



**REPORT OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON  
COMBATING EXTREME POVERTY IN SUB-  
SAHARAN AFRICA THROUGH  
MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACHES**

**HELD AT  
NILDS PERMANENT SITE**

**ON**

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## Executive Summary

1. With less than 6 years to the SDG goals 2030, countries in sub-Saharan Africa still grapple with extreme poverty which significantly threatens their chances of attaining the SDG 1 (Poverty Eradication) and SDG 2 (No Hunger). This is despite evidence in the literature documenting various research and policy directions aimed at addressing the menace of extreme poverty in the region.
2. The Roundtable discussion on combating extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa through multidimensional approaches was thus conceived to convene researchers across various disciplines to brainstorm on approaches to mitigating the poverty problem.
3. The ideas generated at the Roundtable are expected to form part of ongoing research that will culminate into publication of a book on poverty eradication.
4. The Roundtable is the product of a collaboration between the University of Roehampton London (with funding from the Southlands Methodist Trust) and the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS).
5. The objective of the seminar is in tandem with provisions in the Establishment Act of NILDS as provided in Sections 2(k) and 3(a) of the NILS (Amendment) Act, 2017, which provides that *the Institute shall have powers to provide interface between democratic institutions and civil societies. Thus, as the premier policy think tank of the National Assembly, NILDS remains steadfast in its commitment to providing a platform for intellectual interaction and the ventilation of ideas.*
6. The Roundtable held at NILDS Permanent Site, 307 Cadastral Zone, Abuja. The Seminar brought together researchers across various disciplines to brainstorm on the poverty menace.
7. A renowned academic and Professor of Economics at the University of Abuja, Prof. Siyan Peter, delivered the keynote speech.

## Major Highlights of the Seminar

8. Generally, it was observed that despite evidence in the literature documenting various research and policy directions aimed at addressing the menace of extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the problem continues to fester. Taking a legal perspective to address the menace, evidence points to non-enforceability of Laws aimed at mitigating poverty in Africa, especially Nigeria.
9. Specifically, it is observed that Chapter Two of the Constitution which makes provisions for Rights of Citizens remains unenforceable despite its wide reaching provisions. Also, Laws intended to ensure societal prosperity are observed to be subtly skewed to protect the elite, at the expense of the lower class, thus facilitating the cycle of poverty. Particularly, laws moderating access to factors of societal prosperity such as land (and its resources), education and justice.

10. Discussions also revealed a moral deficit or poverty of the conscience whereby the haves seek more, at the expense of the have-nots without a system (justice) to ensure equity and balance.
11. Despite the key role of governance in addressing the poverty problem, the lack of accountability and massive scale of usurpation of public resources has ensured that government continues to fail in her role to mitigate poverty.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- i. There's an urgent need for reorientation of poverty mitigating policies from being viewed as helping the poor to being a basis for equity in society.
- ii. Research and advocacy to establish enforceability of Rights in Nigeria.
- iii. There needs to be renewed advocacy for conscientious thinking/action of the elite class to avert an implosive poverty state which is gradually occurring with the rising trend of dissensions and insecurity.
- iv. There must be an intentionally strategic move to enthrone accountability in leadership across governance levels to ensure compliance to goals in the implementation of poverty eradication (and related) policies.

## **Section One: Introduction**

This is a pivotal Roundtable Discussion aimed at generating multidimensional strategies to combat the menace of extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Roundtable is a collaboration between the University of Roehampton (led by Dr. Augustine Arimoro, a senior lecturer at Roehampton Law School) and the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), bringing together a diverse group of experts to explore innovative, home-grown solutions to this pressing issue. Through robust dialogue and interdisciplinary exchange, the Roundtable sought to generate comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of poverty while fostering sustainable development in the region. The insights shared at the Roundtable as contained in this Report reflect a collective commitment to reshaping policies, fostering collaboration, and empowering communities to build a more prosperous and equitable future for all individuals in Sub-Saharan Africa. This objective aligns with the mandate of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) as contained in Sections 2(k) and 3(a) of the NILS (Amendment) Act, 2017, which provides that *the Institute shall have powers to provide interface between democratic institutions and civil societies*.

This Report is structured into six (6) sections. Following this Introduction Section, Section Two highlights the Opening formalities of the Workshop; Section Three presents the Roundtable Session; the reports from the closing ceremony are contained in Section Four; and Section Five highlights the findings/observations of the Workshop while Section Five proffers recommendations, and Section Six concludes the Report.

## **Section Two: Opening Ceremony**

### **Welcome Address by the Acting Director, Department of Economic and Social Research, NILDS, *Dr. Asimiyu Abiola***

In his opening remark, the Ag. Director welcomed the Director-General NILDS and other management staff present. He subsequently acknowledged the lead researcher, Dr. Augustine Arimoro, stating that this forum serves an epochal function in the ongoing research. Elaborating the Roundtable's objective, Dr. Abiola stated that the goal was to consolidate ideas from researchers across various disciplines to develop policy suggestions, strategic insights and workable recommendations towards addressing the lingering poverty issue in sub-Saharan Africa and specifically Nigeria. He concluded by thanking everyone present, in anticipation of a fruitful deliberation.

### **Remarks by the Lead Researcher, *Dr. Augustine Arimoro***

Appreciating the Institute for the opportunity to utilize its platform for the Roundtable, Dr. Arimoro stated that the core objective was to learn from the discourse towards fashioning home-grown solutions to the poverty problem in sub-Saharan Africa. He concluded by expressing gratitude to everyone present in anticipation of an insightful discussion.

**Opening Remarks of the Director General, National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), *Professor Abubakar O. Sulaiman***

Welcoming dignitaries, participants and resource persons to the Roundtable, the DG, NILDS emphasized the strategic import of this seminar to address the festering poverty of Africa and indeed Nigeria specifically. The DG further stated that Africa's Agenda 2063, the SDGs 2030, the Renewed Hope Agenda for Nigeria, the Legislative Agenda of the 10th National Assembly, and indeed the Strategic Plan of the Institute, all emphasize the need to eradicate poverty as a means to accelerating growth and development in the sub-region. This, he said, underscores the significance of this seminar as a step in the right direction, as it feeds into the overall commitment of the 10th National Assembly and the Institute for Fostering National Development. HE subsequently expressed the profound gratitude of the Institute to her stakeholders (especially the leadership of the National Assembly led by the Chairman of the Assembly and President of the Senate, His Excellency, Distinguished Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, CON, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Abbas Tajudeen, Ph.D.). The DG specifically extended sincere appreciation to Dr. Augustine Arimoro, the lead researcher from Roehampton University, London, and the Southlands Methodist Trust for their support of this seminar.

Emphasizing the strategic import of the Roundtable for a, the DG observed that with less than 6 years until 2030, countries in the global south have continued to lag in the attainment of the SDGs compared to their counterparts in the global north. All countries in Sub-Saharan Africa still have major challenges that make their chances of attaining the SDG 1 (Poverty Eradication) and SDG 2 (No Hunger) very difficult. Economic growth in the sub region also remains one of the weakest in the world. The sub region also continues to experience energy poverty, and access to clean water and sanitation remains a challenge. Human rights violations also continues to threaten opportunities for people in the continent to enjoy what the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen refer to as "Development as Freedom".

The DG emphasized that the Roundtable's objectives are very clear: to explore policy options to address the legal and human rights dimensions of extreme poverty, share good practices in utilizing law and justice to combat poverty, and foster networks and partnerships for enhanced collaboration.

He concluded his remarks by restating that, as the think tank agency of the National Assembly, NILDS remains open to partnerships and collaborations to address the challenges confronting Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. He therefore urged participants brainstorm and come up with solutions that are targeted at addressing poverty through multidimensional approaches. It was on this high note, that the DG, on behalf of Chairman of the Institute's Governing Council, His Excellency

Distinguished Senator Godswill Obot Akpabio, CON, and the Alternate Chairman, His Excellency Rt. Hon. Abbas Tajudeen, declared the Roundtable seminar open.

After the DG's speech, the Institute's corporate souvenir where presented to Dr. Arimoro who also presented a copy of his book to the DG.

Group photographs were taken to document the memories of the event as the opening ceremony was concluded.

## **Section Three: Roundtable Session**

### **Keynote Speech**

***Prof. Peter Siyan***

*Professor of Economics,  
University of Abuja.*

#### **□ Presentation Highlights**

In his keynote speech, Prof. Siyan reiterated that understanding the diverse dimensions of poverty is paramount in shaping informed policies that can effectively address this pressing issue. This intellectual discussion serves as a platform to stimulate innovative ideas and strategies aimed at achieving this objective. It is imperative that we fully engage with the topic at hand, drawing upon our collective knowledge and experiences to explore holistic solutions.

He further asserted that by embracing multi-dimensional approaches that encompass economic, social, legal, and human rights perspectives, we can chart a course towards meaningful poverty alleviation in sub-Saharan Africa. I encourage active participation and collaboration as we work together to generate insights that can inform transformative policy interventions.

### **Presentation of Legal Dimensions to the Project**

***Dr. Bethel Ihugba***

*Senior Research Fellow,  
Deputy Director, Legal Support Services,  
National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies*

Giving a background to the discourse, he stated that despite a long existence of poverty, the Law stands in pole position to addressing the menace. He however opined that shaping/deploying a legal dimension to mitigating extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa requires appreciation of the historical background of the Law in relation to poverty.



Tracing African legal provisions to pre-colonial the era up to the point of colonization, he observed that laws were initiated to checkmate the masses. From access to land, education and other resources, the law served to justify exclusion/inclusion of certain people.

According to him, this was the foundation of poverty in Africa and only a de-sectionalization of the concept of poverty can enable the law redress its creation. He further stated that the fewer people below the poverty line, the more harmonious the society would be and thus the need for the law to demolish existing social constructs that continue to ceil some people below poverty. Also, natural limitations such as gender, disability and age should be delimited by the law to address poverty.

Having established a problem statement bordering the law, he proceeded to proffering some solutions. Five thematic areas of concern were identified around the Constitutional provisions of Chapter Two and Four of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. These sections, according, to Dr. Bethel, define the fundamental and human rights of citizens respectively. Faulting the implementation of these provisions, he observed that if rights are upheld, poverty would likely not overwhelm people. He thus identified the five areas of concern as: right to access to land; criminal law administration; access to justice; administrative procedures of law and access to education.

Per right of access to land, he stated that the Land Use Act has successfully excluded a lot of Nigerians from accessing land which would have enabled productive activities (such as agriculture) to escape the poverty net. In his opinion, reorganizing the Act to broaden citizens access to land would significantly empower citizens to engage in productive activities to overcome extreme poverty.

He proceeded to discussing criminal law which he observes to be a carryover of colonial law which was designed to subjugate people. According to him, the law continues trend of penalizing the poor while shielding the affluent and this perpetuates poverty. The law should be reformed to be equitable.

This extends to access to justice where procedural justice (such as been detained without trial) remains a ban to justice. He suggested that application of justice instance from other jurisdictions such non-custodial sentences, mobile courts (to address distances to court for justice delivery resulting in adjournments) could be adopted to delimit access justice for the poor.

Citing the Mineral and Mining Act which was intended to enhance access to mining for small scale miners but has inadvertently served to further exclude this class of miners, he suggested a critical review of the administrative intents of legal provisions. He went further to cite the emphasis on years of experience as prerequisite for employment which has excluded many graduates from getting employed thus exacerbating the

unemployment problem and contributing to the poverty menace. This, according to him, can be addressed using the Law.

With reference to access to education, Dr. Bethel cited the National Tertiary Education Access Loan whose provisions have inadvertently excluded a significant party of intended beneficiaries. He noted that if the legal crafters understood that people are not been educated for themselves alone, but for the overall development of the society, they would be more intentional and strategic with the Law. He subsequently observed that reforming the Law can strategically facilitate universal education by widening the scope of education been a social service. The discrepancy of vocational education, polytechnic education and university education was also cited as one which perpetuates poverty and could be easily addressed by the Law.

Finally, he suggested that social welfare should stop been viewed as helping people but should be considered as an egalitarian provision for equity in society. Minimum wage, access to shelter, education etc. How can people be homeless, for instance, when many houses are empty and the Law cannot intervene? Beyond the poverty mentality which fuels aggrandizement, equity will likely assure a safe society.

Ultimately, the Law can be employed to ensure equity in access to resources that facilitate prosperity and emancipation from poverty. The Law shouldn't be seen to be helping the people, but facilitating equity.

### **Introduction of the Project by the Lead Researcher**

***Dr. Augustine Arimoro***

*Senior Lecturer in Law,*

*University of Roehampton London*

#### **□ Presentation Highlights**

Introducing the research as an ongoing project intended to culminate into a book publication, Dr. Arimoro emphasized that the goal is to learn from the Roundtable, stating that Africans shouldn't seek a template from the global North to solve her problems. This, he said, informed his decision to come home, to Africa's premier think-tank, to gain insights to resolving the poverty problem. He further stated that while poverty can't be eliminated, extreme poverty can be eliminated.

He restated that despite been of a legal background, he is a multidisciplinary researcher and this research is one of his researches geared towards publishing a book themed Right to an Adequate Standard of Living in Sub-Saharan Africa.

He subsequently expressed his profound gratitude to the Southland Methodist Trust for the funding support to carry out this research.

## Discussions

- Suggesting a practical approach to eliminating extreme poverty in Africa, Mr. Moshood Amuda suggested involving land resources experts in researches of this nature. This he said is premised on the fact that land is a major resource that determines the prosperity in any society. According to him, extreme poverty will be significantly reduced by addressing the distribution and access to land with strategically intentional policies crafted by land resources experts to address poverty. Stating that 80% of prosperous resources are from land, he stated that land use will play a significant role in eradicating poverty when matched with strategic vocational skill development.
- Alluding to a legal dimension, Dr Mohammad Amali queried the non-*justiciability* of legal rights as enshrined in Chapter two of the Nigerian Constitution. He suggested that research may thus be conducted seeking means to making provisions of the Law justiciable (enforceable).
- Taking an academic perspective, Dr. Yemi Fajigbensi observed that there isn't any social phenomenon that is as overstudied as poverty and yet extreme poverty persists, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. He further stated that if poverty is perceived as lack, then everyone is poor; situational poverty, generational poverty, rural poverty, urban poverty etc. These, according to him, are symptomatic conceptions of poverty which have made addressing poverty elusive. He subsequently suggested that the overarching form of poverty which exacerbates all other forms (including extreme poverty) is poverty of the conscience. Emphasizing the poverty of conscience, he asserted that despite solutions to extreme poverty being abundant in literature, the will to pursue these solutions remain significantly low or nonexistent. According to him, the elite class can end poverty if intentional strategies are pursued to address the situation. He thus concluded by stating that irrespective of solutions proffered, without the conscience being addressed, progress in eradicating extreme poverty will remain elusive.
- Alluding to Dr. Fajingbesi's submission, Dr. Usman Wali extended the discussion, seeking to clarify certain social constructs that fuel poverty prevalence. He stated that evidence in the literature reveals that about 60% of the Laws in Nigeria have provisions seeking establishment of a prosperous society and thus direct or indirectly seeking to mitigate poverty. Citing former Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida, as stating that policies abound to emancipate Nigerians from poverty, its implementation that has been a bane to actualizing this goal. Premised upon this, he reiterated the conscience issue identified by Dr. Fajingbesi, stating that the elite class continue to usurp provisions to mitigate poverty. He further stated that weak justice (or judicial) system has allowed for the usurpation to persist unchecked. Finally, he fingered

the hidden hands of neo-colonization as been a major fueling agent of poverty in Africa generally. According to him, Niger republic is a case in view of the colonial subjugation of a nation in sub-Saharan Africa. He subtly fingered the UK as a culpable hidden hand in the Nigerian scenario. He concluded by asserting that accountability of policymakers in government will significantly mitigate poverty in Nigeria and indeed sub-Saharan Africa.

- Taking an economist's perspective, Prof. Frank Ozoh stated that certain factors take precedence to eliminating extreme poverty in Nigeria of any society at all. According to him, social overhead cost or scarcity alleviation are primary economic measures government needs to pursue to pave the path to mitigating poverty. Per conscience, he stated that the lack of accountable systems fuels unconscionable behavior of policymakers and government agents. It thus behooves on citizens at such for as this, to seek establishment of systems and processes that will assure compliance and accountability.
- Referring to poverty as a wicked problem, Dr. Omoh maintained that the menace persists despite abundance of solutions marred by counterproductive non-administrative issues such as the conscience issue already discussed. Taking on the global economy of poverty, she further stated that certain parties actively seek continued existence of poverty while posturing to seek its end. She stated that some donor agencies, for instance, seek to maintain the show of been benefactors of poverty ridden nations while some donor receiving nations do not think above aids. Equity, according to her, would significantly balance this divide. She concluded that the elite class (within and across nations) ultimately have to sit up to address the poverty issue before it consumes them also.
- Asserting that the poor have the potential to either be productive or destructive in their state of poverty, Prof. Salihu stated that strategic understanding of this concept will significantly redirect the moral compass of elites on the need for urgency to address extreme poverty. Using Nigeria as example, he observed the prevailing descension of people into penury which portends significant danger in the face of our enduring insecurity challenges.
- Alluding to the submission on conscience been the core issue, Dr. Osaretin Okungbowa stated that governance plays a strategic role in eradicating extreme poverty as evident in various studies. Institutions, laws and mechanisms of exercise of governance must be reformed onboard the drive to eradicate extreme poverty. He further stated that leadership recruitment process from the local government, states to federal government needs to be reviewed and reformed to emplace leadership that appreciates the need for governance action against extreme poverty.
- Interrogating the submissions on conscience, Dr. Bethel Ihugba stated that conscience is like a wild being that needs to be tamed by the law which moderates the limits of acceptable behavior. He further stated that it is

imperative to redefine wealth and its distribution within conscionable limits as premise to drive the war against extreme poverty. Advocacy for good conscience and institutional/legal measures to hold everyone accountable is thus paramount. Stating the example of thousands of empty houses despite pervading homelessness, he stated that legal provisions to limit empty/unoccupied houses would go a longer way to address homelessness than government attempting to build more houses.

## **Closing Ceremony**

### **Vote of Thanks by Lead Researcher, University of Roehampton London, Dr. Augustine Arimoro**

In his brief remarks, Dr Arimoro thanked everyone present, especially the DG-NILDS, the keynote speaker and other researchers present, for the opportunity to leverage the Institute's expertise for this impactful research. He expressed his openness for future collaborations.

### **Vote of Thanks by the Representative of NILDS, Dr. Abraham Terfa**

Conveying the DG's warmest regards to everyone present, Dr. Terfa emphasized the fact that governance is multidisciplinary and it stands cardinal to resolving the poverty problem in a multidimensional approach.

## **Section Four: Major Findings/Observations**

The following are the highlights of the observations/findings of the Roundtable:

- i. Despite evidence in the literature documenting various research and policy directions aimed at addressing the menace of extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the problem continues to fester. Taking a legal perspective to address the menace, evidence points to non-enforceability of Laws aimed at mitigating poverty in Africa, especially Nigeria.
- ii. Specifically, it is observed that Chapter Two of the Constitution which makes provisions for Rights of Citizens remains unenforceable despite its wide reaching provisions. Also, Laws intended to ensure societal prosperity are observed to be subtly skewed to protect the elite, at the expense of the lower class, thus facilitating the cycle of poverty. Particularly, laws moderating access to factors of societal prosperity such as land (and its resources), education and justice.
- iii. Discussions also revealed a moral deficit or poverty of the conscience whereby the haves seek more, at the expense of the have-nots without a system (justice) to ensure equity and balance.
- iv. Despite the key role of governance in addressing the poverty problem, the lack of accountability and massive scale of usurpation of public resources

has ensured that government continues to fail in her role to mitigate poverty.

### **Section Five: Recommendations**

- i.* There's an urgent need for reorientation of poverty mitigating policies from ben viewed as helping the poor to been a basis for equity in society.
- ii.* Research and advocacy to establish enforceability of Rights in Nigeria.
- iii.* There needs to be renewed advocacy for conscientious thinking/action of the elite class to avert an implosive poverty state which is gradually occurring with the rising trend of dissentions and insecurity.
- iv.* There must be an intentionally strategic move to enthrone accountability in leadership across governance levels to ensure compliance to goals in the implementation of poverty eradication (ad related) policies.

### **Section Six: Conclusion**

The discussions at the Roundtable revealed existence of viable pathways to eradicating extreme poverty in Nigeria and indeed sub-Saharan Africa and these pathways aren't novel. However, intentionally strategic approaches must evolve to ensure a reorientation around the global economy of poverty and the enforceability of Rights to ensure accountability of governance to deliver policy intents for sustainable development. Unravelling the require approaches will be a viable agenda for the proposed research to effectively combat extreme poverty.

### **Appendix**

Pictures from the event





