International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), known short as World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have come up with negative implications for most recipient countries in Africa and another part of the World (Wangwe, 1998: 4). This is because many recipients' African nations relied on and agreed on western donors' policies and assessments as a signal before they decided whether and how much financial assistance to provide. For instance, between the 1980s to early 1990s, the cornerstone of the conditionality of aid delivered or released by international financial institutions (IFI) was the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Akinola, 2021; Geoff et al., 2009: 21). Following high criticism within and outside Africa coupled with the colossal failure of SAP policies in all parts of Africa, it was regarded as anti-poor (charging people in severe poverty fees for health services and closing down regulatory marketing boards and paid more emphasis on macroeconomic stability as well as fiscal balance rather than reduction poverty in Africa). However, after all this criticism and total failure, in 1999, SAP was replaced by a new epitome of aid known as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) program. Following the inception of this new policy approach which was designed as a precondition for especially African nations to qualify for a loan or debt relief under the Enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) initiative, which comprised thirty-three (33) countries in the African continent. This PRS approach aimed to improve the poverty focus of the World Bank and IMF concessional lending (Djimeu, 2018).

Fifty years later, African economies have been static, while her counterpart (Asia) economies have developed. From 1960 to 2005, real income per head in the 48 nations in Africa rose on average 25 percent. This increase was inadequate to tackle poverty in Africa compared to East Asia. For example, real income rose 34 times faster. Therefore, South Korea was as poor and underdeveloped as Ghana and Kenya in the 1950s, but now South Korea is the world's ninth most significant and growing economy. This economic backwardness in Africa has been caused by billions of dollars in foreign aid and investment since 1990. In a real sense, these have led to deep reflection by western donors about aid policies, specifically about how better to deliver grants and loans (aid modalities and aid architecture), the amount of money needed, and in which sectors to also make a difference as well as the deep structures and processes within African nations that arrested reform and undermine the effective use of aid (Djimeu, 2018).

There are multiple numbers conditionalities imposed by western donors and international financial institutions, which weaken the economic growth and development of many African countries and their citizens in extreme poverty. These conditionalities resulted in the following problems; firstly, high administrative responsibility on African countries due to numerous reporting and accounting requirements-secondly, ineffective and unproductive spending injunction imposed by donor nations' priorities and procurement arrangements. Thirdly, highly unpredictable funding levels. Fourthly, difficulties in ensuring sustainability. Fifthly, openness to corruption. Sixthly, corrosion of democratic accountability through mechanisms to satisfy international financial agencies' demands rather than domestic accountability, and finally, weakening of governmental systems and policies through similar structured and staffing (Wangwe, 1998).

Consequently, these preconditions also brought a new change in working as far as possible through governments and normal budgetary processes, which consequently led to the adoption of new aid modalities like General Budget Support (GBS), which un-earmarked donor funding to the central government. However, all these conditionalities were instructed solely on policy measures related to overall budget priorities and better donor organization through mechanisms such as Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs). This agenda, therefore, resulted in a shift in policy emphasis on government issues, particularly the transparency and accountability of public expenditure systems (Presbitero, 2012). Meanwhile, research in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa on the effectiveness of foreign aid revealed that there were more aid weaknesses than achievements. The ineffectiveness of international aid in Africa led some nations to plunge into extreme stress and economic hardships, especially after the outcomes of foreign aid. However, international aid in Africa is of little help and is usually counterproductive.

CONCLUSION

The African continent has the highest and richest natural resources in the world. Today, it is poor, stagnant, or static regarding economic growth and development. In other words, despite all the wealthy resources, including humans and materials in its possession, Africa is the World's poorest continent. Because the Western powers like the UK, France, Germany, and other developed nations exploited African countries. Presently, African underdevelopment, with which the World is now preoccupied, is a direct consequence of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation. Moreover, many Third World countries in Africa or elsewhere are becoming more underdeveloped compared to developed countries like the UK, Germany, France, the USA, etc. This is because their exploitation by the western nations is being intensified in new ways and methods, i.e., through international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, to mention a few.

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