



Understanding the Causal Relationships between the Various Aspects of Poverty and Preventable Deaths Arising From a Lack of Social Protection in Nigeria

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‘ A small poor farmer in the outskirts of Ankpa andanun employed skilled artisan in the suburb of Abujamay both be poor, but their fortunes are not exactly the same. To understand the extent of the meaning of their poverty both of them must be perused as belonging to particular classes of occupational groups with different endowments, operating under different entitlement relations not just as a huge army of the poor. The category of the poor is not merely inadequate for evaluative exercises and a nuisance for causal analysis, it can also have distorting effects on policy matters’ (Sen 1981).

The last two decades has witnessed a resurgence of national and international commitments to poverty-reduction have reaching levels barely imagined. Ambitious targets for reaching and surpassing global poverty have been envisaged by most leaders and commitment towards reducing those targets have been proposed or drafted by national governments and their international partners for reducing those plans as ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)’. The resources of the countries especially developing countries are directed towards mobilizing resources and influencing policies that will provide pro-poor growth and alleviate poverty. The central focus of this exercise has become the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which have become the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These now comprise 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators (OECD 2001). At their lead, was a global rallying call is goal 1-target 1: ‘halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day’. In terms of focusing public attention on the issue of poverty and mobilizing energy and resources for its reduction, it is an excellent goal, but at other levels its consequences may not be as beneficial as imagined. “In particular, it encourages the conceptualization of the poor as a single homogeneous group whose prime problem is low monetary income” (Hume, 2003 pp3), this has led policy makers, their advisers and development planners to devote energy towards searching for ‘the policy’ that increases the income of ‘the poor’.

As Amartya Sen’s opening quote warns, pressures to view poor people as a homogeneous group can both weaken analysis and distort policy. When ambitions are high and time is short simple solutions are sought one noticeable particular problem of contemporary poverty analysis is seeking to as quickly as possible reduce the comparative numbers of the poor in this era of globalization by pushing a neo-liberal vision, the first is to perceive ‘the poor’ as those effectively integrated into the market economy. The implication of this approach is to focus excessively and therefore channel all or a lot of resources and energy into the role of the market forces in poverty reduction. There is no doubt that this approach can help many people if implemented effectively but it has two basic problems.

- This focus will not effectively address the various needs of the different types of poor people
- Secondly such an approach encourages a focus on those poor whom the market can ‘liberate’ from poverty but neglects the needs of those who need different forms of support, policy changes, or broader changes within society that take time.

Those classified as chronically poor are those poor people who have experienced poverty all their lives or for a long time are definitely going to be excluded in such an era owing to the multiple factors that constrain their prospects and the likelihood that market based factors may contribute to their continued deprivations. Earlier efforts have been directed towards helping the deserving poor but the contemporary effort is now geared towards the focusing on the easy way to assist the poor (a focus that is encouraged by the MDGs). While agreeing that these group needs support we contend that, that support must not be at the expense of those whose poverty are problematic to be solved.

Specifically one can deduce the big difference in the types of poverty reduction strategies most appropriate for most countries or regions, with different mixes of chronic and transient poverty. In a country with poverty as a temporary or transient phenomenon where the poor at any particular time has a possibility of improving their position or with existing facilities that can be relied upon to move them out of the poverty trap, policies and

programs should be directed to social safety nets that help people manage their present deprivation, reduce their vulnerability and quickly return them to non-poor status. (Programs such as Limited term unemployment allowances, social grants, workfare, microcredit and new skills acquisition programs can be developed for these categories).

On the contrary in a country where a significant proportion of the poor are chronically poor, in that situation policies that target asset redistribution, a reduction in social exclusion (from employment, market & public institutions), direct investment towards basic and physical infrastructure and provide long term social security will be necessary if poverty is to be significantly reduced. For these two different hypothetical cases different strategies, state forms and different levels of international support will be needed.

I. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

WHAT IS CHRONIC POVERTY?

Chronic poverty like the parent concept poverty is a portmanteau term that has over the years defied every attempt to be limited to a one precise definition on which everyone comes to terms with automatically. From different disciplinary backgrounds have come different meanings reflecting the different personalities and personal values being invested in every attempt to define the term.

It is proposed that chronic poverty be viewed as occurring when an individual experiences significant capability deprivations for a period of five years or more such deprivation could be lacking access to basic amenities considered by the United Nations as human rights which his humanity ordinarily entitles him to i.e survival rights.

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is its elongated duration; the exact time that needs to elapse is somewhat arbitrary unlike that of the income poverty line, the focus is on people who may remain poor for most of or all of their life time and may possibly pass on their poverty to subsequent members of their generation (Harper, Marcus and Moore, 2003). Three propositions are hypothetically proposed for the five year timeline assumption.

In the life of an individual Five years is perceived as a significant period of time, most studies in the collection of data employ a five year duration in the collection points when panel data is created therefore practically the study will be based on a five year period, Carter and May (1999) and Corcoran (1995), and Yaqub (2000) opined that those who stay poor for five years in a row are likely to remain poor for the rest of their lives by implication therefore the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of poverty therefore will be high, thereby enabling the five year criterion chosen to allow the identification of the most serious definition of chronic poverty.

As is the case for general studies targeting poverty, the specific set of capability deprivation employed to define chronic poverty varies from study to study in the wider literature. Therefore any attempt to measure consistent poverty will be futile to rely on the usual consumption and income measures, the need to devise a multi-dimensional deprivation measure needs to be adopted.

Due to the fact that variables for poverty assessment varies and are not stable, income and consumption measurement are likely to fluctuate over relatively short period of time than measures employed to assess literacy or tangible assets thus presenting poverty as a transient phenomenon, therefore understanding the nature and degree of the multi-dimensionality of chronic poverty is therefore very important.

The life experiences of the individuals who suffer chronic poverty needs to be tracked and analyzed but curiously, however, most studies track and analyze the household instead as this is the level at which data is collected. Though in some households all members may experience poverty in similar ways over similar periods of time but this should never be assumed, it must be ascertained before conclusions are drawn.

The possibility of certain members of non-poor households suffering chronic poverty because of their age, gender or socio-economic status exists and, conversely, therefore some individuals in chronically poor households may not be persistently deprived (Hume, 2003). UNCTAD, (2002), posits that it might be necessary to identify social groups, communities or even the populations of spatial areas where chronic poverty is concentrated particularly in countries where the majority of people have been persistently poor for many years (UNCTAD, 2002).

Despite the fact that it is possible to assess chronic poverty in either absolute or relative terms, most existing work focus on chronic absolute poverty (Hume, 2003). Such a focus is consistent with the approach of most poverty analysis in developing countries. But, it should be noted as Yaqub (2002) argues that chronic relative poverty (i.e. always being in the bottom quintile of a country's income distribution) may be as hard, or even harder to escape than chronic absolute poverty. A five tier categorization is proposed for the study of chronic poverty.

The usual measure of poverty has always been limited to income, expenditure or consumption but this study should include other indicators such as nutrition and assets and possibly a combination of indicators such

as household level of human deprivation so that other indicators (such as assets or nutrition), or combinations index can be understood (Hume, 2003).

This will enable us capture the *always poor* whose poverty score (income, consumption, nutritional status, human deprivation index etc.) in each period is below a defined poverty line; the *usually poor* whose mean poverty score over all periods is less than the poverty line but are not poor in every period; the *churning poor* with a mean poverty score around the poverty line but who are poor in some periods but not in others; the *occasionally poor* whose mean poverty score is above the poverty line but have experienced at least one period in poverty; and, the *never poor* with poverty scores in all periods above the poverty line (Hume, 2003, Corcoran, 1995, UNCTA, 2002 & Yaqub, 2000).

These categories include the *chronic poor* (always poor and usually poor), the *transient poor* (churning poor and occasionally poor) and the non-poor (the never poor, continuing through to the always wealthy) though it can be subsumed that the study of poverty is interested in the always poor and the usually poor, these categorization is used to describe dynamically poverty transition.

When a household moves from chronic poor to occasionally poor and on the other hand when a household moves from occasionally poor to chronically poor or when the status of a household changes from never poor to transient poor or being always poor over a period of time all that is being described is the poverty transition (Hume, 2003, Sen, 2003, & Matin and Hume, 2003) the importance of clarifying these processes is to ensure that policies are directed towards ensuring that those in the chronically poor category move out to occasionally poor and conversely those in the never poor category or the occasionally do not slip below the line.

II. POVERTY CONCEPTS AND CHRONIC POVERTY

All the discourse around the concept of poverty surrounds chronic poverty and it centers particularly on whether chronic poverty can be perceived as income or consumption poverty or as something with varied dimensions, though it is now widely agreed by scholars and practitioners and policy makers that poverty can be conceptualized as deprivation in terms of a range of capabilities such as education, health, human and civil rights in addition to income and that these capabilities are significant in their own right and in terms of their contribution to economic growth and income enhancement, (Hume, 2003). Yaqub (2002) opined that poverty dynamics require panel data and virtually all panel data set in developing countries were used to conceptualize poverty as material or physiological deprivations.

Such 'money-metric' approaches permit measurements of changes in levels of household poverty, comparisons over time (and, potentially between regions or countries) and can be rigorously analysed to produce findings that can be statistically tested (McKay and Lawson, (2003) and McCulloch and Calandrino, 2003).

Chronic poverty has typically been assessed in two ways with income/consumption data: the 'spells approach', which focuses on transitions into and out of poverty and is widely held to overestimate transient poverty because of measurement error especially when the object of analysis is income or consumption; and the 'components approach', which attempts to isolate the permanent or underlying component of poverty from transitory shifts, and is measured either by average income or consumption over a period of time, or by a prediction of income based on known household characteristics (McKay and Lawson, 2003).

Where both measures have been used side by side, the components approach typically produces five to 25 percent more chronically poor people (Yaqub, 2002). The spells approach has often been used in studies concerned with transient poverty and the policies required to assist the transient poor emerge from poverty. The analysis of transitions becomes powerful when the factors underlying substantial and sustained transitions can be isolated.

While large sample surveys with a panel element can associate transitions with particular characteristics, they are usually weak in generating understanding of the processes involved. (Hulme, Moore and Shepherd, 2001: 15), or smaller scale, intensive surveys (e.g. Pryer 1993) together with judgments on the sustainability of the transitions observed.

While both spells and components approaches represent essential aspects of chronic poverty, understanding chronic poverty must also rely on developing a picture of people's assets and changes in assets over time. Only by including material and other assets in the descriptive analysis can adequate explanations of persistence be achieved (Hume, 2003). With the improvement in data availability from household surveys, censuses and Demographic and Health Surveys in many poor countries during the 1990s, it has now become possible to focus significantly more attention on assets and asset change over time.

Qualitative research methods with roots in anthropology has in recent years aided the perusal of the concept of poverty from a more multi-dimensional point of view (Wood, 2003; Hulme, 2002) or by using nonmonetary variables in quantitative analyses (McKay and Lawson, 2003; and Baulch and Masset, 2003). Multi-dimensional conceptualizations are likely to be of particular importance for the understanding of chronic

poverty as the more dimensions on which an individual is deprived; the less likely s/he is to escape poverty because of limitedness of the exit routes out of extreme poverty:

‘Extreme poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people’s lives, when it is prolonged, and when it severely compromises people’s chances of regaining their rights and reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future’ (Wresinski, 1987, quoted in Wodon, 2000:3).

Whether the extremely or severely poor are also chronically poor remains an empirical question, but it is clear that a cumulative lack of basic capabilities would make it extremely difficult for the poor to emerge from poverty by their own efforts. Multi-dimensional poverty or deprivation has most commonly been measured at national level through the human development index (HDI) and other indices (for example, the physical quality of life index, PQLI).

Baulch and Masset (2003) observes that this shows in a period of exceptionally high economic growth there was only modest overlap in the sub-groups of chronically poor people defined using expenditures, nutritional status and educational enrolments.

A household’s chronic monetary poverty was not a good predictor of chronic nutritional deficiencies or of chronic low educational status. This has significant policy implications: effective education and nutrition policies and interventions can be considered to be interrupters of chronic poverty in their own right. This optimistic scenario contrasts with developed countries where “broader indicators of welfare seem to be more strongly correlated across generations than narrow pecuniary indicators” (Yaqub, 2000: 26-8).

In the last few years a strong case has been made that knowledge about poverty should focus on the understandings of poor people and the concepts that they utilize (Chambers, 1997). The most

Comprehensive study adopting a participatory approach, *Voices of the Poor* (Narayan et al, 1999), did not specifically deal with the duration of poverty although some of its materials suggest that poor people recognize an overlap between the persistence and severity of poverty.

In Ghana, for instance, the poorest people were described variously as: ‘...chronically hungry...extremely poor, the perennially needy and pathetic (Hume, 2002).

This category was divided into two broad groups, first is “God’s Poor”, a group which includes factors for which there is no obvious remedy – disability, age, widowhood and childlessness. The second group is the “resource less poor”; this includes ...immigrant widowers and other landless poor’ (Narayan, 1999, 28-29).

A second relevant finding relates to the different ways in which the newly poor in transitional countries approach poverty, as compared with that of the poor in developing countries. It is noted that while all the statements gathered “reflect insecurity and material deprivation”, the Eastern European and Central Asian respondents “are filled with disbelief and demoralization, and are much more likely to make comparative statements contrasting the better past with the intolerable present” (Narayan, 1999: 34).

Hume, (2002) observed that comparing the opinion of researchers and that of the poor people themselves noticed that they are likely to agree on some issues while also focusing on some causal factors operating at different scales while the poor tend to ascribe the causal factors to God, researchers on the other hand ascribe causal factors to concrete issues that could have made practical impact on the life of the chronically poor if those social protection against the vagaries and vicissitudes of life could have made, Hulme (2002).

Failures of public and private healthcare provision, a lack of social safety nets, a weak labor market, and governance failures (in both state and civil institutions) with regard to inheritance while the poor tend to focus on causality at the micro and spiritual level, Hulme (2002) emphasized a focus at the meso and macro level.

Vulnerability and Chronic Poverty

Chambers (1983) concluded that the focus of poor people most time is not on their low level of income, consumption or capabilities, but that they are likely to experience highly stressful declines in these levels, since the levels are already low the fear of a further decline is the worrisome fact they are afraid of. This approach suggests that vulnerability can be seen as the risk that a household will suddenly (but perhaps also gradually) reach a position with which it is unable to cope, leading to catastrophe (hunger, starvation, family breakdown, destitution or death).

Hume (2002) opined that vulnerability is not necessarily captured by income or consumption measures, though poor people according to these measures are likely to have fewer buffers against shocks. Responses to shocks and the ability to cope with vulnerability are very much dependent on assets and the possession of/or access to liquid assets are particularly important to avoid impoverishment. Liquid assets included disposable items (classically, jewelry and livestock) but could also refer to the resources people can draw down from social networks or the public purse. People may become chronically poor as a result of one major or several smaller sequential shocks that are not mitigated by their own efforts or by public actions (Hume, 2002, Narayan, 1999 & Yaqub, 2000)

Wood (2003) the absence of effective public social protection a characteristic of poor and transitional countries, as putting a premium on social networks and private liquid assets. Implying that some people stay poor because their priority is to minimize vulnerability and this is best achieved within a patron-client relationship that in turn limits possible exit routes from poverty.

Other studies of poor people Pryer, (1993) and Hulme, (2002) find that vulnerability to ill health is a particular problem. A common 'cause' of chronic poverty in many parts of the world occurs when a household's main income earner contracts a chronic or terminal illness. This lowers household human assets and thus reduces income. To achieve minimum consumption needs this is compensated for by selling off natural and physical assets, using any financial savings, taking on debt, pulling children out of school to enter the labor market, and mobilizing support from social networks

Consumption is also lowered, but this still may not offset the additional costs of medical (or funeral) expenses. A spiral of lowering income, rising expenses and liquidating assets reduces the household to a state of chronic poverty by the time the 'bread winner' dies. In the past diseases such as TB and cancer typified such ill health spirals but today HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Diabetes, chronic liver, kidney, stroke and heart attacks combine to aggravate the situation of the chronically poor (Wood 2003).

A key conceptual challenge for the study of chronic poverty (and indeed poverty) is how to treat those who die preventable deaths (Kanbur, 2002). They experience the most acute form of deprivation (i.e. deprivation of all capabilities) for all of the 'lost' years of the life they would have had. Theoretically this can be done by continuing to 'count' the deprivation (i.e. total deprivation of all capabilities) that the dead person suffers for all of the lost years. Conceptually, this issue is of considerable importance to the study of chronic poverty (and all aspects of poverty), but methodologically, identifying preventable deaths, estimating how many years of life were 'lost' and placing a value on such years is enormously problematic. Concepts from the health sciences, such as disability adjusted life years (DALYs), may provide a basis for starting to think through this theoretical frontier.

(d) Poverty Dynamics and Poverty Severity

The study of chronic poverty is the study of poverty dynamics with a focus on those who are poor and have little or no mobility. The goal of research is to understand the evolution of social structures, mobility within them, and the particular immobility (if this is the case) of the chronically poor at the bottom of the structure. Social structures evolve little over five years, so even if available data limits quantifiable measurement to such short periods, analysis should take in a broader sweep. Qualitative methods are likely to be critical to the development of strong analytical models. For example, in the USA several decades of panel household survey data enabled the identification of a four year threshold for entry into chronic poverty: there was a 90 percent probability that an individual who was poor for four years would be poor for their entire life (Yaqub, 2002). In the majority of cases where such panel data is not available, life history work across a range of categories of individuals or households will provide indications of where such thresholds may lie. These can then be verified as quantitative panel data becomes available. Similarly, qualitative work will be needed to model life course poverty and inter-generational transmission, in order to develop an understanding of the processes involved. The *degree* of life course and inter-generational poverty can of course be estimated from cross-sectional data comparing the income, educational and other characteristics of different age groups and generations within the same households, but this will not be an accurate picture, as it represents all the factors producing poverty during a particular period for people at particular points in their lives. Nor will it be capable of supporting explanations. In searching for explanations of patterns of mobility and the lack of it, asset change is likely to be a central indicator in poor countries with limited labor markets that could otherwise act as mobility channels for people with low levels of assets. In this respect, patterns of mobility in middle income or transitional countries are likely to be very different, if a growing formal sector is able to absorb low skilled labor with few alternative sources of income. Where such conditions do not obtain, improved wellbeing depends critically on enhanced individual or household assets. Yaqub (2002) reports on recent data from 23 developing countries showing that upward mobility was correlated with increased landholdings and level of education, as well as starting level of education; and downward mobility correlated with increased household size and number of dependents.

Where chronically poor people have very limited material assets (e.g. land, tools and equipment, and housing) it is particularly important to focus analysis on human assets such as health and education, the accumulation or loss of which will make so much difference. Social and political networks and public policy may play especially key roles in supporting or preventing accumulation or loss, whereas the accumulation of material assets is largely predicated on the development of and access to markets. Assets partly determine future income potential, but also possibilities of 'bounce back' from crisis. Understanding the transformation processes (assets to income to assets to income etc.) over time is the central pre-occupation of livelihoods analysis suggesting that this body of literature will contain much of relevance to the descriptive analysis of chronic poverty.

WHO IS CHRONICALLY POOR?

There is no body of theory at present that allows a deductive answer to this question. Initial findings in the Chronic Poverty Research Centre identified a number of categories of individuals, households and social groups who are particularly likely to suffer chronic poverty: those experiencing deprivation because of their stage in the life cycle (e.g. older people, children and widows: Barrientos et al., (2003) and Harper et al., (2003); those discriminated against because of their social position at the local, regional or national level e.g. marginalized people (minorities in multi-ethnic states), ethnic, racial or religious groups, refugees, indigenous people, nomads and pastoralists, migrants (Mehta and Shah, 2003; Sen, 2003); household members who experience discrimination within the household e.g. female children, children in households with many other children, daughters-in-law; those with long-term or severe health problems and highly challenging disabilities and impairments (Yeo and Moore, 2003; and Lwange Ntale et al., 2002); people living in remote rural areas, urban slums, and regions where prolonged violent conflict and insecurity have occurred (Bird and Goodhand, 2003 & Amis, 2002). Commonly the chronic poor experience several forms of disadvantage at the same time. These combinations keep them in poverty and block off opportunities for improving their livelihoods.

An inductive approach requires definitions of chronic poverty which are relevant for local, regional, or national contexts. Almost inevitably it will be a heterogeneous group, though there may be consistent findings across countries (Yaqub, 2000). At present the answer can only be sketched as panel data is so rare and all attempts to measure poverty are fraught with problems. However, the numbers are clearly impressive and there is much supporting evidence. Aliber (2001 and in this volume) estimates that 18 to 24 percent of South Africa's population suffered chronic poverty during the 1990s and Sen (2003) illustrates that in Bangladesh tens of millions of people stayed poor in rural areas between 1987/88 and 2000.

(e) Summary

To sum up, chronic poverty focuses on the durational aspect of poverty and has a particular interest in poverty dynamics at individual and household levels rather than aggregate and/or average poverty trends across populations. The analysis of chronic poverty thus requires longitudinal data and, as most existing datasets are quantitative and based upon income or consumption conceptualizations of poverty, it has been dominated by money-metric approaches. It is arguably also for these money-metric measures that the distinction between chronic and transient poverty is most important, as their measurement at a point in time does not provide information on dynamics. However, there is a strong case that more multi-dimensional understandings of poverty are required as income and consumption assessments have a tendency to under-report persistent deprivation and are unlikely to tease out the complexity of the factors that keep poor people poor. Quantitative analysis is now moving beyond purely money-metric approaches. The adoption of capital or assets based analytical frameworks can help to deepen analyses as does the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods (given that qualitative research methods offer new insights, especially about processes, not easily captured by quantitative analysis).

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