

# Poverty in the north-western part of Nigeria 1976-2010 myth or reality

## Abstract

Every society was and is still affected by the phenomenon of poverty depending on the nature and magnitude of the scourge. Poverty was there during the time of Jesus Christ. Indeed poverty has been an issue since time immemorial, but it has become unbearable in recent decades particularly in Nigeria. It has caused a number of misfortunes in the country including corruption, insecurity and general underdevelopment. Poverty has always been seen as negative, retrogressive, natural, artificial, man-made, self-imposed, etc. It is just some years back that the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS, NBS) has reported that Sokoto State was the poorest State in Nigeria, a statement that attracted serious heat back from the Government of the State. The Government debunked the claim, saying that the report lacked merit and that it was politically motivated. In this paper, the author has used his own research materials to show the causes of poverty in the States of the North-western part of Nigeria during the period 1976 to 2010, and as well highlight the areas in the States, which have high incidences of poverty and those with low cases, and why in each case.

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## Introduction

North-western part of Nigeria, in this paper, refers to a balkanized part of the defunct Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate was established in the opening years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century following the successful execution of the Sokoto Jihad. Sokoto Caliphate was the largest polity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Central Sudan, the biggest in terms of landmass, human and material resources.

Sokoto has under gone series of changes politically and geographically from 1804 through 1960 to 2010. The town has always been the Headquarters since 1808 when it was established by Sultan Muhammadu Bello. In 1967 Sokoto was the capital of the North Western State made up of Sokoto and Niger Provinces. In 1976 Sokoto and Niger Provinces were each made a State and Sokoto town became the headquarters of the new State. Sokoto State at that time comprised Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara areas. In 1991 Kebbi area was carved out of Sokoto State and made a state of its own. In 1996 Zamfara area has also been made a State. In this paper, North-western part of Nigeria, refers to former Sokoto State comprising Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara areas from 1976 to 2010.

## Definition of poverty

Poverty has been defined variously by various individuals and organizations both nationally and internationally. But despite the efforts made at defining poverty, a universally accepted definition of the phenomenon is yet to be agreed upon. Instead subjective definitions have been given, each emphasizing on what he or she deems important in understanding poverty. Poverty thus appears to be multi-dimensional in nature, which makes it extremely difficult to describe in a simple manner. Any attempt at defining poverty in a simple form, say economic aspect only, might not capture all the dimensions of the phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

However, a common feature of the concepts that relate to poverty is income, but that, the current development efforts at poverty reduction emphasize the need to identify the basic necessities of life and the vulnerable groups within the society that are affected, so as to alleviate their poverty. This makes poverty not only economic but also social in outlook.

For example, poverty has been seen as a situation and process of serious deprivation or lack of resources and materials necessary for living within a minimum standard conducive to human dignity and well being, concluding that the deprivation may apply to whole societies, even though pockets of extreme affluence may exist in such societies.<sup>2</sup>

Oluwajenyo has said that the manifestations of poverty were diverse, which he said included starvation, adult and child malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality, illiteracy, poor health, over-crowded and poorly ventilated habitation, squalid conditions of environmental situation as well as voiceless ness, powerlessness and vulnerability to events and circumstances which place lives and livelihoods in jeopardy.<sup>3</sup>

The dimensional nature of poverty could also be seen in the various definitions given by the poor persons themselves who were interviewed on different occasions. Each interviewee was lamenting his peculiar ordeal from lack of food to lack of money, shelter, education, health care, potable drinking water, motor-able roads, electricity supply, occupations, skills, voice, relatives or afflictions in form of illness and disasters, etc. It is no more doubtful that poverty exists. In fact, it is visible, felt and extant everywhere in Nigeria more especially in the North.

In this paper, poverty refers to lack of material things, knowledge and skills that could enhance participation in the social, economic and political life of an individual and the community. The material things

<sup>1</sup>Aliyu Abubakar Kware, Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, Poverty Reduction Strategies of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Lessons to Contemporary Northern Nigeria States. Kaduna Journal of Historical Studies. 2012;4:94-95.

<sup>2</sup>Aina, Akin Tade, Salau Ademola T, editors. *The Challenges of Sustainable Development in Nigeria*. An NGO Report prepared by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992. p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid p. 34.

here include food, shelter, clothing, health care facilities, etc, while knowledge and skills refer to education as well as any occupation that could serve as a means for gainful employment or self-reliance. Poverty is therefore the condition the poor persons find themselves in. It is a situation of deprivation and denials of opportunities that could hinder the progress of individuals and societies. It is therefore, the situation of helplessness, powerlessness and destitution. In other words, it is unacceptable condition of living.

### Causes of poverty in Sokoto State

First of all poverty in Sokoto State, was linked to large family size without corresponding rise in income. Incomes have not been large enough to support the size of many families. Up to the early 1970s large family size was a blessing especially where the members were trained, and mobilized to work as a group in the farm or industry. From the early 1980s due to drought, Structural Adjustment Programme, etc there were more members of families with no adequate provision for them to become productive, (no sufficient farming, education and business activities). Many people were idle due to the absence of such activities as dry season farming while others were redundant due to retrenchment during the period. Despite the above pathetic economic situation some people still shouldered what was beyond their ability. For instance, a common man with less than ten Thousand Naira monthly salary or as his business income married between two and four wives. This kept some Hausa people in Sokoto State in debt and hardship throughout, which translated into a circle of poverty. It must however, be noted that the percentage of people in Sokoto State who were married to four wives was very low, not up to one percent. Thus, family size where some men had two, three or four wives and only the husbands worked to earn daily means of livelihood for the members of the households was one of the serious problems in this regard. In some such households however, some wives conducted trading through other women and children. This situation was aggravated by lack of education for the generality of the people and the culture of the area where women did not work to earn a living. Thus, family burden of some Hausa persons prevented them from effective and vibrant economic and scholarship endeavours. This was against the culture in the southern parts of Nigeria where both men and women worked or involved in business activities to generate incomes for the family. Related to the above is another cause of poverty, which was early marriage involving young boys who were not capable of taking care of their wives and who were mostly not educated.<sup>4</sup>

One of the main causes of poverty in Sokoto State was neglect and dwindling nature of agricultural activities. It was in recognition of its viability that agricultural activity was referred to as the oldest business, the origin of wealth and that it suppresses poverty. Farm in particular is referred to as the common man's bank. Historically, agricultural and business activities were the most reliable and dependable activities such as farming, butchering, blacksmithing, livestock production, fishing, barbing, etc.<sup>5</sup> These were some of the vehicles for progress and development up to early 1980s, which some people neglected now. Agriculture particularly wet season farming, started to dwindle from

<sup>4</sup>There was the case of a school boy, a Senior Secondary School II student, whose parents proposed a wife for him in Gwadabawa town. The boy had to abandon school to go to the south of Nigeria to be able to get money for the marriage ceremony and that ended his educational career, narrated by Sarkin Gobir of Gwadabawa, Alh Muhammadu Zaiyanu, aged 72, on 24/8/2008. Trip to the south of Nigeria was a normal phenomenon in Gwadabawa District ever since

<sup>5</sup>M Kware. A Historical Study of Cloth and Leather Dyeing in Sakkwato, 1960-1990. Unpublished M. A. History, U.D.U. Sokoto, 1992. A Samaila. The Livestock Economy in Cross-Border Trade in Nigeria and Niger Republic; A Study of Illela-Konni Border Area, 1960-1993. M. A. History Dissertation, Department of History, UDU, Sokoto, December, 2009.

the 1970s when petroleum oil was allowed to overtake agriculture in terms of priority. Farming activities in Sokoto State were nowadays carried out only as a culture by the majority of the people because the yields no longer sufficed the majority of the households for a year. Large scale farming involved large amounts of money which was beyond the majority of the common men in the State. In many parts of the State, particularly the northern parts, lack of adequate rainfall and the problem of soil deterioration were the main causes of poverty. In the 1970s there was enough food for the people because the land was fertile and productive. But by 2010 varieties of grains such as guinea corn, maize and rice had to be transported by some grains dealers into different parts of Sokoto State mainly from Niger State and from Ribah, Bena and Diri towns of Zuru Emirate and from Makarfi town in Kaduna State. In the 1970s one person could cultivate and produce 1000 bundles of grains, but by 2010 less than 200 bundles would be produced in the same farm using the same methods and techniques. Thus, shortage of rainfall was one of the causes of poverty in Sokoto State. The rain came late, sometimes early but ceased early before the maturity of the planted crops. This pauperized many people in the State particularly the majority who depended on wet season aspect of agriculture.

There was also the Government failure to assist adequately in agricultural and business activities. The Government most of the time was only paying lip service in these areas. There were no enough concerted efforts in that direction, but merely ceremonial statements. Credit facilities from the Governments were not adequate. On many occasions, credit facilities from Governments and commercial banks went to politicians and the few rich individuals in the State leaving the common man with nothing to benefit from. Sometimes, if the money is given to the poor, they spend it on their families or embezzle it by buying luxury items rather than investing the money in productive ventures. Other causes of poverty in the State related to agriculture were the nuisance of birds and insects that destroyed crops during the wet season farming exercise. Beans in particular were mostly affected by the menace of insects. Some agricultural establishments were also abandoned by the Governments over the years such as the Goronyo Dam, Kware, Kalmalo, Wurno, etc, Irrigation Schemes. Many people depended on these projects but were pauperized due to the neglect until recently 2002 when the Goronyo Dam and Wurno Irrigation Schemes were reactivated. The Schemes in Kware and Kalmalo were no more functioning. There were however, some pockets of assistance given by the Governments in establishing some programmes such as the Fadama I, II and III Projects, SRRBRDA, IFAD, etc which distributed seeds, insecticides, sometimes constructing tube wells, etc for the farmers particularly from 1999 to 2009.<sup>6</sup>

Disasters such as floods, fire outbreaks, droughts and desertification were also causes of poverty in Sokoto State since early 1970s. Floods have been a recurrent episode in many parts of the State especially those along the banks of River Rima and River Sokoto, and each time the floods occurred, they pauperized a large number of the people. The floods were caused by both natural and artificial factors. The latter was in the form of over spilling of Bakolori and Goronyo Dams in Sokoto State. (Incidences of floods especially, that of 2010) Fire outbreak was also a major cause of poverty in Sokoto State. Many people were pauperized as a result of fire disasters in various parts of Sokoto State. This was particularly true with regards to the fire disaster that engulfed the Sokoto Central Market in 2006, when over a billion Naira was lost to the disaster. There were also numerous fire outbreaks in Sokoto metropolis and in other major towns and villages of the State during the period under review.

<sup>6</sup>The contributions of agencies such as these were confirmed by the Chairman of All Farmers Association of Nigeria, Sokoto State Branch, Alh Murtala Gadadu Minanata,.....

A major drought occurred in Sokoto State in 1984, which rendered many people in Sokoto State, particularly farmers, poor because agricultural yields were very low, which led to scarcity and high cost of food stuff. The drought period was known as Yar-Buhari, because it was during the military administration of General Muhammad Buhari. During the period, Nigeria's borders were closed, Nigeria's currency was changed, etc, factors that further pauperized many people in the State.<sup>7</sup>

Desertification was also encroaching into Sokoto State since 1970s. The menace of desertification affected some parts of Sokoto State where vegetation was affected, which retarded agricultural output of the farmers. Many other parts of the State have no rivers and their lakes and streams had become dry, which rendered many people idle and therefore poor. The only alternative left to some of the people was to venture into seasonal migration deserting their localities to various destinations, which further pauperized the families they were leaving behind.

Western education in a way was also an agent that increased poverty in Sokoto State because many school leavers depended on white colour jobs, which were not enough to go round particularly from the 1990s. It was however, not Western Education directly that caused poverty because evidence has it that the incidence of poverty in Sokoto State was more on the less educated.<sup>8</sup> The problem was on the part of the successive governments that failed to provide adequate functional type of Education that guaranteed self employment to the school leavers. Where Western education was provided, it was also not adequate because it was mostly concentrated in the State and Local Government headquarters. And in the two places, influential people and those that could afford dominated the facility. Some individuals who would afford it put many members of their families in a school, denying others especially in the rural areas the chance to benefit from the scarce facility. This paper is of the belief that illiterate parents give birth to illiterate children and that continues into generations with very few exceptions. But the paper at the same time submits that all children, at the point of birth, are born illiterate no matter the level of education of their parents. It is when they begin to grow that they acquire education. We should however, not forget that most of the illiterate parents were/are poor and therefore not capable of adequately educating their wards. What this means is that illiterate parents have no knowledge of good home training for their children, and due to poverty level of most of the illiterate people, educating their children was also a problem. The end result was/is illiteracy of the children and at the end of it all is poverty. This is called 'Circle of Poverty'

Culture of the people, particularly in discharging societal responsibilities, also pauperized many people of Sokoto State. Some of the ways the culture caused poverty included extravagant spending in wedding and naming ceremonies. Others were the ways Sallah and other festivities were celebrated, which continued to tie some people in debts and many of the people remained in the debt trap for

<sup>7</sup>When Nigerian borders were closed it led to restriction of movements from within and without, change of currency the Naira also led to destabilization of the economic status of many people who queued up for days to without doing anything beneficial, to get the new currency before the end of deadline.

<sup>8</sup>Most of the people who were educated were better off than those uneducated. Earlier, we reported that education provides multiple opportunities to the people who would be doing one thing or the other to live a fruitful life in the State. Education was also described above as a sure way of graduating out of poverty, etc For more evidence that the incidence of poverty is on the less educated consult chapter 14, in A. U, Iwara, (ed.) *Nigeria and the Millennium Development Goals*, the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Proceedings, Benin 2007, Published by Fulbright Alumni Association of Nigeria (FAAN), June 2008, p, 203.

a long time, sometimes permanently. There were also other ambitious demands by the society, which confronted the people in the State such as the situation where too much financial demands were put on some individuals who were on positions of governance, which in turn forced some of those in positions to embark on both the legal and illegal ways of sourcing money to meet the demands.

Attitudes of some Hausa people (the dominant group of people in the areas) towards certain trades, work, accumulation and other income generating activities also caused poverty. These included embezzlement of hard earned incomes, which many Hausa people engaged in. Igbo and other non-Hausa people spent less whenever the market was not favourable, while some Hausa people spent lavishly whether they made sale or not. Many Hausa people in the State were also neither skilful nor creative in nature and that allowed outsiders to dominate certain trades and other technical services up to date and that caused serious poverty in the State. Indeed, there were very few Auto mechanics, vulcanizers, brick layers, etc. among Hausa people.

Governments' failures to provide adequate infrastructures that could reduce poverty such as roads, electricity, etc. also caused poverty in Sokoto State. Many roads were not constructed, those constructed have become dilapidated in many places, thereby limiting the economic viability of many localities in the State. Many people suffered as a result of that, because farmlands in the remote areas were difficult to reach. That constrained both the farmers and fishermen in boosting their trades and incomes as well as development of the State. There was no adequate electricity supply and no adequate potable drinking water in most of the towns and villages. Absence of adequate potable drinking water and security, roads, health care facilities, electricity supply and educational facilities, etc caused poverty which consequently forced many people of the State to engage in seasonal migrations to various destinations in Nigeria and beyond.

Until in the 1990s, most of the business activities of the people of Sokoto State, except in the State capital and the Headquarters of the LGAs, were petty trading involving majority of the people. This category of business was not capable of uplifting the financial positions of the people in the State, talk less of alleviating poverty. One of the features of petty trading was buying and selling on a small scale but involving a variety of commodities. Manufacturing was minimal in Sokoto State. Of particular concern was hawking of certain goods, which was not significant in improving the standard of living of the people. Hawking of various items involved the youths and some elderly people in the State. For example, hawking of kola nuts in a tray was also conducted by many people in Sokoto State and wherever they went. Some of them hawked even needles and pins.

Absence of viable industries, which served a dual role of generating employment and patronage of agricultural produce from the teaming farmers in Sokoto State, was a factor causing poverty. Industries were adjudged as important agents of poverty reduction but by 2010 they were very few in the State owing to the demise of many of them that were established between the 1960s and 1980s. Over 30 percent of annual production of onions, tomato, pepper, garlic and carrots was lost due to lack of preservation and storage facilities and industries that would process them in the State. Many tons of other agricultural produce in Sokoto State wasted due to the absence of relevant industries that would purchase and process the produce. Many youths were also idle due to the absence of employment opportunities from the industries over the years. It is thus, concluded that industries were not enough in Sokoto State as to reduce poverty. The absence of industries and other business establishments that provided employment opportunities presented a serious problem of unemployment to the people of the State. Gusau Textile, Oil Mills, Sokoto Furniture Ind, Sokotan, etc collapsed like houses of cards.

Related to the above, as a cause of poverty in Sokoto State, was the

refusal of the elites and the wealthy individuals to invest in productive ventures that would generate employment to the people. Indeed they suspected each other. The elites and the rich were blamed for embarking on numerous marriages and purchase of flashy cars and building gorgeous houses, especially in the three metropolitan cities of Sokoto, Birnin Kebbi and Gusau. It must however, be remembered that in the 1970s and the 1980s there were some industries in Sokoto and Gusau towns established by some rich people in the State. But most of the industries died out by 2010.

Unemployment was a major cause of poverty in Sokoto State. Many youths were out of schools particularly in urban centres and employment was equally not forthcoming. There were more youths but fewer employment opportunities, which was one of the reasons for the emergence of area boys in Sokoto State. There were many graduates of Diploma, NCE and Degree programmes that were roaming the streets of the various towns in the State without employment as at 2010. According to the NDE, there were 52,349 registered unemployed persons in Sokoto State as at April 2002.<sup>9</sup> Kebbi State had 41,275 unemployed persons during the same period. Zamfara State had 23,797 unemployed at the same time. In 2007 the figures were as follows; Sokoto State had 81,891 unemployed persons, Kebbi State had 41,172 unemployed persons, Zamfara State had 36,729 unemployed persons.<sup>10</sup> Most of the above unemployed persons possessed either Secondary or post Secondary education. Many of them were idle doing nothing.

Another major cause of poverty in Sokoto State was laziness. Many Hausa people in the State were lazy and relied on others for survival through begging and flattering. Many people took what was beyond their capabilities and were at the same time not working hard to earn a living. Many people were no more struggling hard to earn a living, they awaited assistance from others. Some people were of the opinion that nowadays, there was no lack of means to survive and prosper, what was there was laziness that prevented people from exhibiting hard work to earn a living. Many people were reluctant towards agricultural activities, which were relatively abundant in many parts of Sokoto State.

One of the main causes of poverty in Sokoto State, especially from 1999, was corruption. For example, there were insufficient financial and other forms of assistance to the people such as provision of fertilizers, which was very expensive and unaffordable to the majority of the farmers. But during the 1979-1982 period fertilizers were given to the people of Sokoto State almost free of charge. The farmers at that time were asked to pay between 1.50 Naira and 2.50 Naira from 1979 to 1984 per bag of fertilizer. In recent times fertilizers were not forthcoming at affordable prices. The Governments have failed to discharge their roles in development. It was observed that if there was justice, the common man in Sokoto State would not suffer owing to the enormous wealth the State had received from the federation Account, especially between 1999 and 2009. The State Government received a total of 334 Billions of Naira between June 1999 and December 2008, apart from the amount for the 23 LGAs.

Other causes of poverty in Sokoto State also included old age, illness, disability and lack of medical facilities, things that hindered hard work and perseverance, and consequently reduced productivity among the people. Poverty increases with old age and that there are more sick and disabled people among the poor persons in the State.

Exploitative nature of some loan packages usually given to civil

servants coupled with inadequate salaries also caused poverty, which reduced the worker to a level of a beggar. Many of the beneficiaries of the loans spent many months paying the loans an action, which reduced their productivity and love for their jobs. Many of them suffered due to limited funds to run their homes because part of their salaries went to loan repayment.

Neglect of rural areas was also a major cause of poverty in Sokoto State. Indeed poverty was more in the rural areas than in the urban centres. More wealth circulated in urban centres such as the State capital, Local Government and District Headquarters than in the villages. Rural life was considered one of the main reasons for poverty because in urban centres, there were ample opportunities available to the people to earn a living. In many parts of the rural areas there were fewer numbers of the rich and influential people because many of them have left for the cities and that seriously helped to make people in the villages become poor. This was because there were limited opportunities in the rural areas for the people to utilize and realize income for livelihood. The present day Sokoto State was more rural in nature than urban.

High cost of items (inflation) was also a serious cause of poverty in many parts of Sokoto State. The prices of many consumer items used on a daily basis were exorbitantly high beyond the common man. A bull was sold between One Hundred Thousand Naira (100,000 Naira) and above in 2009, indicating the high cost of livestock generally and meat in particular, which many households were not able to afford. Sokoto State was however, a livestock producing State, which meant that the high cost of livestock such as bulls was an advantage to the people in the State, particularly in the rural areas where the bulk of livestock were reared. It is however to be noted that the economic activities of the people in Sokoto State such as agriculture, especially dry season farming, livestock production and fishing activities have been able to reduce poverty among some people. Indeed some improvements in these aspects have been observed in Sokoto State, especially from the 1990s.

From the above major causes of poverty in Sokoto State the conclusion is that the phenomenon of poverty was multidimensional caused by a multitude of issues such as neglect and dwindling nature of agriculture, due largely to shortage of rainfall, insufficient farming inputs, pests, soil degradation, etc. Other issues included large family size without corresponding rise in income, general unemployment and Governments' failures in the provision of adequate infrastructures such as education, health care facilities, potable water supply, roads, and electricity. Others issues were poor governance, corruption, high cost of consumer items, disasters such as floods, fire outbreaks, droughts, desertification leading to environmental degradation and of course high population growth. Other causes of poverty in the State were attitudes of many people in Sokoto State towards income accumulation and work, culture of the people, which favoured fulfilling societal obligations at the expense of quality livelihood, laziness, old age, disability, neglect of rural areas where the majority of the people of the State lived, etc. Thus, the multidimensional nature of poverty calls for multidimensional reduction strategies.

### Areas with high and low incidences of poverty in Sokoto State

It is on record that from 1990 to 2004, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty in Africa fell from almost a third to less than a fifth.<sup>11</sup> In this paper it is concluded that poverty existed in various

<sup>9</sup>Report of the Nationwide Registration of Unemployed Persons, National Directorate of Employment, August, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup>Report of the Registration of Unemployed Persons-2007, produced by Planning, Research and Statistics, NDE Headquarters, Abuja, September, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup>NO Yakub. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Creating a Network of Researchers/Activists. Conceptual and Methodological Issues' A paper delivered at the 2009 CRD, Damina School, at the Aminu Kano Centre for Democracy, Research and Training, Mambayya House, Bayero University, Kano., p. 4.

ways and magnitude depending on the areas of the former Sokoto State and the present Sokoto State and at different times during the study period, 1976 to 2010.

For example, it is found out that rural areas of Sokoto State from 1976 to 2010 were poorer than the urban areas. Many people left rural areas for the urban centres for livelihood because the governments sighted capital projects in these centres at the detriment of the rural areas. In some rural areas of the present Sokoto State only women and children were left behind while the able-bodied men left for cities in the various parts of Nigeria particularly during the dry season. (75 percent of able-bodied men desert Binji, Silame, Gudu and Gada LGAs for the South of Nigeria in search of livelihood every year during the dry season period).

Areas along the major rivers in Sokoto State were also far better economically and socially than those areas far away from the rivers with very few exceptions. All the major towns of the former and the present Sokoto States were located along the major rivers that crossed the States. These included Gusau, Maradun Mafara, Zurmi, Kaura Namoda, Shinkafi, Isa, Sabon Birni, Goronyo, Wurno, Kware, Dundaye, Sokoto, Wamakko, Argungu, Birnin Kebbi, Bunza, Bagudo and Yelwa, all of them along Sokoto, Gagare, Bunsuru, Rima and Niger Rivers. Anka, Gummi, Kebbe, Jega and Suru along River Zamfara, while Mahuta, Kuchi and other towns on River Ka. There were many other villages and towns on these rivers who were blessed as a result of their location along the rivers.

Areas that practised dry season farming agriculture were better off than those areas that did not engage in it. Most of the above towns and villages that were along the rivers mentioned above practised dry season farming, which improved their income generation and reduced idleness during the dry season witnessed in other areas that were not opportune to be along the rivers. There were however, some few areas such as Gada, Illela, Aliero and Tambuwal that were not along the rivers mentioned above which practised dry season farming, and which to some extent improved their living standard. In fact the economies of Aliero, Gada and Illela have strong agricultural base since in the 1970s.

Areas close to urban centres were also better off than those far away from them. These areas were mostly part of the metropolitan towns of Gusau, Sokoto and Birnin Kebbi. (Kotorkoshi, Bungudu, Kware, Achida, Shuni, Bodinga, Gwandangaji, Kalgo, etc. Indeed all the villages surrounding these three capital towns benefitted in various ways from development projects cited in the major towns such as the provision of urban water supply, electricity supply, road networks, etc

Areas that had early contact with Western Education were also better off than those that received it later. Some of these areas included the above mentioned metropolitan towns as well other towns such as Zuru, Mahuta, Yabo, etc. Areas provided with some basic infrastructures such as roads were better off than those areas with none. The favoured areas were still the major towns and villages that served as State Capitals, LGA and District Headquarters throughout the former and the present State. Most of the infrastructures were provided in the towns neglecting the rural areas an action that intensified rural-urban drift since in 1976.

Men were better off than women in terms of wealth accumulation and freedom of movement, association and interactions. Going by the culture of Sokoto State, and its people, women were kept in seclusion. It was the men who were responsible for the care of the women. They fed, sheltered, clothed and protected the women according to their capabilities. In pursuance of these objectives men went out to work, conducted businesses and other activities and in so doing many men became buoyant enough to discharge their responsibilities while the women generally were at home. Some women were free to conduct

businesses but the businesses were mainly petty in nature and in most cases not capable of achieving major successes.

Sokoto State between the early 1990s and 2010 was far better than Sokoto State of the period 1976 to the late 1980s in terms of opportunities for wealth creation and development. Between 1986 and 1998 Sokoto State was not as rich as it was from 1999 to 2010. In the latter period luxury things, such as cars, expensive houses, etc, were used, of course wrongly, to rate people as either rich or poor.

Between 1976 and 1989 money was more valuable but scarce. At that time livestock, clothing materials, etc were not expensive but money (the Naira) was hard to get. The exchange of the Naira to a Dollar at the time was 0.62 in 1976, 0.894 in 1985, 2.02 in 1986, 7.39 in 1989, 17.30 in 1993, 22.33 in 1994, 85.98 in 2000 and 145.171 Naira to a dollar in 2009.<sup>12</sup> Thus, poverty was more in the past than now. For example, in the 1970s and the 1980s, as a result of community tax, many people left their towns for elsewhere because they had no means of paying the tax. During the years of 1970s some people were on several occasions arrested and arraigned before their District Heads for their inability to pay community tax. That situation was no longer the case in Sokoto State particularly from the late 1990s. What was known in Sokoto State by the Hausa people in the State as *asin da asin* in terms of clothes was congratulated in the 1970s and 1980s among the people in the State. *Asin da asin* meant complete dress of the same clothing material comprising gown, jumper and trousers with a cap to match. But the gesture was no more the case in the State.

In the 1960s up to 1970s One Hundred Pounds Sterling was a big money, which the people of Sokoto State referred to as “the limit of a young man”. This is because it was difficult for many people to accumulate One Hundred Pounds Sterling at that time. Most of the people were not able to reach that target in accumulation no matter their hard work in business. It was only those people that attained the amount that were said to have reached the position of *attajiri*. In 1984 Muhammed Lawal Yalema composed a song as a result of a serious famine that bedevilled Northern Nigeria particularly Sokoto State. The translated version of the song is ‘consumption of *garri* was not for satisfaction’ The reason for the song was the situation of serious hardship people found themselves in, at the time. That was when many of the rich people no longer had enough to eat. Food was scarce and no enough money in circulation. That was when *garri* was brought into Sokoto State in large quantities from the southern parts of Nigeria. That was also when the use of private motor vehicles and motor cycles by the civil servants started in earnest in Sokoto State. The new form of transportation was aimed at generating income to feed families. Indeed, before 1984, things were a little bit better. There were contracts awarded by the Governments of the day, business activities were fair especially as a result of the flamboyant life styles of the politicians of the 1979-1983 civilian administration. But just of a sudden, economic recession set in and almost everything collapsed. That was when the 1983 drought was more serious and at the same time the economy of Nigeria was going down. Contractors and civil servants lost those opportunities, a situation that forced many of them into motor vehicle and motor cycle commercial operations. Since that time *kabu-kabu* and *gari* remained with the people of Sokoto State as a means of transportation and food respectively.

However, from 1999 to date there were many opportunities opened to the people in Sokoto State to earn a living such as dry season farming, livestock production, business transactions of various kinds etc. Many parts of Sokoto State particularly Gada, Goronyo, Wurno, Aliero, Gwandu, etc were now rich because of the production and sales of onions and pepper. A sack of onions was sold between 1,000

<sup>12</sup>The Historical Value of One US Dollar in Nigerian Naira on the Internet from the Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, for the conversion table.

Naira and 14,000 Naira depending on demand and supply as at 2008. From 2009, a sack of onions was more than 14,000 Naira. In the 1970s and 80s, many people of some of these areas remained idle during the dry season period for lack of any alternative job.

Many people from various parts of Sokoto State were at the Federal, State and Local Government levels of governance working. According to a report from the Federal Character Commission, Abuja by 2007, the indigenes of Sokoto State working at the Federal Government level were 2,842.<sup>13</sup> Those of them working at the Central Bank during the same time were 158 for junior staff and 102 for the senior staff.<sup>14</sup> As at 2009 the number of Sokoto State indigenes working at the Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies rose to 4,281, out of this figure 898 were at the Central Bank working.<sup>15</sup> There was increase in employment of school leavers including graduates in many parts of Sokoto State, especially from 1989, when many LGAs were created such as Kware, Gada, Rabah, Goronyo, Sabon Birni, Bungudu, Zurmi, Danko-Wasagu, Koko-Besse, Gwandu, etc.

Before 1991, when Kebbi State was created, many things were non-existent, such as brick houses, motor vehicles, boreholes, hospitals, roads, etc. But subsequent States and Local Government creations led to the reduction of poverty in many parts of Sokoto State, because the Governments were now closer to the people. The employment opportunities were more realized from 1996 when more States and LGAs were created such as Zamfara State and some LGAs such as Shagari, Gudu, Dendi, etc. Employment opportunities were provided to some people both paid and self employment including labour jobs. Salary and wage increases by the Federal, State and LGCs from 1998 to 2010 to civil servants were also factors that reduced poverty in the various LGAs of Sokoto State.

From 1999 democracy has helped reduced poverty in many parts of Sokoto State. Roads and other social amenities were relatively provided to the people and that reduced poverty in the State. From 1999 even flatterer and *raraka*, were used to generate money and influence in Sokoto State, because many of the flatterers, praise singers and the like were able to buy and ride big cars, built houses and lived in affluence in Sokoto State.

Before 1991 a plot of land in Sokoto metropolis, Birnin Kebbi town and Gusau town was sold at 3,000 Naira only, but by 2010, the same size of land was sold at over 100,000 Naira due to, among other reasons, inflation, increase in population and demand as well as the increase in wealth among the people because despite the high cost many people were still able to buy more plots than before. This led to the emergence of new *Sabon Gari* settlements in almost all the LG and District Headquarters of Sokoto State, apart from the unprecedented expansion of the three State Capitals of Sokoto, Birnin Kebbi and Gusau.

Many people now have more than 10 sets of clothes each. Many women have more than two boxes each full of different sets of clothes. They have to decide which set to pick that matched their bags and shoes. From the 1990s to the present, there were few people that needed clothes used by someone or remnants of food left over by another family in Sokoto State.

In addition, as a sign of wealth, the sound of mortars and pestles were no more heard in many households, what was heard now was the noise of grinding engines. Many housewives now do not pound grains with their hands they instead used engines, which was a sign of improvement in the quality of life of the people. Scarcity of food and other consumer items was also difficult to overcome due to insufficient

and lack of effective transportation and communication facilities in the State in the 1970s. Today any kind of food stuff would be supplied to Sokoto town from everywhere in Nigeria without much difficulty and within a short period of time. These things helped to reduce poverty despite the fact that there was increase in the population of the State.

In the 1970s few people such as Abdun Zagi had cars in Sokoto town. In 1973 only one man called Lasisi had a motor vehicle in Danko town but by 2009 there were 20 more vehicles in the town. Up to 1987 there were no more than 5 motor cars in Kware District, but by 2009 they were 150 both private and commercial. For instance, in 1988, a Mercedes Benz car 1984 model 200 type was sold at 4,000 Naira only and very few people could afford it at the time. Up to 1993 very few people had cars.

In Sokoto metropolis, as earlier pointed out, there was no extreme poverty. Youths now were serious in trying to meet up the demands of the society. The poor persons were mostly the labourers, who must work to feed their families on daily basis. What occupied the minds of the people nowadays were extravagancy, embezzlement and love for luxuries. This is because in place of donkeys, there were motor cycles and motor vehicles in the houses of many people in Sokoto State. Every village now has motor vehicles and on average almost every household now has a motor cycle or more. A donkey cost no more than 20,000 Naira at the highest demand by 2010 while a motorcycle was between 80,000 and 120,000 Naira during the same time.

## Conclusion

It is thus, the conclusion of this paper that from the late 1990s there have been some improvements in the quality of life of the people of Sokoto State. For instance, their income level has to some extent rose due to some improvement in agricultural produce; in the areas of dry season farming and livestock production. Secondly, the Governments at all levels have been responding positively, though relatively slowly, to the yearnings of the people especially, since 1999 when democracy returned to the country. More schools, hospitals, water supplies, roads and electricity were provided to the people. Many remote villages, difficult to traverse in the 1970s and 1980s, were now connected through roads and electricity. Thirdly, many people now involved in running the affairs of their localities through elective representations though, amidst grave corruption. Corruption indeed retarded progress and development in the State.

Going by all the above, this paper believes that in history, researchers do not rely on quantitative estimate alone, they would give explanations presenting full details of their findings and impact on the people and area of study. This researcher is therefore convinced that instead of giving quantitative data or figure, about a phenomenon, a historian could categorize it by using words such as majority, many, few, some, etc in his analysis and explanation, depending on the situation on the ground.<sup>16</sup> Where figures are required they have to be disclosed. For example, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, poverty in Sokoto State was 83.9 and 76.81 in 1996 and 2004 respectively.<sup>17</sup> Poverty in Kebbi State was 83.6 and 89.65 in 1996 and 2004 respectively. Poverty in Zamfara State was 83.9 and 80.93 in 1996 and 2004 respectively. The argument here is that quantitative data would not be as accurate as expected and would therefore give false result. Added to that, the use of quantitative data is seen as the exclusive preserve of the Social Scientists alone. Historians on the other hand, use qualitative method of data analysis in their works, establishing relations between and among events and issues.

<sup>16</sup>Discussion with Professor Mahdi Adamu (OFR), the researcher's main Supervisor, at his residence, on Saturday, 26/12/2009.

<sup>17</sup>For details consult *Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire Survey, Nigeria, 2006*, published by the nbs National Bureau of Statistics. Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2005.

<sup>13</sup>10<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Federal Character Commission, Abuja, 2007.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Annual Report of the Federal Character Commission, Abuja, 2009.

It should also be noted that the concept of poverty has been defined variously depending on the angle one sees it. It is a contested term that is affected by place and time. There is thus, no single worldwide standard of poverty, which makes it extremely difficult to make an acceptable count of the poor. This led to the use of certain indices to roughly estimate the extent of poverty of a given area or society. This also led to the use of Poverty Line Index (PLI) and Human Development Index (HDI): The first is based on the absolute concept of poverty, which indicates a level of income below which people are adjudged to be very poor, the second is from the relative concept of poverty developed by the UNDP since 1990. The latter talks about enlarging people's choices in health, knowledge, access to resources, etc. Whatever it is, there is no disagreement that poverty exists in all societies. Based on the above, it is the conviction of this paper that, the

majority of the people of Sokoto State were poor during the period of the study but that, the poverty has actually reduced tremendously over the years especially from 1999 to 2010.

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### Conflicts of interest

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