Chapter 1

Advancing the Anti-Poverty Crusade through the Enforcement of the Fundamental Right to Education under Nigerian Law

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Introduction

Poverty is a ubiquitous concept whose impact on humankind has been felt throughout all civilizations. From generation to generation of humanity, the struggles in society, whether intentionally or unwittingly, were always about poverty and how best to confront this socio-economic “monster.” Poverty is the inability of humans to meet their most basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. This can also refer to the low quality of the basic necessities of life—for instance, the food affordable by an individual may make for an imbalanced diet that can lead to poor health. Therefore, even when a person or community can afford some basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing, these should be of some minimum standard. This presupposes a distinction between basic needs and felt needs. While the phenomenon of poverty clearly applies to basic needs, felt needs are those not immediately required on the scale of priority. Such needs may include cars, wristwatches, telephones, and other such objects that may even extend to ostentatious goods. The standards of assessment of poverty differ from
Defining poverty in Nigeria has been problematic because the database on individual incomes of citizens is so deficient and, in some cases, completely non-existent. This has made it difficult for researchers to define poverty as an index of socio-economic status. However, an operational definition for the purpose of this work is taken outside the realm of the global benchmark of poverty that is defined as US$1.00 per person per day. The translation of one dollar income per day in Nigeria is agonizingly insufficient to meet even the identified basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. In 2013 a dollar in Nigeria was equivalent to about 160 Naira (₦). A pot of food at an average restaurant costs about ₦200. Three meals a day would cost not less than ₦600, excluding clothing and accommodation. On average, a rural “poor” Nigerian requires about ₦1,600 per day, if he is to meet all the basic needs without ostentatious living. At the family level, a family of four will find it difficult to cook a sufficiently large pot of soup with ₦1,500. In urban communities the cost differential may be more than double, as food production is essentially concentrated in rural areas. Also, though urban dwellers with comparatively better employment opportunities earn higher incomes, they have to bear the attendant additional demands such as daily transportation costs. Therefore, in Nigeria, the benchmark should be raised from US$1 to US$10 per day. It is in this light that Garner’s definition of poverty is recommended: “The condition of being indigent, or the scarcity of the means of subsistence.” Indigence connotes poverty or a being financially unable to pay one’s bills. This is not an uncommon occurrence in the Nigerian socio-economic setting. The poor are so many that it has almost ceased to be an issue for concern. The social fabric of Nigerian society appears to have accepted as a normalcy the presence of beggars on major city streets with little or no governmental action.

Into this darkness, education is throwing light by bringing knowledge where there is none. It is a process that may be structured in phases. Across the history of nation states, growth, development, and prosperity have been directly dependent on the quality of education available to the citizens. Education or the lack of it can positively or negatively influence the economic indices of particular generations or communities. One word that didactically describes education is learning. There is usually a direct correlation between a reorganization or rebirth in learning, and economic or technological improvements.