

The Sociology of Poverty in Africa

Dr. Ambrues Monobe Nebo

Sr. Doctor of Sociology

Department of Sociology, African Methodist Episcopal University, Department of Political Science, University of Liberia.

Abstract: This paper explores poverty in Africa under the lenses of sociology by unpacking the main cause(s).

Methodologically, this paper employed a qualitative approach with particular emphasis on document analysis researched by some prolific scholars. It conceptualized poverty in Africa as a social problem.

As the theoretical frameworks explaining the sociology of poverty in Africa, the paper was guided by three theories; the individual deficiencies or behaviorist theory, the theory of Cultural Belief Systems that Support Sub-Cultures of Poverty, and the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty. Among these theories, the paper settled on the social progressive theory of poverty that attributes the cause(s) of poverty to economic, political, and social systems that cause people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being. It advances the argument that in Africa, poverty is artificial, created, grows and nurtured or fertilized by the economic and social policies our government makes and how they fund the instruments, policies created to counter poverty, and the safety net of public income supports. It also attributes rampant corruption that entrenched extreme poverty to the very same economic, political, and social systems.

Based on the social progressive theory considered as the main framework, this paper concluded that poverty is a deliberately constructed social phenomenon that is strategic to the personal interests or political agenda of politicians. As such, the urge to tackle poverty as they claim have always been a mere lips service and political rhetoric. It recommends that until Africa can deconstruct the economic, political, and social systems that benefit politicians' personal interests at the expense of vulnerable youth, the continent will remain one of the poorest toppings on the list on this earth.

Keywords: Africa, Poverty, social problem, Sociology of Poverty

I. INTRODUCTION

Sociology provides a powerful lens through which to view the wide range of socio-political or socio-economic phenomena confronting human societies. One of the phenomena confronting human societies is poverty which is so pervasive. Since political independence, Africa, the world's second largest and second-most-populous continent, after Asia in both cases (UN DESA, 2019) continues to be confronted with poverty. For example, according to World Population Review (2022), Africa is the poorest continent on Earth. This is evidenced by 27 countries worldwide currently ranked by World Bank as Low-Income Economies, indicating they are the very poorest countries in the world, 23 are located in

Africa. Moreover, over 70% of global poverty is in African countries (Tong, 2020).

Evidenced by the inauguration of poverty reduction strategies (PRS), development efforts have been made and are being embarked upon by the continent; the poor are targeted, and yet poverty remains a critical area of development concern. It is relevant to ask why such a dismal picture remains a difficult challenge, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa endowed with copious natural resources.

To answer this question, this paper introduces the sociology of poverty in Africa with the aim of highlighting the obstacles to progress. Put it another way, this article explores the sociology of poverty in Africa by looking at the causes directly tied to relevant theoretical frameworks.

Structurally, it interrogates the topic through three segments. The first succinctly reviews poverty as a concept. The second segment examines relevant theoretical frameworks that offer insight pertaining to the causes of poverty in Africa. It also takes into consideration the trend of poverty in Africa and how it benefits politicians in Africa. The third segment draws a logical conclusion from the first two segments.

II. METHODOLOGY

As a research imperative, this article employs a qualitative research method to explore the phenomenon. Particularly, it makes use of analysis of documents and materials as one of the methods of qualitative research. According to (Bowen, 2009), document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic. It provides background information and broad coverage of data and is therefore helpful in contextualizing one's research within its subject or field (Bowen, 2009). Documents analysis includes but is not limited to incident reports, reflections/journals, newspapers, annual reports, policy manuals, student handbooks, strategic plans, training materials, articles, scrapbooks, blogs, Facebook posts, duty logs, incident reports, etc. For the purpose of this study, the researcher reviews and analyzes published articles from international journals, scholarly papers from the Google search engine, and reports from international organizations as authoritative sources all of which are relevant to the topic under interrogation.

Bowen (2009) further argues that document analysis points to questions that need to be asked or to situations that need to be observed, and it is a way to ensure your research is critical and comprehensive. Therefore, the research through documents

analysis asks why poverty remains a difficult challenge, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa endowed with copious natural resources?

Sociological Conceptualization of Poverty

Sociology provides a powerful lens through which to view poverty. From a sociological perspective, Crossman (2018) conceptualized poverty as a social condition that is characterized by the lack of resources necessary for basic survival or necessary to meet a certain minimum level of living standards expected for the place where one lives.

Similarly, the World Bank describes poverty in this way: "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is a lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time.

Meeting the certain minimum standard is significantly tied to the income level that determines poverty across cultures. Income level is measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita, and the number or share of people

living under the poverty line. This is the most commonly accepted definition of poverty pioneered by the United Nations, precisely the World Bank, and UNDP.

According to the World Bank, if you're living on \$1.90 a day or less, you're living in extreme poverty. Living on less than \$1.90 a day implies people's inability to meet the certain minimum standard necessary for decent lives.

Millions of the extremely poor live in the world's low-income countries characterized by low quality housing, not enough money for school fees (primary education isn't always free), healthcare expenses, and not enough to purchase nutritious food or to stave off hunger.

In the opinion of the World Bank, a country's wealth is measured in terms of GDP, which is the total value added to all goods and services produced in a national economy per year. Because the size of any country's economy is related to the number of inhabitants, GDP is commonly divided by the total population to obtain GDP per capita. This measure allows us to compare income levels across countries and compute income growth over time. The World Bank classifies economies into four income groups: lower-income (up to US\$ 1,005), lower-middle-income (US\$ 1,006 - 3,955), upper middle income (US\$ 3,956 12,235), and higher-income (US\$ 12,236 and above) (these are official standards for Gross National Income in 2018). As of June 2020, the majority of the countries in Sub Sharan Africa were classified as low-income (World Bank List of Economies, 2020). Arguably, this ranking suggests the extremity of poverty in these countries despite the existence of poverty reduction strategies.

Poverty as a Social Problem in Africa

In the studies of sociology, poverty is also defined as a social problem. In order to explain poverty as a social problem, it is prudent to begin by looking at social problems. A social problem is one of the phenomena that has not enjoyed a universal consensus in terms of definition despite several attempts. Therefore, sociologists employ several approaches to define poverty. Permit me to briefly walk you through it.

The Objective Approach

Pioneered by the works of Blumer (1971), Mauss (1975), and others, the objective stance of social problem presumes that a social problem exists as an objective condition or arrangement in the texture of society. To express it in other words, the approach explains the reality of the existence of a condition or behavior recognized as a social problem. The reality of the existence of a social problem stems from the negative consequences for large numbers of people in society.

In one of his eloquent articles, (Nebo, 2020) argued that this large number of people affected by a given problem remains contentious in terms of numerical value or threshold. For example, Is 100,000 enough? How about 10,000 or 1,000? Does the problem need to affect more than 1percent of a nation's population? This contention that is yet to be resolved is one of the loopholes that lies within the objective approach. It can be argued that regardless of the universal consensus on the numerical threshold, it still does not question or erase the reality of the existence of a condition recognized as a social problem. For example, apartheid in South African society cannot erase the reality of how it affected thousands of black South Africans.

Concerning the recognition of a condition to be a social problem, the question that may be asked is: who or what determines the recognition of a condition to be a social problem? (Best & Harris, 2013) provides logical insight worth learning from. They argued that the process of the development of a social problem begins when someone (the maker of a claim) makes an argument (a claim) that a condition or behavior is harmful and tries to convince others why something must be done about it and what specific actions are needed.

The claims maker may be an expert in a related field, someone with personal experience, a social activist, or opposition who tries to assemble evidence supporting a claim that a condition or behavior is a social problem. The next step is gaining favorable coverage from the media. If this effort is successful, the public will react by coming to view the objective condition or behavior as a problem. Claims makers may also try to mobilize large numbers of people in a movement to work together to deal with the problem and force lawmakers to do something about it. An example would be all of the anti-corruption protests in Africa. Organizers of the protests or whatever they are called are the maker of the claim (corruption). Why are they making the claim? Or why the protests? The answer is very simple. The negative impacts

on national development disadvantage the general society. To confirm this assertion, (Jenkins & Büchner, 2021) concluded that grand, high-level corruption is more likely to generate protest in African countries. Put it differently, the anti-corruption protests are an affirmation of corruption defined as a social problem under the objective approach. Moreover, all of the anti-corruption measures legislated by the government in Africa are an acknowledgment of corruption defined as a social problem. In other words, the anti-corruption measures also suggest the government as the claim maker.

In summation, a condition is said to be an objective social problem only if citizens, policymakers, or other parties call attention to the condition or behavior.

The Subjective Approach

Pioneered by the works of many scholars such as Becker (1966); Blumer (1971); Kitsuse and Spector (1973); Mauss (1975); Rainwater (1974), this approach seeks to answer the question of how and why a specific condition comes to be perceived or acknowledged as a social problem. In other expressions, this approach argued that there must be a perception that a condition or behavior needs to be addressed for it to be considered a social problem. This would mean that some conditions do not receive recognition and thus do not qualify as a social problem. While some problem qualifies as social problem based on the level of public concern about the problem. In a different language, it means that the existence of a condition may not necessarily qualify as a social problem unless citizens, policymakers, or other parties call attention to the condition or behavior. For example, corruption existed long since in Africa but did not attract public or citizens' attention because it did not qualify as a social problem. But over the past 10 years, Africa has experienced an unprecedented rise in contentious politics that has come to be known as the "third wave of protest." The "third wave of protest" motivated by grand, high-level corruption has shaken governments, ousted corrupt leaders, and has been characterized by a combination of high-minded calls for accountability as well as "home and hearth" concerns (Branch and Mampilly, 2015; Mueller, 2018). In other words, the citizens or general public evidenced by their outcries manifested by protest now recognize corruption as a social problem. Recent examples in Burkina Faso, South Africa, and Sudan have demonstrated that corruption now qualifies as a social problem.

The Social Constructionist Approach

Capturing both the objective and subjective approaches to social problems, the constructionist approach asks one important question. What makes something a social problem? the answer is that people decide what is and is not a social problem by the way they react to things. The basic argument that underlines this approach is that people in society create or construct social problems when they give a particular meaning or "spin" to potentially troublesome conditions. To put it another way, social problems are ambiguous situations that

can be viewed in different ways by different people, and that is defined as troubling by some people. In a nutshell, this approach suggests that the degree to which a social problem is perceived as problematic, as well as the kind of problem it is understood to be, is a function of social interaction. Wade (2009). An example would again be how the "third wave of protest" motivated by grand, high-level corruption is now constructed by citizens or the general public as a social problem.

In addition to the three approaches, Nebo (2020) defined social problems in terms of certain characteristics. He proposed four characteristics worth mentioning in this article.

The problem must affect a substantial number of people in society

Even though there is no universal consensus on what constitutes the threshold on the number of people affected by a given social problem, however, for any potential condition to exist as a social problem, it must considerably affect a good number of people that draws society's attention for action. For example, there is no doubt the thousands or millions of people affected by corruption, drug abuse, etc. in Africa. To prove this, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer – Africa 2019 has found more than half of 47,000 citizens in the 35 countries surveyed believe their nation is becoming more corrupt – and that the government isn't doing enough to tackle the problem (Whiting, 2019). Similarly, violence against women affects a substantial number of women. According to the UN, nearly 1 in 3 women have been abused in their lifetime. In times of crisis, the numbers rise, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent humanitarian crises, conflicts, and climate disasters. A new report from UN Women, based on data from 13 countries since the pandemic, shows that 2 in 3 women reported that they or a woman they know experienced some form of violence and are more likely to face food insecurity. Only 1 in 10 women said that victims would go to the police for help (UN, 2021)

The problem must emanate from the existing social structure

As the name implies, a social problem is associated with society. Every society

has a social structure that explains how a society is organized in which the implications for social problems are obvious. For example, social stratification explains how society is structured. The extent to which society is stratified may entrench a given social problem. In the case of the social problems encountered by the majority of blacks in South Africa, it is attributed to the ugly legacy of apartheid that emanated from how the minority whites stratified the society.

The problems must come into conflict with the values of society

For any problem to be qualified as a social problem, it must come into conflict with the values of society. The outcries of Drug abuse, political corruption, etc. in Africa explain how

much these social problems come into conflict with the African society. Moreover, the global fight against corruption suggests its repugnance to universal value.

The problem must be solvable by collective social action

For any problem to qualify as a social problem, it must be solvable by collective actions. On the premise that social problems conflict with societal value system, they must be tackled by both national and international efforts. For example, the fight against corruption as a global social problem is being addressed by anti-corruption measures at the national level, and international response. Internationally, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, the Convention on the fight against corruption involving EU officials or officials of EU countries, etc.,

Similarly, the global fight against gender-based violence or domestic is another classic example. National and international measures are being introduced as collective social actions to tackle this social problem. One of the collective actions can be seen from the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women launched by the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign (Nov 25-Dec 10) — an initiative of 16 days of activism concluding on the day that commemorates the International Human Rights Day (10 December).

C Wright Mills Concept

Defining social problem without regard to the sociologist C Wright Mill's concept of sociological imagination undermines or reduce the richness of the paper contents. This is because the sociological understanding of social problems also rests heavily on the concept as one of the insightful lenses. Coined by an American sociologist, C. Wright Mills (1959), the concept of sociological imagination explains the ability to appreciate the structural basis for individual problems. For the purpose of elucidation, Mills explained the distinction between personal troubles and public issues. Personal troubles refer to a problem affecting individuals that the affected individual, as well as other members of society, typically blame on the individual's own personal and moral failings. To simplify Mill's concept, public issues, whose source lies in the social structure and culture of a society, refer to social problems affecting many individuals. In other words, this definition implies that, unlike personal troubles or problems that are squarely blamed on the affected individuals which could be attributed to laziness or carelessness, the causes of public issues are squarely attributed to how society is organized. For example, gender-based violence fits into Mill's concept because is a social problem globally affecting women. It is not a personal problem. It is a public issue attributed to the social structure of society. For example, according to European Institute for Gender Equality, since the age of 15, 1 in 3 women has experienced physical or sexual violence, 1 in 20 women has been raped, 95% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation in Europe are women. One of the main

causes of gender-based violence is attributed to the unequal status of men and women evidenced by the patriarchal and sexist views perpetuating this problem. patriarchal and sexist views are historically tied to the social structure of the global community.

From all the approaches, characteristics, and Mill's concept of defining a social problem, it is safe to conceptualize poverty in these manners. In other words, poverty fits into all the conceptualizations of social problems. Below are the arguments proving the assertion or claim.

There is no doubt about the definition of poverty under the objective approach that argued that a condition is said to be an objective social problem only if citizens, policymakers, or other parties call attention to the condition or behavior. The acknowledgment or recognition of extreme poverty in Africa continues to attract huge attention. All the "third wave of protests" that led to regime change and unrest in Africa cannot be assessed in absence of poverty entrenched by a high level of corruption. For example, what initially started as a protest against the jailing of Zuma for contempt of court mushroomed into grievances over inequality and poverty that have rocked South Africa for ages (Bauer, 2021). Similarly, extreme poverty was among the key factors that triggered an anti-government protest that ended the almost 30 rules of the Bashir regime. Also in Algeria, the anti-government protest that ended the regime of Abdelaziz Bouteflika due to his bid for a 5th term was just the tip of the iceberg or a trigger factor. Poverty entrenched by grand corruption and poor economic policy that hindered growth and production significantly motivated the protest. At the time of the protest, 30% of Algerian youth were unemployed. Algeria's census at that time remains youthful as a whole, with 54% of the country's 42 million population under the age of 30 (Mekki & Fiorentino, 2019). All these examples prove that poverty in Africa is objective.

Under the characteristics of a social problem and C Wright Mills's sociological imagination argues that for a condition to be qualified as a social problem, it must affect a substantial number of people. Granted, there is no threshold defining a substantial number of people. However, it is factual that poverty affects a substantial number of people in Africa. Take a look at this example. Over 70% of global poverty is in African countries (Tong, 2020). While poverty rates had been slowly increasing on the continent since the beginning of the SDG period (less than 1% in the previous 2 years), from 2019-to 2020, the number of people living in extreme poverty in Africa is projected to jump by approximately 8% to nearly 520 million Africans. This is around 40% of the entire population of 1.3 billion on the continent (Tong, 2020). Similarly, UNCTAD (2021) intimated that while in 2019, 478 million people lived in extreme poverty, it is estimated that in 2021, 490 million people in Africa live under the poverty line of 1.90 PPP\$/day, and this is 37 million people more than what was projected without the pandemic.

On the premise that statistic science is not an exact science that creates the grounds to question the data or figures, the outcome or results of the interrogation will not erase or question the reality that poverty doesn't affect a substantial number of people in Africa.

For a condition to be qualified as a social problem, it must come into conflict with the values of society. In the context of this paper, it cannot be a denial that poverty is not repugnant to Africa's value system. If not, it will continue to be frowned upon and outcried by the general public including the government. Poverty conflicts with Africa's value system because it has serious implications for democratization in Africa. For example, vote-buying during elections in Africa is caused and entrenched by Poverty.

For a condition to be qualified as a social problem, it must emanate from the existing social structure. So, does poverty in Africa emanate from the existing social structure? To put it differently, does the existing social structure create and nurture poverty? The social structure perpetuates poverty in many ways. One of the main ways can be seen how the social gap in society is widened by means of its stratification system has implications for poverty. For example, the World Bank estimates that 87% of the World's extremely poor will be in Africa by 2030 if nothing is done to address the current trends of social inequality (Seery, Okanda, & Lawson, 2019).

For a condition to be qualified as a social problem, it must be solvable by collective social action. Of course, the fight against poverty is manifested or evidenced by collective or holistic social action. For a typical example, all the poverty reduction strategies suggest collective social action. It is collective because it met the approval of both the executive and legislature or parliament.

Theoretical Frameworks on the Causes of Poverty

Grant & Osanloo (2015) posits that a theoretical framework is the 'blueprint' or guide for research. They further explained that as a guide, it consists of theories, perspectives, constructs, concepts, and approaches, that seem interrelated with their propositions deduced (Grant & Osanloo, 2015).

In view of the aforementioned, this paper is guided by several theories offering insight into the causes of poverty. They are the individual deficiencies or behavioralist theory, the theory of Cultural Belief Systems that Support Sub-Cultures of Poverty, and the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty.

The individual deficiencies or behavioralist theory

Proponents of this school of thought or perspective argue that the individual is responsible for their own poverty situation. Gans, (1995) and cited by Sameti et al (2012) believe that the individual factors that cause or fuel poverty include individual attitude, human capital, and welfare participation. In his contribution, Bradshaw (2006) blame the poor for creating their own problems arguing that with hard work and better

choices the poor could have avoided and solved their problems. He further explained that poverty is caused by a lack of genetic qualities such as intelligence that are not so easily reversed. Moreover, Asen (2002), and Bradshaw (2006) argued that any individual can succeed by the application of skills and hard work and that motivation and persistence are all that are required to achieve success. Similarly, (Bertrand et al. 2004, and Durlauf 2011) posit that the poor are poor because they engage in counterproductive, poverty-increasing behavior or risks like single motherhood or unemployment. This theory of poverty is criticized on this ground. In the opinion of the author of this article, this theory seems to be an isolated case. Meaning that in terms of the numerical threshold pertaining to a substantial number of people affected despite the lack of consensus, the cause of poverty as a macro-sociological phenomenon or problem rarely settles on this theory. To put it differently, poverty as conceptualized in this paper, especially under sociologist C. Wright Mills' concept is a macro-sociological issue that affects people on a large scale. Nowadays, society's approaches to fighting poverty enshrined in poverty reduction strategies focus on systemic structural challenges or issues that breed poverty. In itself, all of the poverty reduction strategies in Africa offer a holistic approach to tackling the phenomenon. It offers no prescriptions for personal problems but for the entire social system or structure. Therefore, this theory may not suffice or support the causes of extreme poverty in Africa.

The theory of Cultural Belief Systems that Support Sub-Cultures of Poverty

Similar to the behavioralist theory, this theory argued that poverty is created or caused by the transmission over generations of a set of beliefs, values, and skills that are socially generated but individually held (Bradshaw, 2006). In other words, Bradshaw (2006) further asserts that individuals are to be blamed for poverty because they are victims of their dysfunctional subculture or culture. This theory owes its origin to the "Culture of Poverty" coined by sociologist Oscar Lewis (1966). It assumes or argues that the poor are poor because they learn certain psychological behaviors associated with poverty. Lewis (1966) further opined that the poor do not learn to study hard, plan the future, have protected sex, or spend money wisely (Samati et al, 2012). According to Lewis, (1966) and cited by Samati et al. (2012), poverty is transmitted from generation to generation because children are socialized with values and goals associated with poverty.

Technically according to Bradshaw (2006), the culture of poverty is a subculture of poor people in ghettos, poor regions, or social contexts where they develop a shared set of beliefs, values, and norms for behavior that are separated from but embedded in the culture of the main society. For his part, McIntyre (2002) proffers what could be seen as the remedy to the culture of poverty. He argued that the poor could fight and break away from poverty. In my opinion, for this to happen, two things should come to bear. The first is to deconstruct the minds of the poor about the concept of the culture of poverty.

The second is to provide the incentives and opportunities that will create an enabling environment for the poor to break away from the shackle of poverty. Cain and Gillett (2020) posit that billionaires aren't all born with silver spoons in their mouths. Research provides tangible evidence of people that fought and broke away from the shackle of poverty. For example, the well-known Emmy-winning financial adviser, who has published numerous New York Times bestsellers, could not afford to move out of her van when she first moved to Berkeley, California, in the 1970s, according to The Huffington Post.

For two months, Orman and a friend took a job clearing trees for \$3.50 an hour and lived out of Orman's van. Today she is a multimillionaire (McDowell, 2020)

Moreover, read about the story of these people; James Cameron who lived out of his car before selling the rights to "The Terminator" for \$1, Halle Berry, who once stayed in a homeless shelter in her early 20s, Chris Pratt lived out of a van in Maui, Hawaii, Millionaire Chris Gardner, who inspired the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness," (McDowell, 2020). Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty and started off her career by becoming the first African American TV correspondent in Nashville (Cain and Gillett 2020).

Arguably, no way these millionaires or billionaires could have managed to resurrect from the dungeon of poverty if society had not provided the enabling environment and opportunities. Moreover, think about why the U.S. diversity visas continue to attract Africans in huge numbers annually? It is simply because of the available opportunities and enabling environment for Africans to break away from the shackle of poverty outside Africa. On the contrary, besides research purposes, tourism, or maybe small business investment, that attract westerners, how many of them will want to immigrate to Africa? Of course, they will not dream about it. The reason is simple. No opportunities and enabling environment. This is something that Africa can learn from by creating an enabling environment.

The theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty

Unlike the individual deficiencies or behaviorist theory and theory of cultural belief systems that support sub-cultures of poverty that shift the blame on individuals, the economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty shifts the blame on the society. Proponents of this theory attribute the source of poverty to an economic, political, and social system that causes people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being (Bradshaw, 2006).

In the same vein, Samati et al. (2012) held the view that the larger economic and social structures are a cause of poverty. They argue that capitalism creates conditions that promote poverty and that irrespective of individuals' efforts; (hard work, skills, and competencies); the structure of some economies, for instance, the economy of the United States of

America ensures that millions of people are poor. In other words, a greater number of literature suggest that the economic system is structured in such a way that the poor fall behind regardless of how competent they may be (Bradshaw, 2006).

(Brady et al. 2016) also contend that poverty is a political outcome driven by power relations over and collective choices about how to distribute resources. These theories further argued that power and institutions cause policy, which causes poverty and moderates the behavior-poverty link. Power and institutions reinforce each other, and institutions also directly shape poverty and moderate the behavior-poverty link. In a nutshell, (Brady et al. 2016) viewed poverty as the willfully chosen outcome of state (in)action when something could be done.

By analysis, the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty squarely shifts the blame for the causes of poverty on the state that constructs the social system or social structure that entrenches extreme poverty. Arguably, the analysis also implies or suggests that poverty is artificial or created by the social system, precisely the government.

There are so many ways the social system or political system can entrench poverty. For instance, research shows that one of the more entrenched sources of poverty throughout the world is social inequality that stems from cultural ideas about the relative worth of different genders, races, ethnic groups, and social classes (Srinivas, 2015). Ascribed inequality works by placing individuals in different social categories at birth, often based on religious, ethnic, or 'racial' characteristics. For example, in South African history, apartheid laws defined a binary caste system that assigned different rights (or lack thereof) and social spaces to Whites and Blacks, using skin color to automatically determine the opportunities available to individuals in each group (Srinivas, 2015).

Similarly, the wide gap of social inequality traceable to the elites Americo Liberian 133 years of rule helped to entrench extreme poverty in Liberia. No doubt about this assertion.

Social inequality is a social construction that explains the social stratification of society.

Another way the social system cause people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being (Bradshaw, 2006), is through rampant or pervasive corruption. Of course, no doubt about how poverty in Africa is entrenched by rampant or pervasive corruption. This is a phenomenon accepted by political leaders in Africa. For example, Corruption costs sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) roughly \$150 billion a year in lost revenue (Brennan, 2018). Monies collected from natural resources that could have been used to tackle poverty by creating incentives and opportunities are embezzled and diverted from state covers to personal accounts often difficult to retrieve from foreign accounts, especially those monies frozen in Switzerland bank accounts (Ebatamehi, 2019)

In summation, it is safe to make the inference from the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty that poverty is created and nurtured in Africa. In other words, it can be argued that the causes of poverty that are tackled by poverty reduction strategies provide evidence that we grow and fertilize poverty to the extent it becomes so extreme in Africa due to situations where political and social support is lacking or non-existent. This is especially true in Africa where the political structures are weak and there exists little if no planned national welfare and social security programs. In this situation, one must use whatever influences and position to secure the wealth needed for themselves and their immediate and extended family.

Rampant corruption has also caused people to have limited opportunities in Africa. It robs millions of Africans of quality education, healthcare, and basic social services. Similarly, corruption in education threatens the well-being of society because it erodes social trust and worsens inequality. It sabotages development by undermining the formation of educated, competent, and ethical individuals for future leadership and the labour force (Kirya, 2019).

The Trends of Extreme Poverty in Africa

To begin with, the UN bluntly and simply defined extreme poverty as living on less than \$1.90 a day (Roser, 2021). This definition is not a political statement coming from politicians that creates the ground for academic debate or intellectualization. It is scientifically supported by empirical facts coming from gurus or experts in international economic or international systems.

Against this backdrop, how can the UN definition be applied to extreme poverty in Africa? It is no counterargument that despite making immense progress against extreme poverty, it is still a reality in Africa. Poverty in Africa, like elsewhere, is typically measured in economic terms. The standard measure is the World Bank's definition of living on less than \$1.90 per day.

According to (Roser, 2021), most extremely poor people today are living in Africa. Almost 40% of the population lives in extreme poverty. Similarly, another recently published scenario analysis (October 2020) of the impact of COVID-19 in Africa finds that relative to the pre-COVID-19 Reference (or baseline) forecast, 14 million additional Africans will be extremely poor in 2020. Moreover, about three in five of the world's poor are now living in Africa (Christiaensen & Hill, 2019, 34). The depth of poverty in Africa is also more extreme. For those living below the poverty line in Africa, the average consumption level is only US\$.70 a day, considerably lower than levels in other regions that are all nearly approaching the \$1 a day level (Bhorat et al., 2016, 10). Approximately 40 percent of the Sub Sharan Africa (SSA) population still lived in extreme poverty in 2018 (World Bank, 2020, 13). SSA also has the highest rate of multidimensional poverty, with 58 percent of the population considered to be multidimensionally poor (see Oxford Poverty

& Human Development Initiative, 2018, 39; Tewelde & Weldeyohannes, 2018, 474).

As a way of corroborating the above statistical evidence of extreme poverty in Africa, (UNCTAD,2021) published that while in 2019, 478 million people lived in extreme poverty, it is estimated that in 2021, 490 million people in Africa live under the poverty line of 1.90 PPP\$/day, and this is 37 million people more than what was projected without the pandemic.

Concerning extreme poverty in Africa, Roser (2021) argued that not all African countries are struggling, in fact, most African countries have achieved good growth after the end of the oppressive colonial regimes that hindered the growth of African economies. But in a number of countries, the situation is particularly bad. These countries remain as poor as they were in the past.

Similar to Roser's characterization of extreme poverty in Africa, Saleh (2021) opined that in 2021, nearly 13 percent of the world population in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at 1.90 U.S. dollars a day, lived in Nigeria. Saleh further argued that the Democratic Republic of the Congo accounted for around nine percent of the global population in extreme poverty. Indeed, Africa has the largest share of poor people worldwide. Despite the fast-growing population, the levels of poverty on the continent are expected to decrease in the coming years. Yet Africa would remain the poorest region compared to the rest of the world.

Arguably, the trend of extreme poverty in Africa is caused by numerous factors that exemplify or bear the semblances of the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty. According to Brennan (2018), these causes that are interrelated include Poor Governance, Corruption, Poor Education, and Poor Healthcare. Carefully note that poor governance leads to corruption that affects the education and the healthcare systems in Africa. Similarly, Korankye (2014) in his article titled "Causes of Poverty in Africa: A Review of Literature", identified corruption and poor governance, limited employment opportunities, poor infrastructure, poor resource usage, wars and unending conflicts, poor World Bank and IMF policies, among others as the causes of poverty in Africa.

Inarguably, these causes are the byproduct of economic, political, and social systems institutionalized decade upon decade in Africa. Moreover, these causes imply that Africa is not poor, others made it that way. These others are the governments that control the economic, political, and social systems that grow and nurture extreme poverty in Africa.

In summation, extreme poverty in Africa is constructed by the economic political and social systems.

Why is Africa among the Top List as one of the Poorest Continents on Earth?

It is interesting to know that despite practical and concrete efforts employed by governments evidenced by all the poverty

reduction strategies coupled with financial aid as grants, it can be argued that Africa remains one of the poorest regions compared to the rest of the world. Why is Africa since post-independence still dragging behind the fight against poverty especially endowed with copious natural resources? In the opinion of this article, the main reason stems from the observation that extreme poverty in Africa is strategic to the personal benefits of politicians. It serves their personal political agenda. So, the urge to tackle poverty as they claimed has been a mere lip service. It is political rhetoric. This is how extreme poverty benefits politicians in Africa.

Inarguably, poverty prey on the vulnerable youth in Africa. Through this vulnerability, politicians exploit and manipulate the youth that constitutes the majority of the electorates. For example, take the case of vote-buying in African elections that cannot be aloof from extreme poverty. Take the case of trucking voters to another location that is against election laws in Africa. Take the case of election violence in which vulnerable youth are used to protect the political interests of politicians. So, if politicians remove these vulnerabilities through empowerment, will it not affect their strategic interests? In other words, who do politicians use to protect their personal and selfish interests? The vulnerability of the youth provides politicians access to wealth in African politics. It also explains the nexus between youth and political violence in Africa. In other words, the extent to which the youth engage in political violence is attributed to extreme poverty.

Similarly, (Ismail & Olonisakin, 2021) opined or argued that the youth used violence to counteract long years of socio-economic disempowerment and political marginalisation. This socio-economic marginalisation is thought to emerge from collapsed education, unemployment, and poor service delivery arising from official corruption. Interestingly, all these phenomena are highly connected to poverty constructed by the political system. To put it differently, collapsed education, unemployment, and poor service delivery arising from official corruption are attributed to the social progressive theory of poverty that attributes the phenomenon to the social, political, and economic system constructed by politicians. The logic in this argument is that without the vulnerability of the youth, it would be difficult for politicians to manipulate them into political violence. In a nutshell,

Therefore, poverty is deliberately constructed to protect the existing status quo inimical to national development.

In view of the above premise that poverty benefits politicians, it is unlikely that Africa will make significant progress in poverty reduction. The truth of the matter is if Africa really wanted to reduce poverty as a social problem, they would have by now made significant progress.

III. CONCLUSION

This article has explored the sociology of poverty in Africa by bringing out the causes and why it continues to persist despite a good number of strategies or interventions.

By reflecting on the conceptualization of poverty coupled with the theoretical framework, especially the theory of economic, political, and social distortions or, the social progressive theory of poverty, this article draws several conclusions.

Extreme poverty is a social construction based on socio-economic factors and socio-political factors in Africa. The poor do not choose poverty in Africa. It is how governments construct the socio-political or social-economic systems that explain poverty. It is constructed by the economic and social policies our government makes. It is constructed by the choice government makes about how they fund the instruments, policies created to counter poverty, and the safety net of public income supports.

Premise on the assumption that politicians derived benefits from poverty, it is unlikely that poverty will be reduced in Africa as envisaged.

The article also concludes that in as much as poverty is a social construct, is not an inevitable phenomenon in Africa. The remedy lies in the un-construction or deconstruction of the very economic, political, and social systems that grow and nurture extreme poverty in Africa. The story of Singapore which by the 1990s, the country had become one of the world's most prosperous nations, with a highly developed free-market economy and strong international trading links is one of the classic examples that poverty is artificial that can be tackled by serious and meticulous structural changes in economic, political, and social systems that breed poverty in Africa. Today, Singapore has the highest per capita gross domestic product in Asia, which is 7th in the world, and it is ranked 9th on the UN Human Development Index (IMF, 2019).

REFERENCES

- [1] Brennan, Kailey (2018) Identifying the Multiple Causes of Poverty in Africa <https://borgenproject.org/causes-of-poverty-in-africa/> Accessed 31 March 2022
- [2] Branch, A, Mampilly, ZC (2015) Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change. London: Zed Books. Google Scholar | Crossref
- [3] Bradshaw, T.K. (2006) Theories of Poverty and Anti-Poverty Programs in Community Development. Rural Poverty Research Centre (RPRC) Working Series No.06-05 Oregon State University and University of Missouri.
- [4] Brady D, Burton (2016). The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty. Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press Accessed 22 March 2022
- [5] Bauer, Nickolaus (2021) 'Little to lose': Poverty and despair fuel South Africa's unrest <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/14/little-to-lose-poverty-and-despair-fuel-south-africas-unrest> Accessed 21 March 2022
- [6] Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027
- [7] Blumer, Herbert (1971) "Social problems as collective behavior. *Social Problems* 8:298-306
- [8] Bertrand M, Mullainathan S, Shafir E. (2004). A behavioral economics view of poverty. *Am. Econ. Rev.* 94:419–423 Accessed 22 March 2022

- [9] Best, Joel and Harris, Scott R. (2013) Making Sense of Social Problems: New Images, New Issues ISBNs: 978-1-58826-855-6 hc 978-1-58826-880
- [10] Crossman, Ashley (2018) Understanding Poverty and Its Various Types <https://www.thoughtco.com/poverty-3026458> Accessed 19 March 2022
- [11] Cain A. and Gillett, R. (2020) 21 billionaires who grew up poor <https://www.businessinsider.com/billionaires-who-came-from-nothing-2013-12?r=US&IR=T>. Accessed 2 April 2022
- [12] Durlauf SN. (2011). Groups, social influences and inequality. In Poverty Traps, ed. S Bowles, SN Durlauf, K Hoff, pp. 141–75. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press Accessed 22 March 2022
- [13] Ebatamehi, Sebastiane (2019) Will Switzerland Ever Release African Funds Frozen in their Banks? <https://www.africanexponent.com/post/4500-when-will-switzerland-release-africas-millions> Accessed 31 March 2022
- [14] Grant & Osanloo (2015) Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Developing a “blueprint” for your “house” Administrative Issues Journal Education Practice and Research DOI: 10.5929/2014.4.2.9 Accessed 22 March 2022
- [15] Ismail, Olawale & Olonisakin, Funmi (2021) Why do youth participate in violence in Africa? A review of evidence. Accessed 3 April 2022
- [16] IMF (2019) "Report for Selected Countries and Subjects" www.imf.org. Accessed 3 April 2022
- [17] Jenkins, Matthew and Büchner, Isabelle (2021) The relationship between corruption and protest https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/Relationship-between-corruption-and-protest_2021.pdf Accessed 20 March 2022
- [18] Kirya, Monica (2019) Education sector corruption: How to assess it and ways to address it. <https://www.u4.no/publications/education-sector-corruption-how-to-assess-it-and-ways-to-address-it.pdf> Accessed 3 April 2022
- [19] Korankye, Alex Addae (2014) Causes of Poverty in Africa: A Review of Literature American International Journal of Social Science, Vol. 3, No. 7; December 2014 accessed 31 March 2022
- [20] Mauss, Armand L. (1975) Social Problems as Social Movements. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company
- [21] Mueller, L (2018) Political Protest in Contemporary Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Google Scholar | Crossref
- [22] Mekki, Samia & Fiorentino, Michael-Ross (2019) Why are people protesting in Algeria? | Euronews answers <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/01/why-are-people-protesting-in-algeria-euronews-answers> accessed 21 March 2022
- [23] Mills, Wright, C. (1959), Sociological Imagination. Oxford University Press.
- [24] McDowell, Erin (2020) 20 rich and famous people who were once homeless <https://www.businessinsider.com/rich-and-famous-people-who-were-homeless-2015-10?r=US&IR=T> Accessed 2 April 2022
- [25] Nebo, Ambrues M. (2020) Contemporary Social Problems of Liberia
- [26] Tong, Baldwin (2020) COVID-19 has pushed extreme poverty numbers in Africa to over half a billion <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/10/12/covid-19-has-pushed-extreme-poverty-numbers-in-africa-to-over-half-a-billion/> accessed 15 March 2022
- [27] UN DESA, (2019) World Population prospects – Population division"" population.un.org. accessed 15 March 2022
- [28] World Population Review (2022) Poorest Countries in Africa 2022 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/poorest-countries-in-africa> accessed 15 March 2022
- [29] World Bank List of Economies, (2020). <https://www.acpeaccredit.org/pdf/ISP/WorldBankData-CountryClassifications.pdf> Accessed 20 March 2022
- [30] World Bank. (2020). Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1602-4. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO
- <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34496/9781464816024.pdf> Accessed 20 March 2022
- [31] Whiting, Kate (2019) 1 in 4 Africans had to pay a bribe to access public services last year <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/07/africa-corruption-bribe-economy/> Accessed 20 March 2022

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ambrues Monboe Nebo Sr. is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science, University of Liberia. Department of Sociology, African Methodist Episcopal University, Criminal Justice Department, Adventist University of West Africa. He is also reviewer for the International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS).



He holds a Doctorate of Sociology (D.Sc.s.) with major in Sociology from the Atlantic International University (AIU).

Also, he holds MSc in the top 5 % of the graduating Class in Peace and Conflict Studies with emphasis in Humanitarian and Refugee Studies from University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Post Graduate Certificate with distinction in Public Administration from Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration Ghana, Bachelor of Arts (Magna Cum Laude) in Sociology from African Methodist Episcopal Zion University College in Liberia, a graduate of Liberia National Police Academy and Training School formerly National Police Training Academy and obtained various Certificates in peacekeeping operations from the Kofi Anna

International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Ghana. Professionally, he is a senior police officer of the Liberia National Police with seventeenth years of experience in Training and Administration. He has authored three books namely: „The Politicization of the Criminal Justice System: A Liberian Perspective“ available at <https://www.amazon.com/Politicization-Criminal-JusticeSystem-Socio-Political/dp/6139445337> and Morebooks shop.

The Wave of Protests Leading to Regimes Change in Africa: A Sociological Perspective available at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/9975153461> and Introduction to Liberia Criminal Justice System: A Concise Edition available at <https://www.morebooks.de/store/us/book/introduction-toliberia-criminal-justice-system/isbn/978-620-3-04123-1>

Moreover, he has authored a dozen of articles dealing with contemporary issues in Africa and Liberia that can be accessed online at <https://neboambrues.academia.edu>