

Forum: Economic and Social Council
Issue: Eliminating poverty in Sub Saharan Africa
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Introduction

Poverty is rooted as an inherent state in Sub Saharan Africa and has remained as one of the most controversial issues due to its severe damages, repercussions, and prevalence. As the attention towards the issue of impoverishment augmented globally, remarkable progress in eliminating extreme poverty has been achieved worldwide. However, the population under the extreme poverty line in Africa - Sub Saharan Africa in particular - is strikingly high compared to the rest of the world. In fact, the number of the people under the poverty line in the Sub Saharan Africa increased to 413 million from 278 million between the year of 1990 and 2015, accounting for more than half of all people living in destitution across the globe.

It is important to note that poverty is characterized by multidimensionality. A state of poverty may indicate that a person is experiencing a lack of either money, education, basic infrastructure facilities, or all of these. This multifaceted nature of poverty is relatively prominent in Sub Saharan Africa. Based on the survey conducted by Global Monitoring Database (GMD) in 2013, 28.2 percent of the people living in poverty in the region experienced simultaneous deficiency of all the different categories of penury—consumption, education, and access to basic infrastructure services, while the rest suffered from differing forms of poverty. Thus, tackling the issue to be a more demanding and troublesome task, as different measures need to be taken for different facets of deprivation with a balance among them.

Poverty can also be classified into absolute and relative poverty, both of which are present as dire concerns in Sub Saharan Africa. Over the past few decades, significant economic development has taken place across numerous countries in the region, including Kenya, Mauritania and Angola, yet the decline in the population under the poverty line has met stagnancy. This indicates that it is hard to eradicate absolute poverty through focusing mainly on stimulating economic growth, which many counties in Sub Saharan Africa are currently doing. Moreover, the disparity of income between the population is stark, and this can also be seen as a consequence of the unbalanced investment from the government between economic and social development.

Definition of Key Terms

Relative Poverty

Relative poverty is when the state of deprivation is observed in comparison to other people in the economy, meaning that the people in subject have incomes that are a certain percentage below the median incomes. For instance, a household might fall under relative poverty if it receives 50% of the average median incomes. Thus, development of the economy negatively correlates with the relative poverty. Relative poverty often indicates the level of wealth disparity in countries, so although people under this category are not in total poverty, they might be experiencing inequality.

Absolute Poverty

Absolute poverty is the poverty relative to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs. It is the condition where the household income is below a universal baseline, implying that the people are not able to afford basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, or water. Economic development in the country barely alleviates these people's state.

Chronic Poverty

This refers to the state of a person or a group of people experiencing deprivation for an extended period of time, even for their entire lives. Most people in chronic poverty undergo multi-dimensional deficiency including hunger and lack of education.

Background Information

Despite the fact that Sub Saharan Africa is the region with the richest natural resources, it is the poorest region the world. Poverty had led to casualties greater than any disease from the genesis of mankind, and it still stands to be one of the most difficult issue to be tackled. In order to expedite this process, it is imperative to understand both the causes and the repercussions of poverty and take multifaceted measures.

Causes of poverty in Sub Saharan Africa

Poverty is not a result of a single or a few sources but an outcome of countless different actions or situations. Hence, it is impossible to point out specific causes that might lead to the eradication of poverty. However, some are worth giving greater emphasis and attention.

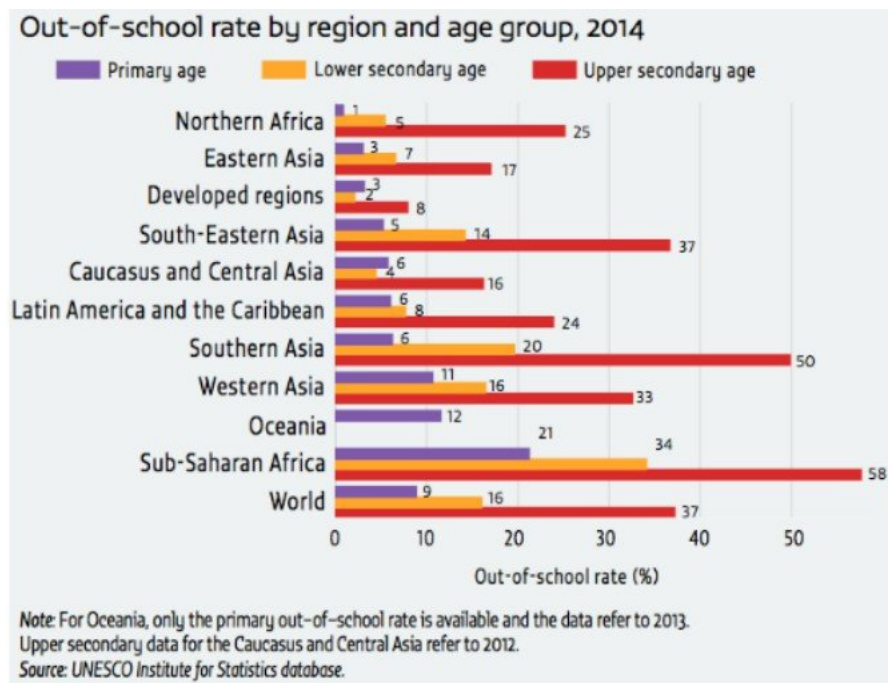
Poor Governance

One of the major causes of poverty in Sub Saharan Africa is poor governance, including various malpractices and implementation of weak laws. Malpractice is when government officials are intentionally negligent about an issue or takes improper or illegal actions, and it can be in the form of corruption or dysfunctional public services. Many of government officials in the region have created a "personal rule paradigm", where the purpose of government switches from fulfilling the needs of the people to personal gain. In fact, corruption costed the region roughly \$150 billion in 2002, and this number has not decreased since. This money can also be seen as the amount of money that has been withdrawn from the budget that is needed for basic provision of necessities, which are what the people in poverty are lacking. The poor also struggle to escape

impoverishment due to the loss of support and disturbance of growth of small enterprises that has resulted from the corruption. Moreover, the incorrect types of taxes imposed by the government and the imbalance of the government’s investments or subsidization in industries aggravates income inequality.

Lack of Education

As human capital is directly related to the well-being of the country and the individual, a lack of education is a large contributor of poverty. The advancement of knowledge and skills not only helps an individual escape from poverty through more job opportunities, but also assists in reducing poverty in general through increased productivity, creativity, and exchanges. Education also enlightens citizens about the inherent conflicts entrenched in their society - many, such as inequality and causes of poverty – and stimulate them to fight for the rightness. However, this becomes harder every day with the rapidly increasing child population. The absence of education is most severe in Sub Saharan Africa, with almost 60% of youth between the ages of 15 and 17 not attending schools. Additionally, the lack of education for women in particular plays a prominent role in inducing poverty. “Studies have shown that educated mothers tend to have healthier, better-nourished babies and that their own children are more likely to attend school; thus, helping break the vicious cycle of poverty.” Yet, the social norms and cultures such as Ukuphuma KweZintombi, a festival for unmarried males to pick females that are parading, and child marriage in the region prevents this.



Caption #1: Graph of the out-of-school rate of each region in the world

Infrastructure Facilities

The type of infrastructure varies from roads to sanitation facilities, and progress has been made in a large number of them. The facilities furnishing basic necessities have seen improvement, such as safe water, as access to it increased from 51% to 77% of the region's population between 1990 and 2015. However, infrastructure that is essential in elevating people above the poverty line have not received as much investments, such as the access to electricity that remains at a mere 35%. This is not only due to the relatively low levels of spending in infrastructures (2% of GDP annually) that have increased but not yet suffice, but also the pervasive inefficiencies of management in the sector. An analysis of the public spending on infrastructure in Sub Saharan African countries by the World Bank shows that countries spend significantly less than they actually allocate to projects, meaning that the "execution of projects earmarked for investment each year" are reduced. Given that bringing the quantity and quality of infrastructure in the region up to standard levels could raise annual GDP growth per capita by 2.6%, the state of infrastructure and the governments' responses account for the stagnation in the process of reducing poverty.

Lack of Economic Diversification

As the well-being of the economy and people directly correlate, stagnant economy is a major cause of poverty. Despite the fact that the GDP is on a steep rise, Sub Saharan African countries are far from reaching the threshold and maintaining it due to the undiversified economies. Nigeria is an extreme example of the lack of diversification: in 2008, the oil and gas sector constituted around 97.5 % of their export revenues and 81% of government spending. Like Nigeria, most countries in the region are overly dependent on the primary sector of the economy and are inefficient in utilizing natural resources or reaching out to the tertiary sector. A diverse economy with various sectors is critical for these countries, especially in this era of information revolution, for them to create a sustainable cycle of economic activity where varying businesses continually provide and receive support in differing aspects and to be able to provide goods and services of its own to the people. However, with the vulnerabilities to economic shock and the dearth of job opportunities brought by the countries' inability to achieve this, the poor continue to suffer.

Consequences of poverty in Sub Saharan Africa

Poverty itself is a severe issue, but its repercussions are as critical. Reduction of poverty may eliminate these effects, but it is equally imperative to tackle these on their own.

Increased Crime

The poor are not only susceptible to crime but also are more likely to commit crime. Due to the limited opportunities to escape poverty and inability to fulfill their needs, people are inclined to do anything, including violence, to satisfy it. Countries in Sub Saharan Africa have relatively high crime rates, some places even reaching to the point of having an average of 58 people murdered

every day. The areas with the highest crime rate and gang activities in the country were where the unemployment rates were the highest, showing the direct correlation.

Poor Health

Without proper sanitation and ventilation in their home, people in poverty, especially children, are vulnerable to life-threatening diarrhea, intestinal infections, and respiratory diseases. The rise in population aggravates the situation, as over crowdedness in poor condition leads to an increased probability of diseases spread. The cost of doctors is also burdensome for the poor, leading to a greater number of people being untreated.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

South Africa

South Africa is known as one of the most developed countries in Sub Saharan Africa, yet it stands as the country with the highest recorded level of income inequality in the world, which is the biggest impediment to its progress of poverty reduction. According to recent research by Stellenbosch University economist Anna Orthofer, the top 1% of South Africans own 67% of all the country's wealth. The shrinking incomes for the majority and the ballooning of incomes for the rich serves as one of the causes of this extreme wealth disparity. It is also a legacy of apartheid. The past impoverishment of black people by colonizers has led to high unemployment rates among this race, causing the reduction of the gap between them and the previously privileged group to be hard to be achieved.

Niger

Niger is recorded as one of the poorest countries in the world, with 45% of citizens living under the national poverty line. Its high fertility rate of 7.4 births per woman is one of the driving factors of poverty in the country. Due to the lack of education surrounding contraception, the population is growing rapidly, making it difficult to feed and educate families. Moreover, droughts are having detrimental effects on the country's economy, based mainly in agriculture, resulting in shortage of foods and available jobs. The social and political instability brought by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram also plays a major role in causing poverty.

Congo

Poverty in Congo is particularly dire. More than 80% of its population live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.25 a day, albeit the fact that the country has \$24 trillion worth of minerals beneath its surface. Poverty in Congo does not have a single reason but is a result of various causes. These range from the lack of infrastructure to corruption in its mining industry. Among these, diseases play a

significant role in inducing poverty, some of which include malaria in 2009 and frequent cholera outbreaks.

African Union (AU)

AU is a continental union that consists of 55 African states. Its purpose of creation was for unity, cooperation of the African nations to ensure quality life for everyone, maintenance of independence, and lastly international cooperation. It believes that one of the first steps of ensuring a high living standard for their people is eradicating poverty and therefore has taken numerous acts to meet this goal.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1885 - 1914	The Scramble for Africa, invasion and colonization of African territory by the European countries, began in around 1885 and lasted for almost a few decades. Colonialism is the major cause of poverty in Sub Saharan Africa, as it triggered a belated start on economic development and deprived countries of their ability to run an independent economy.
July 1963	The poverty thresholds, or the standard of poverty line, were established by Mollie Orshansky of the Social Security Administration in the United States.
1982	Debt crisis emerged in Africa, with the average fiscal deficit doubling over the following years. This has brought up the poverty rate significantly.
1993	The poverty rate in Sub Saharan Africa spiked this year, reaching almost 60%.
August 3, 2007	The African Union (AU) devised a plan of setting up African Investment Bank to fund development with poverty reduction as the primary objective, which becomes one of the three major institutions of the organization.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Ending poverty is one of the major aims of UN. In fact, it is the first of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With this goal and the fact that poverty remains the most preeminent concern in Sub Saharan African countries in mind, the

General Assembly has proclaimed the “Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)” in order to maintain the momentum generated by the “Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017).” There are other numerous resolutions and treaties adopted by UN in efforts to eliminate poverty and support Sub Saharan African countries:

- Observance of an international day for the eradication of poverty, 31 March 1993 **(A/RES/47/196)**
In this resolution, the General Assembly declared 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication Poverty. This is a day where people of all backgrounds gather to show solidarity with the poor. The General Assembly has aimed to raise awareness concerning the need of support of the poor, especially the Sub Saharan Africans.
- First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, 26 January 1996 **(A/RES/50/107)**
Through this resolution, the General Assembly declared the theme for the Decade as a whole to be “eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.”
- Prevention of conflicts in Africa: addressing the root causes, 15 April 2013 **(S/PRST/2013/4)**
This is a Statement by the President of the Security Council made at the 6949th meeting of the Security Council. The President reinforces the importance of implementation of effective security sector reform by a means of combatting major issues in Africa, one of which being poverty.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

AU

Aside from the UN, many other organizations or countries have made attempts to eradicate poverty in Sub Saharan Africa. One of them is the AU, where economic, social, and political development of Africa is the primary goal. This continental union has attempted to reduce poverty, which is the first and foremost task in order for development to be achieved, in a diverse range of ways, including the establishment of New Partnerships for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Numerous projects are implemented under this program, such as the MSME Academy, where easy access to practical training and resources on financing opportunities for enterprise’s is made available. NEPAD did not lead to a significant reduction in poverty but acted as the overarching vision and policy framework for further actions in poverty elimination and acceleration of overall development in Africa.

Niger

Further efforts have been made by countries individually as well. The government of Niger, the poorest among the Sub Saharan African countries, has founded the National Poverty Eradication

Program (NAPEP) and National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) in 2001. The goals of NAPEP is to educate youths, support internship and micro-credit, and create employment in the automobile industry, and it coordinates with NAPEC to oversee and develop guidelines for other institutions. NAPEP has been able to empower 130,000 youths, but most of the beneficiaries were non-poor. Hence, the country is struggling to eradicate poverty effectively on its own.

Possible Solutions

A means of reducing poverty is developing the economy for the poor to have higher income and living standard and receive better aid from the government. The lack of economic diversification being the major factor that hampers economic growth and poverty decrement, increase in intra-African trade through elimination of tariffs and adoption of common external tariffs as a custom union is an essential step for Sub Saharan countries to become resilient to movements in demand and shift from overdependence on commodities to higher-value added products and services, thus diversifying the economy. However, it is equally crucial to improve the strongest sector of the region in order to have immediate improvement that can act as a foundation for developments in other sectors. According to the World Bank, growth in agriculture is 2.5 times more effective than any other sector in decreasing poverty for Sub Saharan Africa, as it consists of the majority of the population. Boosting agriculture in an efficient and sustainable way include employing technology to alleviate farming and storage management and increase the precision of farming and ensuring access to national and foreign markets for farmers.

Although investments in the economy is vital, the social and the distributive aspect of growth is often times neglected, leading to inequalities. It is not only important for Sub Saharan African countries to increase the quantity and qualities of infrastructures and educational institution in areas with high percentage of poverty, but it is as crucial to achieve national integration. This can be done in ways such as increasing economic activity between rural and urban areas through incentivizing businesses to dispatch or found subsidiary companies outside urban areas, bringing up the rural areas where most people in poverty live to the level of the urban areas. Enforcing appropriate fiscal policies – such as phasing out VAT exemptions and replacement of fuel subsidies which mainly benefit middle and higher income households – with transfer schemes targeted at poor households also assist the country towards a more equalized society. Furthermore, the abolishment of legal restrictions for women, including women not being able to open a bank account or start a new job without the consent of their husband, is another way of reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Countries outside the Sub Saharan African region can buttress Africa in its process of poverty reduction by empowering them and providing positions of greater influence in organizations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). This can enable the Sub Saharan African countries to better communicate their status quo and desired

aid. Countries can also open their markets to African exports to encourage economic relations and develop the domestic industries.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. More information on foreign countries' role in resolving poverty in Sub Sharan Africa: https://www.lejournalinternational.fr/Foreign-aid-is-hurting-not-helping-Sub-Saharan-Africa_a2085.html
- II. Further reading on previous attempts in solving the issue and possible solutions: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2019/10/21/assessing-past-and-future-strategies-for-reducing-poverty-in-africa/>