

## **Family institution as a factor in poverty alleviation for sustainable development in Nigeria**

**Assoc Prof Alexander Ngozi Aniche**  
Department of Sociology Psychology  
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu

**Joseph Ikekhide Aigbiremhon**  
Department of Sociology Psychology  
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu

**&**  
**Aniche, Juliana Chinyeaka**  
Department of Sociology Anthropology,  
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu

### **Abstract**

*The family is the very institution to which we owe our humanity. Human beings are brought up in the family. Families exist everywhere on the planet and in different forms. Family experience is necessary to turn a new born into full human being with values and standards and the ability to live harmoniously with other people and contribute to poverty alleviation for sustainable development. Family is a social unit characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children born or adopted. Family is in fact a universal institution. Family performs and carry out fundamental societal functions and activities necessary for poverty alleviation and thus contribute to sustainable development. Family is regarded as the microcosm of the society, the extent to which the family succeeds in controlling the behaviours of its members and carry out its functions depict the level of orderliness and contribution to poverty alleviation and thus sustainable development in a given society.*

**Key Words:** family, family institution, poverty, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, Nigeria

### **INTRODUCTION**

Obviously, it is not simple and very easy to define family as it may at first have seemed as a social institution. Family is not just a group of people. A special relationship distinguishes the family from other types of social groups. To define those unique and special social relationships, however, is very difficult. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2004), family has often been regarded as the cornerstone of society. In pre-modern and modern societies alike, family has been seen as the most basic unit of social organization and one which carries



out vital tasks, such as socializing children. Most sociologists assumed that family life was evolving as modernity progressed and the changes involved made the family better suited to meeting the needs of society in poverty alleviation for sustainable development as is the case in Nigeria.

According to Iffih and Ezeah (2004) family is the smallest social unit, yet the most important primary group in any society. It is the basic social institution from which other institutions have grown as increasing cultural complexity made them necessary. When we speak of family, common sense suggests that a family is composed of a father, mother and their child (ren). According to Aniche and Onyia (2008), sociologists normally define family either by reference to a specific form of social organization or by reference to a particular set of social activities. Thus, Farley (1994) from point of view of social organization defined family as a social group of people related by ancestry, marriage or other committed sexual relationship or adoption and who live together. Also Akubukwe (1994) defined family as a social group whose members usually are related either through common ancestors or marriage and are bound by moral rights. With the reference to a particular set of social activities, Akoji (2013) defined family as a universal institution whose most important functions is socializing and nurturing the younger generation.

Family is variously regarded as the microcosm of the society, the extent to which the family succeeds in controlling the behaviours of its members portends the level of orderliness and contribution to the poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Thus, the important of this work cannot be over emphasized. The sustainable development can be fully realized in Nigeria when family institution performs the various functions of the family that lead to poverty alleviation.

### **Types of Family**

According to Otite and Ogionwo (2014) families are classified according to the number and generation of people involved in the family groups and the family leadership or power holder. The best known types include:



a. **Nuclear Family.** This type of family consists of a husband and a wife and their dependent children living together in a single dwelling. For Farley (1994) a nuclear family is made up of two or fewer generations who live together and it most often includes a husband, a wife and their dependent children. Nuclear family is also known as elementary family.

b. **Extended Family.** An extended family consists of two or more nuclear families. This type of family consists of several related persons such as a husband and a wife and their children, at least one of their sets of parents, as well as aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, all living together in a single dwelling or in close proximity. Hence, a man and his wife and children as well as his father and mother and their other children form one extended family.

c. **Patriarchal Family.** This type of family refers to family patterns where men are the heads of the families and they are to dominate the family decision making. According to Onwuzurumba (2008) any single parent (a man) family in any society is also a patriarchal family. In this case, the wife is not living in the family as a result of desertion, separation, divorce, death etc.

d. **Matriarchal Family.** In this kind of family pattern, it is the right of women in the society to dominate family decision making, living with their husbands notwithstanding. As the case may be, any single (a woman) parent family in any society is also a matriarchal family. In this case, the husband is not living in the family as a result of separation, divorce, death, desertion etc.

e. **Egalitarian Family.** This type of family pattern is common among working class couples in modern societies. In these family patterns, responsibilities and power or decision making are shared equally between husbands and wives. Family decisions are made jointly by the couple in the family.

## **FAMILY AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Family and other social institutions are a complex system of roles, expectations, and values organized around some specific human needs and aspirations. According to Onwuka (2009) family is set up with the primary aim of meeting specific system problems such as poverty entailed in social life. One of the major contributors to the current situation of Nigeria is poverty. According to Ekpe and Mama (1997) Sociological Theorists see poverty in terms of unfavourable conditions evidenced in the society as is the situation in Nigeria. The problem



situations and conditions in Nigeria are fall outs of poverty and the solutions rest with the family institution which is the microcosm of Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria has since the past neglected the family and the important of its roles as social institution. This negligence has brought the country into social confusion, different social problems such as insecurity which the country is passing through at present time. The evidences of the neglect of family institution and its useful roles abound in all aspects of life in Nigeria.

According to Onwuzurumba (2012) the many ways which family institution contribute to poverty alleviation for sustainable development include carrying out such activities and functions as reproduction and physical maintenance, socialization, social control, status placement, and achievement of psychological balance.

**a).Reproduction And Physical Maintenance:** The family is the only agency for legitimately reproducing the species which engage in different field of works in the society. Most of us owe our existence to the family and our debt extends far beyond birth itself. The human infant is a remarkably unfinished animal at birth, unable to fend for himself and survive. He requires years of care and guidance. Normally, the family provides, nurture and protection of the new born, feeding, clothing and sheltering until he is ready to leave the family nest and join the workforce in the society.

**b).Socialization of Children:** Not only does the family create and physically maintain children, it also carries out the serious responsibility of socializing each child. Socialization is the process beginning at birth through which one eventually adopts, as one's own the norms, values, and beliefs of one's culture, and the roles appropriate to one's social position in the society. Children are mostly taught by their families to conform to socially approved patterns of behaviour. It is the way that the culture of the society is passed from one generation to the next. It teaches the norms and values attached to particular roles or positions in the society, such as how to be a student, a shop and industrial worker, a teacher, a friend or a parent and even governor and president. Family is an ideal school, which all classes and most people attend when they could. Exactly what behavior constitutes proper performance, of course, differs according to social class, religious, racial, ethnic and other factors. Societal demands for conformity are nonetheless powerful and pervasive. Socialization is not merely learning to

conform. It teaches us how and when not to conform or how to bend the rules in particular situations.

**c) Social Control:** Although social control is closely related to socialization, it is different enough to warrant attention. Early sociologists tended to regard social control as little more than sexual control, but the regulation of sexual behavior is now considered only one important aspect of the whole process. Social control comes from external pressure and social sanctions administered primarily by parents, but also by school authorities, law enforcement officials, community leaders, and so forth. Socialization, by contrast, denotes the internalization of norms so that we become self-regulating. The source of sanction constitutes the difference between the two forms of behavioral control.

The importance of social control is that we learn the socially appropriate ways for realizing our personal interests. The family thus equips us for responsible participation in the society at large. According to Aroh (2012) Durkheim claimed that social controls tamed our essential egoistic, selfish drives and transformed us into moral, realized individuals.

**d) Status Placement:** In Nigeria, especially in Igbo land social identity is fixed by family membership by being born to parents of a given status position whose characteristics the children initially internalize. Class outlook is also acquired, so that children receive from their parents' basic values, attitudes, and definitions of reality. Because children internalize family beliefs and attitudes, they are treated and defined by others as extensions of the social identity of their parents; the children of the "best family in town" are treated as such.

The ascribed social status acquired from one's family orientation, however, does not automatically persist throughout one's life. Once launched from the nuclear family, an individual is responsible for achieving and maintaining a status that will prevail during his adult years. As a general rule, the social training acquired in the family of orientation fosters a continuity of status when a family of procreation is established. The likelihood of drastic upward or downward social mobility is thus significantly curtailed, but not prevented.

**e).Maintaining Psychological Balance:** physical maintenance, socialization, social control, and status placement are all largely directed towards the needs of the individuals in the family and prepare the individuals in contributing in poverty alleviation in the society. Promotion of



psychological balance is a function that primarily meets the needs of adults. Of course even children have psychological needs that require gratification. The nuclear family is an important source of affection, love, and social interaction.

The pressure experienced by adults in modern life as they engaged in one occupation or the other, contributing to poverty alleviation programmes intensify their need for a place where psychological balance can be restored. In the world of secondary relationships outside the home, adults have to be constantly concerned about the image they project. Role management takes a great deal of psychological energy and generates anxiety as well as frustration. The modern nuclear family, then, has become important as a place of refuge for adult members who need a release from the pressures of contemporary social life.

## **CONCLUSION**

The family is a specialized institution that significantly has a concrete position in poverty alleviation for sustainable development in Nigeria. As a subunit of society, the family institution possesses boundary lines from the points of inter-change and supply with other subunits of the social order. Thus, there are major linkages between the family and economy, polity, religion, education and even the science and technology through which family institution contribute to poverty alleviation for sustainable development in Nigeria. Providing labourers or the economy is the family's first function. Family provides members with replacement not only for the economy but for society as a whole which would soon die without the infusion of new members. The family is the only institution legitimately charged with the responsibility of procreation. The family controls the quality as well as quantity of new members through the socialization process. The family gives an individual a basic orientation towards the value of productive labour in general as well as the fundamental skills for entering the labour market. A badly socialized individual may turn to be an unreliable, irresponsible or incompetent worker. The polity is equivalent to what we call government in contemporary societies like Nigeria. The family supplies members into political institution. We are not born with a commitment to democracy; we acquire it largely through our training in the family. The family responds by providing shapes to our political attitudes and at times our attachment to particular political parties. The family even supports the polity with compliance in turn for



decisions taken by the polity. The opportunities provided by the family institution should help the country to crawl out of the entrapment of poverty into sustainable development.

### References

- Akoji, O. (2013). *Basic Social Institutions in Fundamentals of Sociology: An Introductory Text*. Edited by Okau, A, Metiboba, S and Tinuola. Ado Ekiti: Apex Publishers Ltd.
- Akubukwe, D. (1994). *Sociology: Themes and Explanations*. Owerri: Opinion Research and Communications Ltd.
- Aniche, A and Onyia, P (2008). *Sociology: the Scientific Study of Society*. Enugu: Ifeson Prints.
- Aro, A(2012). *Introduction to Sociology*. Enugu: Infinity Publications.
- Farley, J(1994). *Sociology New Jersey: Prentice Hall*.
- Haralambos, M. and Holborn, M (2004). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd.
- Iffih, B. and Ezeah, P (2004). *Sociology of the Family*. Enugu: John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.
- Onwuka, J(2009). *Basic Sociology*. Okigwe: M.B. Authentic Press.
- Onwuzurumba, H (2008). *The fundamentals of scientific sociology: a rudimentary compendium of sociological paradigms and theories for undergraduates*. Enugu: Rumbas Research and Publishing.
- Onwuzurumba, H (2012). *The Grand Masters of Sociology*, Enugu: Rumbas Research and Publishing.
- Otite, O. and Ogionwo, W (2014). *An Introduction to Sociological Studies*, Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc.
- Salawu, B. (2007). *Sociology: Concepts and Themes, An Introduction*. Ibadan: Cresthill Publishers Ltd.
- Uwakwe, E (2003). *The Basics of Sociology*. Nsukka: Liberty Printing and Publishing Co.