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## THE SCOURGE OF POVERTY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE CASE OF AFRICA

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### **Abstract**

*About 220 million people or half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa live in poverty, with projections indicating a figure of about 400 million by the year 2010. Poverty in Africa has been characterised by declining per capita income, poor economic growth, low employment and inadequate access to social service. It has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the erosion of social security nets as countries adjust their economies in the wake of globalisation, political instability, ethnic conflict and genocide. Utilising Africa as a case study, this paper argues that conventional theories of development, which have been used to explain poverty such as the modernisation theory, have failed. It therefore calls for the promotion of direct attacks on widespread poverty where African governments and the people themselves play a critical role in poverty alleviation programmes. The paper also argues that over-reliance on outsiders, generally known as the dependency syndrome, is escalating poverty in Africa, and proposes that Africans should be more enterprising if poverty is to be reduced in the foreseeable future.*

### **Introduction**

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, signatories proclaimed that all people have the right to education, work, health and well-being. But today, millions around the world are crippled by poverty to fulfil these basic rights. Millions continue to go hungry and scores of children

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never step inside a classroom. Families watch their loved ones die from largely preventable causes because they do not have access to adequate medical care or they cannot afford the exorbitant health fees charged by health institutions. Unfortunately, the burden of poverty is spread unevenly among the regions of the world, among countries within those regions and among localities within those countries. Nevertheless, poverty is mainly concentrated in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. And the rural areas bear the brunt of this poverty. Utilising Africa as a case study, the purpose of this paper, therefore, is to argue that in essence poverty is a denial and a violation of human rights. It further argues that the conventional theories that have been used to explain poverty have failed and advocacies for new strategies have to be adopted if the scourge of poverty is to be alleviated or reduced in Africa. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part conceptualises poverty. The second part provides the theoretical underpinnings on the issue of poverty. The third part describes the poverty situation obtaining in Africa. The last part provides possible solutions to the alleviation or reduction of the scourge of poverty in Africa.

### Conceptualising Poverty

According to an old African saying, poverty is like heat; you cannot see it; you can only feel it; so to know poverty you have to go through it. Poverty means different things to different people. It is a hydra-headed concept; hence it is conceptualised in different ways in the literature. Mashinini (2005) notes that there is no consensus on the definition of poverty in development debates. However, some authorities argue that in general, two methods of defining poverty are used. The first is what he calls the income/consumption method, which assesses the deprivation of households due to the failure to command the necessary resources to access basic needs as a result of a lack of purchasing power. The second is the internal-external method, which entails the use participatory poverty assessment.

In general, the income/consumption method measures absolute poverty, whereas the internal-external method compares the household with those around it and thus measures relative poverty. Other definitions of poverty are provided by, for instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which uses the Human Development Index (HDI) as a composite measure of multi-dimensional aspects of poverty with particular reference to purchasing power, education and health. The United Nations poverty measure is that of less than one US dollar per day. Yet others like

Sen argue that poverty might best be defined through assessing a lack of access to basic entitlements. Sen (1999) notes that there are good reasons for seeing poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as low income. Deprivation of elementary capabilities can be reflected in premature mortality, significant under-nourishment (especially of children), and persistent morbidity, widespread illiteracy and other failures.

Kaulem (2006) also argues that poverty is about not only economic deprivation but also the denial of choices and opportunities that make one lead a long and healthy life. In that regard, economic growth, increased international trade and investment, and technological advancement are all very important; but they should only be viewed as means to an end, which is human development. Patel (2005: 240) defined poverty as “an interlocking and multi-dimensional phenomenon caused by a lack of multiple resources such as employment, food, assets (housing, land), basic infrastructure (water, transport and energy), health care and literacy”.

### Theoretical Underpinnings on the Issue of Poverty

Development's supposed final goal is the eradication of poverty. Yet, economic emancipation for the world's poor remains elusive. In real terms, the number of people suffering from poverty continues to increase in tandem with worsening destitution. This occurs with a parallel increase in the wealth of the world's already wealthy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, poverty was viewed to be the result of laziness, insobriety and irresponsibility. Nevertheless, there have been other various theoretical underpinnings put forward on the issue of poverty since the 1950s. Firstly, development theory and practice of the 1950s and 1960s generally assumed that poverty was generally more or less homogeneous and that effective poverty alleviation efforts would in a reasonable time, spread sufficiently to most people. This line of thinking generally came to be known as the modernisation theory. The modernisation theorists believed that the solution to mass poverty lies essentially in the capitalist strategy or rapid economic growth. As Hardiman and Midgley (1982) explain, the ‘trickle down’ assumptions of the theory suggest that the economic growth through industrialisation will raise levels of living automatically by increasing the wage level from employment. Inherent in modernisation theory is the westernisation of developing countries, which is an inescapable outcome of the successful diffusion of the dominant economy, technology and culture of the West. In the words of the former President of the World Bank, Eugene Stanley,

economic development will only work if countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America adopt the social institutions and values of the West (Hoogvelt 1976: 186). Yet modernisation strategies have made little headway, if any, towards reducing poverty. While respectable growth rates have been achieved over the years, the number of people living in absolute poverty has increased in low-income countries. Within countries also, the benefits of economic development have been unequally distributed. The rich continue to be richer while the poor are becoming poorer. For instance, the South African economy is currently growing at a very fast pace but the majority of the people are wallowing in abject poverty. Only a select few are enjoying the fruits of high economic growth. As a result, modernisation theory has been subject to criticism especially for being too ethnocentric, one-sided and focused on the Western world and culture.

Secondly, a theory antithetical to that of modernisation, which emerged as a response to it, was the international structuralism or dependency theory and its various Neo-Marxist reformations. The dependency theory became popular in the 1960s and 1970s as a criticism of modernisation theory that seemed to be failing due to the continued widespread poverty of large parts of the world. The dependency theorists share the common view that exploitation of the poor by the rich, both at domestic and international level, is the cause of underdevelopment in Third World countries. These theorists blame Europe and other western countries for underdevelopment of the Third World due to colonisation. Colonialism robbed Third World countries of their resources and helped develop European and other western countries. A central concept is that poverty of Third World countries is the result of the manner of their integration into the 'world system'. The following measures have been adopted to alleviate the effects of the world system by some of the countries at one time or another. (a) Promotion of domestic industry and manufactured goods: by subsidising and protecting industries within the periphery nation, these third world countries can produce their own products rather than simply export raw materials. (b) Import limitations: by limiting the importation of both luxury and manufactured goods that can be produced within the country, supposedly, the country can reduce the amount of its capital and resources that are siphoned off. (c) Forbidding foreign investment: some governments took steps to keep foreign companies and individuals from owning or operating property that draws on the resources of the country. (d) Nationalisation: some governments have forcibly taken over foreign-owned companies on behalf of the state, in order to keep profits within the country.

Dependency theory has been criticised by free market economists who believe that it will lead to corruption (state-owned industries may have a higher rate of corruption than privately owned companies) and lack of competition (by subsidising in-country industries and preventing imports, these companies may have less incentive to improve their products, try to become more efficient in their processes, please their customers, or research new innovations). Free market thinkers see dependency theorists' complaints as legitimate, but their policy prescriptions as self-fulfilling prophecies, in that the policies only aggravate the disparity between the developed and underdeveloped nations by isolating them from free markets especially during this age of globalisation. Liberal trade advocates see the current structure of capitalism and trade favouring the capital owners rather than consumers, but also believe that dependency theorists' prescriptions lead only to more wealth for capital owners and more poverty for the third world. It means that their advocacy of restricted trade and self-development leads to the same outcome as mercantilist trade as experienced under colonialism. Free market thinkers criticise dependency theory because it conflates free market economics with current capitalist economic trading arrangements, and thus assumes that free market international trade will not increase economic growth and development.

Doubts have been raised on the usefulness of both the modernisation theory and dependency theory in dealing with the issue of poverty in developing countries resulting in the emergence of a third school of thought. It has been called the developmentalist theory. The developmentalists reject the idea that economic growth through the spread of capitalism will of itself eradicate subsistence poverty. Although they accept that sustained growth may eventually result in the abolition of mass poverty, "this is unlikely in any but few developing countries in the foreseeable future" (Hardiman and Midgley 1982: 57).

While economic growth is the major factor in the reduction of mass poverty, growth policies must be supplemented by clearly defined poverty-alleviation efforts that emphasise the role of policies and institutions, including reallocation of public resources for social services. The developmentalists dismiss the dependency theory as simply unrealistic and simplistic in its policy prescriptions. They would not work especially in this era of globalisation. According to Hardiman and Midgley (1982) developmentalists therefore advocate for the provision of social services such as free education and

public health by the state, progressive taxation, and land reform and state sponsored agricultural projects which provide irrigation, expertise, credit, technology and access to markets. These policy prescriptions would lead to the creation of egalitarian societies as they seek to not only redistribute wealth but also raise the incomes of the poor. However, Kitching (1982) argues that it is debatable whether this 'populist' development paradigm and the policies it has generated will solve the massive problems facing the developing countries. He further argues that, while there is an obvious need for an alternative strategy that addresses the problem of poverty directly, there is a danger that the contribution of industrialisation in creating remunerative wage employment and raising levels of living may be under-emphasised or disparaged. A balanced approach that accords proper weight to the disparate elements in development is highly desirable. As nations such as China and Sri Lanka (which emphasised basic needs to the detriment of growth) have realised, the two are antithetical. And, as the experience of Taiwan reveals, policies can be formulated that combine employment-creating strategies with those that directly promote welfare within a wider framework of egalitarian development.

### **The Poverty Situation in Africa**

Africa is the world's second largest continent after Asia. It has a total surface area of 30.3 million square kilometres, including several islands, and an estimated population of 888 million. The vast Sahara Desert, covering an area greater than that of continental United States, divides Northern Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa. The nations that today constitute the continent of Africa share a number of characteristics which include exposure to European colonialism, dependence on agriculture and the production of other primary commodities, predominantly rural population and high prevalence of subsistence poverty, and absolute deprivation. These countries emerged as sovereign nation-states after the demise of European colonialism which, over a period of centuries, had subjugated both prosperous civilisations and simple societies. Although not all societies were colonised by Europeans, the impact of colonialism was both pervasive and mixed; while it facilitated the diffusion of new practices, ideas and technologies, it also exploited and oppressed (Midgley 1988).

Radithhokwa (1999) notes that although some African societies have achieved commendable economic progress, it is a fact that Africa is still experiencing a serious development crisis which in some countries is

exacerbated by political fighting, authoritarian dictatorship, structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and natural disasters like drought, famine and diseases. Despite being potentially one of the richest continents in the world, Africa has the most drastic poverty levels. Liebenthal (2005) states that Africa ranks at or near the bottom in global comparisons of social indicators of development. This is confirmed by Wikipedia (2007) which notes that the bottom 25 spots in the United Nations list of countries based on the quality of life index are regularly filled by African nations. In 2006, 34 of the 50 nations on the United Nations list of least developed countries were in Africa. Mozambique is ranked the least developed country in the world despite some recent economic growth. Most of the people in Africa survive on less than one dollar a day. The continent is blessed with abundant human and natural resources that include oil, diamonds, gold and other base metals such as copper and iron but ironically, its poverty levels are shocking. The seriousness of poverty is depicted by Abdulai (1993: 169-170) as follows: "a huge part of the population in Africa, including some urban dwellers, have no access to medical services; the infant mortality rate is approximately 104 deaths per 1000 live births; and about 32% of the population have no access to safe water. Between 1980 and 1990 Africa had the lowest levels of educational provisions in the world." The United Nations (1994) also noted that about 220 million people or half the population of Sub-Saharan nations live in poverty, unable to meet their basic needs, with projections indicating a figure in the order of 400 million by the year 2010.

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) poverty in Africa is predominantly rural. More than 70 per cent of the continent's poor live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for food and livelihood, and yet development assistance to agriculture is decreasing (IFAD 2002). In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 218 million people live in extreme poverty. Among them are rural people in Eastern and Southern Africa, an area that has one of the world's highest concentrations of poor people. The incidence of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is increasing faster than the population. Overall, the pace of poverty reduction in most of Africa has slowed down since the 1970s. The IFAD (2002) notes that the poor in Africa constitute the following groups: small scale farmers, nomads and herders, artisan fishers, wage labourers, displaced people, households headed by women, unemployed youth and landless people. Disabled people are also among the poorest people in Africa.

## Causes of Poverty in Africa

Poverty, especially in many rural areas of Africa, has its roots in the colonial system and the policy and institutional restraints that it imposed on people. For instance, many African people were alienated from their land and had no access to credit and market facilities during the colonial era. In recent decades, however, Hall (1990) notes that poverty in Africa has been characterised by declining per capita income, poor economic growth, low employment and inadequate access to social services. The development of urban areas at the expense of rural areas especially during the early years of most African countries' independence also precipitated rural poverty. Poverty has also been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This pandemic has reversed all the developmental gains which had been made by many African countries and it is threatening to wipe out whole communities. The erosion of social safety nets as countries adjust their economies in the wake of globalisation has also contributed to poverty. Furthermore, some of the serious causes of poverty in Africa are explained below.

### *Misused money*

Wikipedia (2007) observes that over US \$500 billion have been sent to African nations in the form of direct aid and the consensus is that the money has had little long term effect. In addition, most African nations borrowed substantial sums of money. However, a large percentage of the money was either invested in weapons (money that was spent back in developed nations and provided little or no benefit to the native population) or was directly misappropriated by corrupt governments. As such, many newly democratic nations in Africa are saddled with debt run up by totalitarian regimes. Large debts usually result in little being spent on social services, such as education, pensions, or medical care thereby exacerbating poverty in African nations. Furthermore, what large sums of money that are in Africa are often used to develop mega-projects when the need is for smaller scale projects. For example, Ghana was the richest country in Africa when it obtained independence. However, a few years later, it had no foreign reserves of any consequence. The money was spent on large projects that turned out to be a waste of resources. The Okasambo Dam was built in order to supply electricity for the extraction of aluminium from bauxite but unfortunately, Ghanaian ores turned out to be too low grade and the electricity is now used to process ores from other nations.

Another example of misspent money is the Aswan High Dam. The dam was supposed to have modernised Egypt and Sudan immediately. Instead, the block of the natural flow of the Nile River meant that the Nile's natural supply of nitrate fertilizer and organic material was blocked. Now, about one-third of the dam's electric output goes directly into fertilizer production for what previously was the most fertile area on the planet. Moreover, the dam is silting up and may cease to serve any useful purpose within the next few centuries. In addition, the Mediterranean Sea is slowly becoming more saline as the Nile River previously provided it with most of its new fresh water influx (Wikipedia 2007).

### *Corruption*

The scourge of calamitous poverty in Africa has also been fuelled by rampant corruption in these countries. The anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer of 2007 as quoted by Wikipedia (2007) reports that public sector corruption was by far the highest in Africa with 42 per cent of respondents reporting that they had been asked to pay a bribe in the past twelve months. African countries with high levels of corruption were reported to be Senegal, Cameroon and Nigeria. Many native groups in Africa believe that family relationships are more important than national identity, and people in authority often use nepotism and bribery for the benefit of their extended family groups at the expense of their nations. A good example is that of the then Zaire under Mobutu Sese Seko. During his term of office, Mobutu plundered the wealth of his country while the majority of his country's citizens wallowed in abject poverty. The current Zimbabwean situation is also a fitting example. Mugabe and his close associates are looting the country's resources at the expense of the majority. Today Zimbabweans are among the world's poorest people mainly as a result of the corrupt practices of Mugabe's regime.

### *Conflicts*

Another major cause of poverty in Africa is that of unending conflicts throughout the continent. Despite other hotspots for war, Africa remains among the top places for ongoing conflicts, consisting of both long standing civil wars, for example Somalia, and conflicts between countries, for example, Ethiopia and Eritrea' border wars after the latter's independence from the former. The ongoing civil wars in Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan's Darfur region are also creating untold misery and

poverty among civilian populations. Despite a lack of basic social services or even basic necessities of life, military forces are often well financed and well equipped.

### *Natural Disasters*

Many African countries have experienced continuous natural disasters such as droughts and floods which have greatly affected the rural population. The Southern African region has been prone to recurrent droughts and floods over the past decades. For example, in 2006, Lesotho suffered one of the severest droughts in thirty years and the government had to declare the drought a national disaster. Mozambique has also had its fair share of floods over the years. Many people have been impoverished by these natural disasters in Africa.

### *Overpopulation*

As with any society largely dependent on agriculture, African families are often very large. Most of the elderly rely on their children for support, and as much of agriculture in Africa is labour intensive, large numbers of children provide the much needed labour for ploughing, planting and harvesting. However, overpopulation is a serious problem in Africa and it can exacerbate the scourge of poverty. For example, during times of famine, the high demand for food in affluent cities often draws supplies away from needy rural areas affecting mainly the elderly, women, children and the disabled.

### *Dependency syndrome*

In many African countries, the dependency syndrome has firmly established its roots resulting in poverty especially after the attainment of independence. At national level, African governments are always seeking for assistance from donors. Even at the community and individual levels, people are always looking up to outsiders to do things for them. There is no initiative and the people are no longer enterprising at all. If there is no outside help, they will just wallow in poverty.

### **Effects of Poverty in Africa**

Poverty in Africa has resulted in much anti-social behaviour among the population such as alcoholism, drug-addiction and prostitution especially in urban and peri-urban areas. Also these vices have led to higher HIV/

AIDS infection rates. It is therefore not surprising that Africa is leading the race in HIV/AIDS statistics. Furthermore, family violence has also increased as well as high crime rates especially in South Africa which is one of the countries with high rates of violent crimes.

Some families in Africa have also abandoned their children exacerbating the problem of street children and begging on the streets of large African cities like Harare, Nairobi and Johannesburg. Malnutrition is also more pronounced among these children. It should be noted, however, that most poor people in Africa resort to these drastic measures because they feel powerless and it is often a cry for help.

Poverty in Africa has also resulted in many people being homeless. This can be seen by the increasing slums in urban areas. Africa has the dubious claim of having one of the largest slums in the world, known as Kibera which is Nairobi Kenya. Many people are not able to pay rent let alone buy houses or build their own homes, and they resort to staying on the streets or in shantytowns. This is really dehumanising. In some African countries, some groups have resorted to taking up arms against governments they feel are responsible for their misery and poverty. For instance, the Delta region in Nigeria is currently unstable because the people in oil-rich region are of the view that the country's wealth is not being distributed fairly. They also argue that their oil-rich region is contributing a lot to the country's economy but the people of the Niger Delta are among the poorest in Nigeria.

### **Suggestions for the Alleviation or Reduction of the Scourge of Poverty in Africa**

The scourge of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa should be addressed as a matter of urgency since it has generated a lot of debate over the past few years. Various authorities and organisations have come up with suggestions for the alleviation or reduction of poverty. Heads of State of developed and developing countries, the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) made a commitment under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that will see the realisation of the targets to reduce poverty by 2015. The commitment was adopted by 189 countries in 2000 and included urgent collective commitments to overcome the poverty that still grips most of the world's people. The MDGs are made

up of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators to be achieved by 2015. The Goals for eradicating poverty are unique in their explicit recognition that they can be achieved only through stronger partnerships among development actors and through increased action by rich countries - expanding trade, relieving debt, transferring technology and providing aid. The Goals and the promotion of human development share a common motivation and reflect a vital commitment to promoting human well-being that entails dignity, freedom and equality for all people. The eight MDGs are as follows:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education;

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women;

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality;

Goal 5: Improve maternal health;

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability and

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

Kaulem (2006:10) notes that at the heart of the MDGs is the understanding that fighting poverty is a collective undertaking and that all countries have a stake in the results. While primary responsibility for achieving the goals lies with developing countries, the United Nations note that international support is critical, especially for the poorest countries and those handicapped by geographical isolation. Moreover, in an interdependent world economy, open avenues for trade, international financial stability and the spread of technology are needed to enable developing countries to seize opportunities for accelerated and sustained development.

Although it can be argued that these are indeed noble goals which can go a long way in the alleviation or reduction of poverty in Africa, the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report (GMR) revealed that on current trends, most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet any of the MDGs. This pessimism is informed by current projections in the report that in 2015 Africa's poverty rate will remain over 38 per cent far above the 22.3 per cent target (Kaulem 2006). There is therefore need to come up with other measures or strategies to combat the scourge of poverty in Africa. For instance, improved multilateral cooperation on trade is vital if the African countries are to successfully reduce poverty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. International

trade rules and national policies need to be aligned with a commitment to poverty reduction. That trade is at the heart of the interdependence that binds a country together is indisputable. Yet that interdependence can only contribute to human development advances, enabling millions of people to escape poverty if the costs and benefits of trade are evenly distributed within countries. Unless this happens, trade will perpetuate a pattern of globalisation that builds prosperity for some amid mass poverty and deepening inequality for others. Bearing this in mind, there is therefore need for the trading field to be levelled.

One of the strategies that could be used to alleviate poverty in Africa is empowering the poor. Empowerment in this regard, is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Since poverty is multi-dimensional, poor people need a range of assets and capabilities at the individual level such as health, education and housing and also at the collective level such as the ability to organise and mobilise themselves to take collective actions to solve their own problems. The key element of empowerment that must underlie institutional reform is access to information, as information is power. Informed citizens are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities, access services, exercise their rights and hold state and non-state actions accountable. Inclusion/participation of the poor people and other excluded groups in decision-making is critical to ensure the limited public resource builds on local knowledge and priorities and brings about commitment to change and accountability. State officials, public employees, politicians and others must be held to account, making them answerable for their policies and actions that affect the well-being of citizens. This is grossly lacking in most African countries at the moment.

Land reform has also been touted as another method of reducing poverty in Africa. However, most of the time, achievements have fallen far, far short of hopes - in most places, the landless and the near-landless have gained rather little or nothing as has happened in Zimbabwe where the elites took all the most productive land after the country's controversial land reforms. There is need, therefore, of thorough commitment to genuine land reforms from governments in Africa if the poor are to benefit. Improving tenure security, especially for women who are the main farmers is very important. Women in most African countries do not own the land but they are the ones who work on the land.

The IFAD (2002) rightly notes that to be successful, poverty-reduction policies must focus on rural areas. To overcome disadvantages stemming from remoteness, lack of education and health care, insecure and unproductive jobs, high fertility and often discrimination as women or ethnic minorities, the rural poor need: legally secure entitlements to assets (especially land and water); technology (above all for increasing the output and yield of food staples); access to markets; opportunities to participate in decentralised resource management and access to microfinance.

Patel (2005) argues that another step in dealing with poverty in Africa is a continuing effort to establish a welfare system that works. We should note that there is some evidence that higher welfare guarantees can enable some people - though not all - to escape from poverty. The welfare system should target the most vulnerable groups such as the rural poor, persons with disabilities, women, orphans and the elderly. For those who work and are still in poverty, it would be helpful to create a system of fringe benefits for low wage earners. The fringe benefits could include such things as an increase in the earned income tax credit, tax credits for child care expenses, and tax credits for housing expenses.

Self help is another way of dealing with the scourge of poverty in Africa. As IFAD (2002) rightly declares, poverty reduction is not something that governments, development institutions or non-governmental organisations can do for the poor. The poor themselves have to seize the responsibility as agents of change, for their own development. For example, the use of mutual aid societies such as stokvels and burial societies should be encouraged as a way of mobilising resources in poor communities. The stokvel, which is relatively common in African countries and known in the literature as rotating savings and credit association, functions in a simple, cost effective way. A group of individuals with a common bond – such as kinship, community or employment - agree to save together a fixed amount of cash over a fixed period. Then the members of the group take turns using the funds accumulated. Burial societies function like insurance clubs, collecting a fixed monthly amount from members. The amount collected, usually by an elected treasurer, may be small. Part of the accumulated funds is used when needed to defray the costs of the burial feast for someone in a member's family.

Finally, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has to be properly managed in African countries since it is contributing a lot to the scourge of poverty.

Awareness campaigns should be carried out especially among the youth, commercial sex workers and long-distance truck drivers and the military as they are the most vulnerable groups. Treatment should be made available to those infected with the disease so that they can live longer.

## Conclusion

This paper has conceptualised poverty. It has also provided the theoretical underpinnings on the issue of poverty and has described the poverty situation obtaining in Africa. In conclusion, this paper proposes that a sustainable reduction in poverty calls for the creation of a pro-poor policy environment, and allocation of a larger volume of resources targeted to the poor with greater effectiveness. This needs to be complimented by better partnership among governments, civil society and the private sector so that the poor are empowered to take responsibility for their own development. It has to be noted, however, that the suggestions put forward for the amelioration of the scourge of poverty in Africa are not meant to be prescriptive. They are meant to provide a basis for democratic debate and policy formulation in African countries. It is only through a transparent and inclusive democratic process can solutions be found that will help Africa to reduce its poverty.

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## **MIGRATION, A SURVIVAL STRATEGY: CASE OF BRICK KILN WORKERS IN BARAK VALLEY, ASSAM**

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### **Abstract**

*Migration is a natural phenomenon. In view of the major changes in the availability of employment in the rural areas, people often migrate from rural to urban areas in search of source of livelihood. This situation coupled with poverty has pushed people into miserable conditions. The migrant workers do not possess the skills or the education to enable them to find better paid, secure employment in the formal sector and they have to settle for work in the informal or unorganised sector. This paper discusses the condition of migrant labourers engaged in brick kilns in Barak Valley of Assam. It examines the various factors for their migration and addresses the issues of migrant workers and their problems. It was found that under difficult conditions they migrated as a means for survival during lean season often with their family members including children. They work under very hazardous conditions. The facilities provided at the kiln sites are far from satisfactory. Safety measurers are hardly met. Both the government and non-government agencies should come forward with effective programmes to improve the situation of the migrant labourers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration is considered as one of the characteristic features of the population in India like the other developing countries. People move from the permanent place of their residence to another more or less permanent one for a substantial period of time (Chakravarti 2001). During the 2001 census period, 14.4 million people migrated within the country for work purposes either to cities or other areas with the expectation of higher economic gains. The National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL) estimates the