

Poverty in sudan: trends and causes



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To measure the trends of poverty in a systematic way one needs a continuous flow of household-level data pertaining to income and expenditure. The first household budget survey carried out in Sudan was in 1968 followed by the second one in 1978. In 1992 the ILO funded the migration and labor force survey. Also, in 1992 the Social Solidarity fund funded the poverty line survey. In 1994, Ali adopts a direct approach to assess the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (1978-1986) on poverty in Sudan. However, and before reviewing poverty in Sudan let us glimpse the factors behind poverty in Sudan.

Causes of Poverty

The causes of rural poverty in Sudan are to be found in the sustained urban bias of the development strategies adopted since independence. This tended to neglect the traditional agricultural sector where the vast majority of population lives and is the main source of rural livelihood. This has resulted in high rural to urban migration unaccompanied by either increased productivity in the sector or sufficient urban development to generate the necessary urban employment opportunities. Note that the development of the agricultural sector was completely ignored but it was dichotomous in nature in the sense that the islands of modern irrigated agriculture coexisted side by side with the vast traditional rain-fed agriculture. While the former benefited from modern scale specific technologies and market access, the latter lagged behind in terms of production technologies, finance, management, research, extension, market access and rural roads. As a result of this unbalanced urban/rural development structure, the traditional agricultural sector continued to be the major source of limited supply of

unskilled labor to urban centers thereby swelling the ranks of the informal labor markets where there is little employment at or near the subsistence wage level. This has also exerting additional pressures on the already limited and over stretched social services and facilities. These trends were further aggravated by those displaced by both natural (rainfall failures leading to famines) and manmade disasters. El Tahir M. Nur (1992).

In addition and throughout the period since independence, there has been a clear pro-urban bias in policies adopted by successive governments. These manifested themselves in the provision of a reasonably adequate social and economic infrastructure not matched by similar facilities in the rural areas. These pro-urban biases were further strengthened by the long running policies of subsidizing a variety of goods consumed by urban population. However, such goods were out of reach of many of most of the urban poor particularly, the recent migrants from rural areas who represent the poorest of the urban poor who are manually employed in the marginal jobs in the informal sector. But, it must pointed out that most of these consumption subsidies have been abolished under the recent economic reform programs, though electricity and piped water are still subsidized such that piped water is cheaper in urban than in rural areas. The effects of urban bias were further aggravated by government marketing policies for some of the major export crops mostly grown in rural traditional sector, where export monopolies very much along the lines of the old marketing boards, were established for Gum Arabic, oilseeds (abolished in late 1980s) and more recently livestock. This marketing structure has adversely affected farmers' incomes, their incentives to increase production and their chances to raise their living

standards. In the context of poverty alleviation, the current marketing structure for those exports needs radical reform.

As discussed above, causes of poverty are more complex. Part of the explanation is certainly the lack of rural focus in the various development efforts since independence. The other part of the explanation relates to the basic characteristics of the traditional sector. In other words, it is vulnerability that constitutes the major cause of impoverishment and deprivation in the traditional sector. The unstable climatic conditions of rural Sudan, with their characteristics of frequent rainfall variability, have from time immemorial altered rural producers to the periodic oscillation from feast to famine situations. A basic strategy of rural producers was and continues to be hoarding of surpluses in good years to transcend the hardships of lean years. Furthermore, conflict in Sudan, as in elsewhere; represent the most devastating factor to nation's infrastructure and welfare. Therefore, the civil strife took place in various parts of the country since independence, represents one of the most ravaging factors and has a tremendous impact on poverty situation in the country. Thus, southern Sudan was the most severe conflict and has been counted as the most destructive elements of development in the whole country. The war has also resulted in numerous cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees whose situation become aggravated after they were but in zero stage of living.

The problems of debt and the deterioration in donor community relations have also a tremendous effect on the poverty situation in Sudan. The International Institutions such World Bank and African Development Bank used to finance several sectoral developmental projects that have a direct

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impact on population welfare. However, the absence of those institutions has resulted in an un-bridged gap in terms of resources availability that reduces employment opportunities.

Magnitude and poverty trends

It is most important to note that the poverty trends differ very slightly and sometimes vary greatly between groups. In general terms, the number of the poor people in rural areas has increased with a rate nearly equal to the rate of population increase. And the number of the poor urban household has increased at a higher rate than the urban population growth rate. This situation was created due to immigration took place from the rural areas to urban centers responding to the economic incentives consistent with the objectives of maintaining industrial revolution centered in urban sector. However, as we mentioned earlier, the industrial sector was not able to absorb the rural migration. An elaboration of poverty situation will be presented in the sub-periods below depending mainly on studies made by Ali Abdel Gadir: “ Poverty and Structural Adjustment Programs in Sudan”.

The trend of head count index in Sudan over this period (1968-1978) had been increasing at an annual rate of 0. 5% Annex 4. Over the same period, the number of rural households had been growing at a rate equal to the rural population growth rate while the number of poor urban households had been growing at a rate higher than the urban population growth rate. Over the same period, the poverty gap ratio in the whole country had been decreasing at an annual growth rate of 0. 64%. This shows that although poverty had been spreading at an annual rate of 0. 5 % over the period, the economic conditions of the poor had improved over the same period. The rural urban

poverty structure emerged as a result of a hasty adoption of dual economy development modules that advocate development through the transfer of cheap labor from the rural traditional sector (agriculture) to the urban modern sector (industry). Urban modern wage sector failed to absorb the rural migrants and marginal urban jobs by the rural migrants (the informal sector) proved not to be a stepping stone to the formal wage sector.

During the period (1978-1986) the headcount index increased from 54.3% in 1978 to 77.8% in 1986 at an annual rate of increase 4.6% and the rural urban poverty disparity was that the rural headcount index for urban increase from 20.5% in 1978 to 52.9% in 1986. However, the rural incidence of poverty (83.1) remained higher than the incidence of urban poverty (53%). However, the period had witnessed that the incidence of urban poverty had been growing at a higher annual rate 12.6% than the rural (3.3%). Meanwhile, the number of poor families in Sudan increased from 1.7 million in 1978 to 2.7 million in 1986 in an annual rate of 6.2% which is higher than the population growth rate. Up to 1986, the number of the poor rural families exceeded the number of the urban poor families by 2.33 million but growth rate of the poor urban families exceeded that of rural by 9.4% percentage points (Nur, 2003: 5).

The observed high pace of the incidence of urban poverty (12.6%) over the period (1978-1986) was attributed to the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and the urban bias development policies (i. e. the development that overlooks the rural areas without creating enough urban jobs) coupled with urban poverty growing faster than rural poverty. Sudan poverty gap index, over the period (1978-1986) increased from 23.1% in 1978 to 45.4% in

1986 at an annual rate of increase of 8.8%. This implies that, given the incidence of poverty, the income gap ratio increased from 42.6% in 1987 to 58.4% in 1986 at an annual rate of increase of 3.9%. By contrast, during the period (1968-1976) the incidence of poverty has been increasing at an annual rate of 0.5% but poverty and income gap ratio has been decreasing at an annual rates of 0.64% and both 1.2% respectively (improve economic conditions of the poor). Comparing the two periods, we notice that the poverty levels, both in urban and rural, have increased sharply. Therefore, the situation has become more and more complicated and the existing social safety nets (Zakat and other social funds) were unable to address the phenomena at that time.

During this period, the incidence of poverty has also increasing. The national headcount index increased from 77.8% in 1986 to 91.4% in 1992. The rural and urban headcount indexes increased from 82.1% to 93.2% and from 52.9% to 84.4% respectively. In addition to, the number of poor households increased from 2.71 million, in 1986 to 3.43 million in 1992 at an annual rate of increase of 4% (Nur, 2003: 7). The poverty trend is shown below in Annex 4. The national poverty gap index increased at an annual rate of 1.7% over the period (1986-1992). The rural and urban poverty indices increased at an annual rate of 1.4% and 2.9% respectively. The national urban mean income of the poor as a ratio of the poverty line decreased over this period from 0.42 to 0.33, from 0.54 to 0.43, and from 0.38 to 0.22 respectively. This indicates that poverty had been deepened all over the country, particularly in the rural areas.

Generally, three main poverty indicators namely, the head count index, the income gap index and poverty gap index, had been increasing at an increasing rate all over the period. It is also revealed that structural rural and urban forms of poverty exist in Sudan since 1986 and continued to exist at higher rates. Again, the continued urban bias characterized development in Sudan, overlooked the agricultural sector, lead to reduction in rural livelihoods. The result is that high rates of rural migration took place without creating sufficient employment opportunities for immigrants, coupled with displacement resulting natural and manmade disasters has worsened the situation. The public spending on social services like health and education was reduced and the poor are obliged to pay for these essential services, putting more pressure on their earnings in the formal sector defected their coping efforts to catch up with the rising cost of living.

During this period, there is a serious vacuum in the data about poverty and other human indicators that have direct or indirect relation with surveys. Therefore, this period depend very much on perceptions and nobody dared to come out with results on poverty since no recognized survey oriented research is conducted in this field. However, several attempts were undertaken to tackle the issue. These attempts were not able to cover that huge gap through time (i. e. time series data to cover the period 1994-2003), although, they were able to produce an acceptable results and arguments that could be used as a proxy for the poverty phenomena in Sudan. The most interesting attempt has conducted by Eltahir M. Nur “ Human Poverty in Sudan (2000); Magnitude and Distribution” then updated in 2003.

Human Poverty

As poverty in the human development perspective manifests itself in the deprivation of lives that people can lead, Tahir Nur methodology identified three main areas of human deprivation that correspond to the three human choices. These areas of deprivation include deprivation in survival, deprivation in knowledge, and deprivation in economic provisioning.

Size and distribution in deprivation in Survival

Deprivation in survival is all over the country but particularly high in the rural areas. While the rural national averages of means or the probabilities that a person will die before age 40, a child will die before age 5, and an infant will die before his (her) first birthday are 20.2%, 10.5%, and 7.2%, the urban national means of the same poverty indicators are 19.4%, 9.95% and 6.89% respectively for North Sudan where data is available, are 22.77%, 11.73%, and 8.10% respectively. From this comparison, we conclude that in terms of South-North, urban deprivation in the South is higher than that in the North but the differences in poverty indicators are small. Within the North, the rural deprivation in survival is higher than the urban one and again the rural urban differences in poverty indicators are small.

Looking at the state rural ranking of poverty, we note that the top five states in rural poverty are the Red Sea, the Blue Nile, Kassala, South Kordofan, and North Darfur. Their group means of the three poverty indicators (29.66%, 15.52%, and 10.52%) are higher than the national means (23.59%, 12.3%, and 8.334%) of the same poverty indicators. We also note that the states with the least rural deprivation in survival are El Gezira, the northern, the River Nile, North Kordofan, West Kordofan, and South Darfur- arranged by

the order of being the least poor state. The probability that a person will die before age 40 is the largest component of the deprivation survival index throughout the States – a great loss of productive human capital.

Size and distribution of the deprivation in knowledge

The rural national deprivation is almost double the urban national deprivation in knowledge. While the rural national means of inaccessibility to media, adults illiteracy rate, basic education dropout rate, and secondary education dropout rate are 67.2%, 27.4%, 9.8%, and 53.6%, the urban national means of the same poverty indicators are 42.4%, 15.8%, 26.8%, and 27.4% respectively. Therefore, priority in the re-education of the deprivation in knowledge should go to rural areas. Provision of basic and secondary education service is vital for the reduction in the deprivation in knowledge because education dropout rate is the major component of the deprivation in knowledge index in all the States and across the board of rural and urban location. The rate of inaccessibility to media (radio and T. V) is the largest component of the rural deprivation in knowledge index.

Upon ranking the states by the basic education dropout rate, the States of the Blue Nile, North Kurdufan, West Darfur, North Darfur, and South Kurdufan come top in the state – level rural profile of the deprivation in knowledge. Their rural group means of inaccessibility to media (75%), adults illiteracy rate (29.3%), basic education dropout rate (69.6%), and secondary education dropout rate (71.1%) are higher than the national rural means (67.2%, 27.4%, 49.8%, and 53.6%) of the same poverty indicators respectively. For the national urban poverty ranking, while the blue Nile and west Darfur states retain their positions among, Wau, and Malakal replaced

North Kurdufan north Darfur, as South Kurdufan as top poor urban areas in knowledge. While rural Khartoum is among the middle poor state in knowledge, urban Khartoum is among the least poor states in knowledge. In view of these results, basic, secondary, and adults education services should be extended to the rural areas with emphasis on the top five poor states.

Size and distribution of the deprivation in economic provisioning

Rural national deprivation in economic provisioning is higher than the urban national one. The rural national means of the proportion of people with no access to electricity (75.5%), with no access to safe drinking water (46.7%), with poor sanitation (46.5%), dependent on the use of biomass energy (79.6%), below food poverty line (55.9%) are higher than the urban national means except for the head count index (80.9%) and the proportion of people dependent on the use of biomass energy (82.8%) which are higher in the urban areas. However, the rural national mean of the composite poverty index (59%) is higher than urban national mean of the composite poverty index (54%). Therefore, rural areas rank number one in the deprivation of economic provisioning. On average, while the proportion of people who have no access to electricity (75.5%) and that of those who depend on the use of biomass energy (79.6%) are the highest rural poverty indicators the latter (82.8%) and the proportion of those who are below food poverty line (80.9%) are the highest urban poverty indicator

The experience of the Sudan, however, is unique. Some studies came out with, “ despite the relatively high growth, evidence seems to suggest that its effect did not trickle down considerably to reduce poverty or expand formal employment opportunities”. Ibrahim A. Ibrahim et al (2001: 11) While people

expecting the poverty levels be reduced as the country's GDP increased, there is strong allegation that poverty is increasing. In conclusion, while worldwide benefited from the global economic growth, Sudan did get to know that experience and the effect of economic growth on poverty is still very minute in general perception. Although, the prompt reason to think about is the mal-distribution of income, yet, the situation has many other interpretations and this area will further be elaborated in coming paper.