



# Democratic Governance and Poverty Reduction in the Niger Delta, Nigeria (1999 – 2015)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the impact of major poverty reduction policies in the Niger Delta during Nigeria's democratic era (1999-2015). This is on the proposition that democratic regimes would, having derived their mandate from and being representative of the people, be responsive to the evident pressing problems in the society. The paper adopts the Marxian Political Economy theoretical framework, which underscores the class character of state policies as well as the importance of qualitative and historical analysis. The paper also generated critical primary data using a questionnaire based on sample size of 2,400 households in three states (Bayelsa, Edo and Rivers) out of the nine Niger Delta states that were selected, using random sampling. The main findings of the study show that Nigeria's democracy has not significantly ameliorated poverty in the Niger Delta; and that democracy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty. The study therefore recommends a democratization that is more participatory, transparent, accountable and responsive. The poverty reduction strategies should be collaborative, multi-dimensional and cognizant of the socio-cultural and environmental features of the various regions.

**Keywords:** Democracy; Poverty reduction; Ideal democracy-development curve; Imperfect (abnormal) democracy-development curve; Niger delta.

## 1. Introduction

The notion of national development presupposes a democratic structure of government as well as a system of justice which protects all the people from actions inconsistent with just laws that are known and publicly accepted ([The Report of the South Commission, 1993](#)). However, it does seem that there is a negative correlation between democracy and development in the Niger Delta. The seemingly deepening levels of poverty by a vast majority of the people of the Niger Delta over the years (and equally across various regimes) calls for serious and sustained study. The conundrum of poverty in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the pathetic paradox that the region that generates the oil wealth that sustains the Nigerian state is among the least developed in the country. This is even more worrisome when compared to other regions of the world with similar oil and gas resources. When poverty is further measured in terms of access to social and physical infrastructure, the level in the Niger Delta is glaringly high. Focusing attention on the relationship between poverty reduction and the political context of the poor, ([United Nations Development Programme, 2003](#)) notes that,

Ending human poverty requires a democratic space in which people can articulate demands, act collectively and fight for a more equitable distribution of power...Government that acts in the interest of poor people is easier to achieve in democratic political systems where the poor represent a significant electoral bloc.

The above remark by the UNDP illuminates the preference for a democratic configuration especially as it relates to the task of eradicating poverty. To what extent has Nigeria's democratic experience justified the above assertions? Is democracy a necessary and sufficient condition for poverty reduction? Poverty reduction is a key variable in the development equation. As [Seers \(1969\)](#) aptly remarked,

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore, what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capita income doubled.

Within 'Seer's model', poverty, is perhaps, the most important and critical variable since poverty does not only stifle development but is always embedded in the inequality gap and unemployment ratio in any given society. The assessment of poverty levels is thus a central and germane method of assessing the development trajectory of any governmental system. [The Report of the South Commission \(1993\)](#), tends to lend credence to the foregoing when it noted that the first objective of development,

...must be to end poverty, provide productive employment and satisfy the basic needs of all the people, any surplus being fairly shared. This implies that basic goods and services such as food and shelter, basic education and health facilities and clean water must be accessible to all.

The Report further notes that;

In addition, development presupposes a democratic structure of government, together with its supporting individual freedoms of speech, organization and publication, as well as a system of justice which protects all the people from actions inconsistent with just laws that are known and publicly accepted.

It is within this context that the primacy given to poverty eradication as the first goal in both the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is easily comprehended. [The Economist \(2013\)](#), gives a graphic and gloomy future of poverty in Africa vis-à-vis the rest of the world to show just how serious and deep-seated the problem is:

Only in Sub-Saharan Africa will there be large numbers of people below the poverty line. Unfortunately they are currently too far below it. The average consumption of Africa's poorest people is only about 70 per cents a day- barely more than it was 20 years ago. The continent has made big strides during the past decades. But even 20 more years of such progress will not move the remaining millions out of poverty. At current growth rates, a quarter of Africans will still be consuming less than \$1.25 a day in 2030. The disproportionate falls in Africa's poverty rate will not happen until after that date.

The Nigerian situation appears to mirror the African scenario as the poverty of its citizens seems to be deep-rooted. The perplexing paradox is that Nigeria, which is about the sixth largest exporter of oil and the first in Africa with its potential for poverty reduction, is among the poorest countries of the world. [Ogwumike \(2002\)](#) showed that the number of those in poverty increased from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985; it declined slightly to 42% in 1992 and increased very sharply to 67% in 1996.

The Report of the [National Bureau of Statistics \(2012\)](#) shows that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010 as the number of Nigerians living below poverty line rose from 68.7 million to 112.5 million (69% rise in poverty incidence) within the aforesaid period. The report further remarked that previous figures on unemployment in Nigeria corroborated this scenario as the number of unemployed members of the labour force grew from 12.3% in 2006 to 23.9% in 2010. However, during the same period, the economy grew strongly at an average annual growth rate of about 6.6% (approximately 7%), making it the 5<sup>th</sup> fastest growing economy in the world in 2010 at 7.87% real growth rate. This represents the paradox of growth in the face of poverty and inequality as well as a negation of the trickle-down theory.

[World Bank Report \(2011\)](#), report shows that poverty incidence is even worse when measured using international poverty line-population below \$1.00 in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms in 2010 was 61.2 per cent while those below \$1.25 a day by 2003/2004 was 64.41 per cent and 68 per cent in 2010. The population below \$2 a day in 2010 was 84 percent. The reports of the UNDP appear to lend credence to the above scenarios. In 2003, the country was ranked 152 out of a total of 175 nations in terms of human development. In 2011, it was 142 out of 169 nations and this has further deteriorated to 153 out of 187 nations in 2013 ([United Nations Development Programme, 2013](#)). The 2015 report placed Nigeria 152 out of 188 nations ([United Nations Development Programme, 2015](#)).

Within the Nigerian entity, the Niger Delta region does not appear better off especially when viewed in terms of her enormous resources and contribution to the national coffers. This comparison shows a gloomier result when juxtaposed with other oil producing regions around the world. The perplexing paradox is that in spite of the huge oil wealth generated from the region, and its contribution to the economic wellbeing of the nation, the Niger Delta is enmeshed in unacceptable levels of squalor and degradation, which may not be unconnected with the political blindness, ideological leanings and development models of successive governments and regimes that controlled the state machinery.

[United Nations Development Programme \(2006\)](#), describes the region as;

Suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor and endemic conflict... the majority of the people of the Niger Delta do not have adequate access to clean water or health-care. The poverty and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil has become one of the world's starkest and most disturbing examples of the "resources curse".

As the [United Nations Development Programme \(2006\)](#) aptly remarked;

There exists a negative relationship between abundant resources and development in the region. Analysis of poverty and human development in the region paints a dismal picture. The region's human development index score, a measure encompassing longevity of life, knowledge and a decent standard of living remain of abysmally low value of 0.564.... the region rates far below that of countries with similar oil and gas resources.

The frustrating irony from the perspective of the people of the Niger Delta is that there appears to be a negative nexus between the enormous oil and gas resources and their well-being. The Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006) appears to reflect this view point when it notes that;

The critical issue in the Niger Delta is not only the increasing incidence of poverty, but also the intense feeling among the people of the region that they ought to do far better. This is based on the considerable level of resources in their midst and the brazen display and celebration of ill-gotten wealth in Nigeria, most of which derives from crude oil wealth. This to a large extent explains why there is so much frustration and indignation in the region.

The fact that the deepening levels of poverty can be alleviated under conditions of democratic governance has been emphasized ([United Nations Development Programme, 2013](#)). Some states in Africa (e.g. South Africa and Ghana) and indeed Nigeria tend to underscore the imperativeness of a democratic system of government in the attainment of development ideals in general and poverty reduction in particular. This ideological leaning appears to

be corroborated when we recall that the essence of all democracies is “to provide the conditions for the full and free development of the essential human capacities of all the members of the society” (Macpherson, 1972). Commenting in this regard, Beetham (2006) notes that; “A confidence in ordinary people’s capacity to take reasoned decisions about their own lives and, by extension, the life of the communities in which they live has always formed the bedrock of democratic thinking”.

The foregoing tends to suggest that the country’s transition to democratic rule in 1999 has contributed little to the emancipation of the majority of the people from the menace of squalor, abject poverty and inequality. There seems therefore to be a lacuna between system cum policy objective and policy outcome. There further seems to be a negative correlation between Nigeria’s democracy and poverty reduction in the Niger Delta. The positive link between democracy and poverty alleviation appears negated. The bedrock of democratic thought should supposedly make the governments to be more responsive to and accountable for solving the needs of the community, including consistent and sustained positive response to the needs of the poor who comprise the majority. A democratic system of government therefore provides the requisite structure and opportunities for emancipation, poverty reduction and societal development in general. In the light of the above conundrum, an objective assessment appears compelling to gauge the relationship between Nigeria’s democratic experience and her poverty reduction index particularly in the Niger Delta.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The vast literature on democracy and poverty reduction appear to support the idea that poverty reduction presupposes a democratic structure of government (Green, 2012; Macpherson, 1972; The Report of the South Commission, 1993). The proponents of this school of thought hold that there is a positive link between democracy and poverty reduction. In other words, democracy appears to be a prerequisite for poverty reduction. Nonetheless, it does also appear that there is a negative correlation between democracy and poverty reduction in Nigeria. This is a gap in literature which this study intends to fill by interrogating the existing theory of democracy and development and highlighting the un-developmental nature of policies in democracy.

In interrogating the democracy-development nexus and the impact of Nigeria’s poverty reduction strategies during the 1999-2015 democratic regimes a governing and incisive theoretical framework appear indispensable. This is even more compelling when we note that poverty is multi-dimensional and cuts across economic, political, legal and socio-cultural milieu. It is against this background that this paper adopts the Marxian Political Economy approach.

Intrinsic in Marxian political economy perspective is the notion that men develop ideas and institutions in response to their material conditions of existence. Man is essentially a producer and *homo economicus*. Labour creates wealth and capital is meaningless without labour (Marx, 1990). Beyond the interaction and relations of men with the means of production is the social relations of men in production. These underscore the notion of classes and social groups in production; the forms of ownership of the means of production; the forms of distribution of material wealth and the contestation and class struggles that ensue (Marx and Engels, 1965).

As society traverses and develops its notion of production, exchange and consumption in a bid to sustain and reproduce itself, classes emerge, contradiction and conflicts exist and class struggles inform all engagements and the state emerges to mediate these conflicts and class struggle (Ekekwe, 2009). The Political Economy method is, therefore, a tool of social analysis that focuses on the scientific study of social reality, social change and society. The relevance and application of this theoretical framework is appreciated when we bring to the limelight the various interests and powerplay in governance as well as the nature and patterns of interactions between individuals, the state, market and societies and the institutions that evolve to serve and/or defend these interests. It is within this context that Nigeria’s poverty reduction strategies and democracy are examined.

This study adopted the descriptive and historical research designs. The descriptive method reviews existing conditions of investigating variables while the historical method systematically captures relevant past data that have bearing on the present. Historical materialism, dialectical materialism and class analysis are important tools of analysis intrinsic in the political economy method. This informs their adoption in this research work. All the Heads of Households in the nine Niger Delta states, (about 3,122,458 persons), constitute the population of this study. A total of 2,400 Heads of Households were systematically selected from ten (10) Enumeration Areas (E.A.s) in eight Local Government Areas of the studied states: Bayelsa, Edo and Rivers constitute the sample size. The stratified multi-stage sample design was adopted in selecting the three states out from the nine oil producing states of the Niger Delta. The data were derived from both Primary and Secondary sources.

The structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the selected households in each of the selected EA’s in the selected Local Government Areas of the states under review. The secondary sources were obtained from Libraries; offices of the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics and other related agencies; the internet - World Wide Web resources as well as other relevant published studies. The study involved descriptive and inferential statistic. Descriptive statistic such as frequency, percentages, tables, charts, weighted mean and standard deviation were used in testing the research questions. While the inferential statistic which includes multiple regression analysis, correlation analysis using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient and the Z-test statistic were used in testing reliability and hypotheses at 5% level of significance. These analyses were done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 in addition to the relational content analysis adopted for the qualitative data.

### 3. Conceptual Analysis of Democracy and Poverty

Like most concepts in the social sciences, the term democracy has been subjected to several definitions, which tend to reflect the ideological dispositions, leanings and idiosyncrasies of the authors. The plethora of definitions tend to suggest some kind of conceptual discord. As [Sadeeq \(2008\)](#) remarked,

The concept of democracy defies a universally acceptable definition. Hence, while the conceptualizations are dependent on individual perceptions of scholars... the practice of democracy however varies from one country to another and it is a function of values, beliefs, orientations... held sacrosanct by each state.

To [Gallie \(1962\)](#), it is an essentially contested concept like power, justice, peace and equality. Arising from the foregoing, scholars tend to argue that democracy has the problem of “homonymity” (one word meaning many things) and that the concept’s classificatory utility is close to zero; its boundaries are fuzzy and fluid ([Ojo, 2008](#)).

However, there seems to be a common trend that runs through these various conceptualizations. Unfortunately, even these common trends appear to be nebulous in real definitional and conceptual terms. They are themselves victims of definitional pluralism like the mother concept itself. For instance, the democratic feature of representation is in itself a subject of much controversy. Scholars have queried how representative should a democracy be; to what extent is a representative government democratic? What is the implication of Mitchel’s Iron Law of Oligarchy in a democratic setting? These and many more pose serious concerns. Discouraging as this may seem to appear, this study shall attempt to put forward what seems to be the general and specific characteristics of democracy.

The term democracy can be seen in both procedural and philosophical terms. These respectively reflect the notion of the process and principle in democracy ([Baradat, 2008](#); [Ighodalo, 2008](#)). As a process, democracy is simply a way of making decisions, that is, collective decision making. [Beetham \(2006\)](#), definition tends to fit into the democratic thought of the *process democrats* when he stated that “democracy can be most simply understood as a procedure for taking decisions in any group, association or society, whereby all members have an equal right to have a say and to make their opinion count”. For Beetham, a system is said to be democratic if its procedure for decision making are cognizant of the opinion of all of its members. [Newton and Deth \(2007\)](#), tend to lend credence to this process view when they defined democracy as a political system whose leaders are elected in competitive multiparty and multi candidate processes.

In philosophical terms, the *principle democrats* regard the ultimate goals of democracy as more important than the procedures employed to meet those goals. For instance, they draw a set of principles and inherent rights for which any democracy ought to acknowledge, respect and protect. These include the realization that man is the centre of all governance structures. Thus, the place of man is central and germane. Arising from this is also the equality principle of all men as well as the inalienable right to life and of liberty. As [Baradat \(2008\)](#) aptly remarked; ‘although certainly not uninterested in process, principle democrats regard the goal of democracy as more paramount than the procedures...insisting that a democratic government be dedicated to improving the conditions of life for all of its people and that some mechanism exist by which the people in the society can exercise a degree of control over their leaders and express their wishes and needs’.

[Macpherson \(1972\)](#), appears to be reasoning along these lines when he was interrogating the democratic content of Lenin’s Vanguard state. He argues that the answer depends on how we see democracy, that is, either in a narrow sense or a broader sense. In a narrow sense, he notes that democracy is simply a system of choosing and authorizing governments. It is a system in which the majority actually controls the rulers and those who make and enforce political decisions. In a broader sense, he contends that democracy means much more than a system of government and implies an ideal of human equality, not just equality of opportunity to climb a class ladder, but such an equality as could only be fully realized in a society where no class was able to dominate or live at the expense of others. Both as a procedure and principle, the essence of a democracy is to provide full opportunities for all members of a polity to realize their full potentials in a composite society. It is against this background that ([Ighodalo, 2008](#)) stated that “democracy is believed to possess sets of principles and processes that stimulate the innate abilities of the people, while at the same time create the environment of freedom and liberty germane to the realization of human development”.

Human fulfilment and the attainment of the ‘good life’ by all appear to be the cardinal cannons of democracy. The elements of human fulfilment and human development are essential ingredients of a democracy. Seen in this way, democracy and development appear to be intrinsically related as they both seek an ultimate goal of attaining the highest possible potential for all the citizens of a state. The positive and analytical linkages between democracy and development is indeed a subject for further inquiry as there seem to be some negative correlations in certain social formations. Ideally, a democracy seeks to promote the welfare and wellbeing of her people. It is against this background that [Ake \(1994\)](#) advocates for the democracy of empowerment, that is, “that which invests heavily in the upliftment of ordinary people so that they can participate effectively in governance and be more competitive in promoting their material interests.” A democracy therefore is better appreciated within the context of its people-centred approach in the conception, implementation and management of public affairs. Democracy presupposes that all citizens as equals have the right to participate in the decision-making process of the state.

Conclusively, it is important to note that democracy is not just statistical or numerical majority. The ultimate aim of a democracy is the enthronement of a just and egalitarian society. It is not just a sway of the majority. If the majority must have its way, the minority must not only have its say but its say must be considered. Democracy seeks to ensure that all men as equals have at least a say in the activities and institutional machineries that affect their livelihood.

[Dworkin \(1990\)](#), captured this when he opined thus;



True democracy is not just statistical democracy, in which anything a majority or plurality wants is legitimate for that reason, but communal democracy, in which majority decision is legitimate only if it is a majority within a community of equals. That means...that each individual person must be guaranteed fundamental civil and political rights no combination of other citizens can take away, no matter how numerous they are or how much they despise his or her race or morals or way of life. That view of what democracy means is at the heart of all the charters of human rights.

Democracy grants to all the right of voice and a corresponding right to have that voice heard and considered. But do the poor who are often in majority in many societies actually have a voice? Are their voices heard and considered? If the poor people's voices are actually heard and considered, it does seem that they might not have been in their persistent state of penury. To this extent therefore, it seems appropriate to opine that the existence of widespread poverty is an indictment on democracy.

Poverty is multi-dimensional and interlocking, and its dimensions are mutually reinforcing. It defines various levels of want and deprivations that constrain a person from fully realizing his or her potentials in society. Poverty can be construed from three key approaches; Economic; Political and Legal/ Human Right. Each of these approaches illuminates basic elements that impinge on the concept of poverty.

What appears to be a consensus is that the prevalence of poverty is a negation of human development. In other words, widespread poverty undermines real development (which is human-centered) and true democracy (which is developmental). The prevalence and entrenchment of poverty in many societies (especially in the developing countries) has led to the description of poverty as not just a measure of inequality but as a crime against humanity. As Shaw, (c.f.(Green, 2012) remarked; "the greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty." To Mandela (2005) "massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils."

Arising from the backdrop of focusing only on one or two elements of poverty, scholars have attempted to recognize the multi-faceted nature of poverty by putting forward a more holistic and all-encompassing definition of poverty. To this end, (Faleti, 2012) describes poverty as;

a situation where there is deprivation that prevents people from satisfying their basic needs.... a lack of sustainable livelihood or more broadly in terms of barriers to everyday life. It depicts a denial of choices and opportunities; a violation of human dignity, lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society and leads to insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It also creates susceptibility to violence and often implies living in marginal or fragile environments.

Faleti, as can be seen, lucidly illuminates cogent elements that characterize and also tend to perpetuate the scourge of poverty. His recognition of the importance of choices, opportunities as well as capacity to participate effectively in society are worthy of note as these cannot be held in isolation in any meaningful discourse on poverty reduction. Sen (2000), couches the concept simply as lack of freedom. This includes economic unfreedom, social or political unfreedom. To Sen (2000), therefore, development must institute a process of expanding real freedoms that people enjoy. The Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006) neatly but graphically captures the multi-dimensional definition of poverty in a more prosaic manner when it noted thus;

Poverty is hunger; 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. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is about powerlessness, lack of representation in decision making in the society and lack of freedom to express oneself.

What is deducible from the foregoing is that those who live in conditions of poverty lack a broad range of socio-economic, socio-political, legal and human rights and may be described as poor or impoverished. The concept of poverty therefore reveals various levels of want and deprivations that characterize the poor. Shaffer (1998) summarizes the main understanding of the term as follows: Physical Deprivation; Social Deprivation; Human Freedom Deprivation

What is worthy of note is that the various dimensions of poverty are not only interlocking, they are mutually reinforcing. Beyond that, the lack of voice and power appear to be a cogent factor that has kept the poor in a perpetual state of poverty. As the World Bank published 'Narayan (2000) remarked "again and again, powerlessness seems to be at the core of the bad life."

#### **4. Poverty Reduction Strategies and Interventionist Measures**

Several poverty measures and interventionist policies have been pursued by the government. Each of these measures and strategies tends to reflect the ideological leanings of the various regime types, whether military or civilian. Table 1 presents the various regimes strategies and programmes as well as the nature of intervention during the pre-democratic era.

**Table-1.** Anti-Poverty Programmes during Nigeria’s Pre-Democratic/military Regime: 1986-1997

Programme	Year Established	Target Group	Nature of Intervention
Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)	1986	Rural Areas	Feeder Roads, rural water supply and rural electrification.
National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	1986	Unemployed youths	Training, finance and guidance.
Better Life Programme (BLP)	1987	Rural women	Self – help and rural development programmes, skill acquisition and health care.
People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	Underprivileged in rural and urban areas	Encouraging savings and credit facilities
Community Banks (CB)	1990	Rural residents, micro enterprises in urban areas	Banking facilities; credit facilities
Family Support Programme (FSP)	1994	Families in rural areas	Health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, etc.
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	1997	Rural areas	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.

Source: Oladeji and Abiola (1998)

As can be seen from above, several measures were instituted by the government to tackle the menace of poverty and promote development. However, the impact of these programmes felt short of its goals as poverty was on the increase. As Ogwumike (2002) noted, ‘on the whole, poverty alleviation programmes/efforts in Nigeria failed to produce the desired results’ Table 2 below tends to corroborate the above assertions.

**Table-2.** Poverty Incidence in Nigeria, 1980 -2000

Year	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in Poverty (Million)	Poverty Incidence (%)
1980	65	18.3	28.1
1985	75	34.7	46.3
1992	91.5	39.1	42.7
1996	102.3	67.1	65.6
1998	118.4	81.2	79.2
2000	126.1	96.91	84.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 1996; 2000

The foregoing holds true for the Niger Delta region. Tables 3 and 4 below reveal that the people of the Niger Delta region suffered same fate as the rest of Nigeria in terms of their poverty profile.

**Table-3.** Nigerian Poverty Profile 1980 / 1996

	1980 (%)	1985 (%)	1992 (%)	1996 (%)
National	27	46	42	66
Northeast	36	55	54	70
Northwest	38	52	37	68
Central	32	51	46	65
Southeast	12	30	41	54
Southwest	13	39	43	61
South-South	13	46	41	58

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

**Table-4.** Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta 1980 / 1996

	1980 (%)	1985 (%)	1992 (%)	1996 (%)
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2004).

During the period under review (1999 – 2015) the democratic regimes that ensued further embarked on various anti-poverty programmes and projects that were aimed at changing the poverty narrative of the country. Lots of funds were budgeted for and expended in order to achieve these goals. For instance, on assumption of office in May 1999 the democratic government in power earmarked the sum of NGN10 billion to tackle the twin problem of poverty and unemployment in the country through its Poverty Alleviation Programme, PAP (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1999).

Specific attempts to develop the Niger Delta region were made by the government through the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 and the establishment of the Ministry of the Niger Delta in 2008. These establishments were specifically aimed at infrastructural development, environmental transformation and socio-economic empowerment of the people. Table 5 below presents a synopsis of the various attempts at poverty reduction as well as the nature of intervention.

**Table-5.** Poverty Reduction Strategies and Interventionist Measures during Nigeria’s Democratic Regime 1999 – 2015:

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Year Established</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Nature of Intervention</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME (PAP)	2000	Unemployed, youths, rural farmers.	-Job creation -Create a credit delivery system from which farmers would have access to credit facilities; -Launching of universal basic education. -Increase adult literacy & shore up health care delivery system.	Over centralization, nepotism, uncoordinated design, irregular payment of stipends, poor monitoring, logistics constraints, corruption, failure to identify the poor and the nature of their poverty.
NATIONAL POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMME (NAPEP)	2001	Unemployed, youths, Rural Areas; the underprivilege	-Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) -Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS) -Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) -Natural Resource Development & Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)	Over politicization, poor funding, favoritism, corruption, poor project implementation.
NDDC	2000	The people of the Niger Delta/The nine oil producing states and the impoverished in the region.	Development of social & physical infrastructure; technology; economic & environmental remediation & stability; human development; pursuit of a peaceful environment.	Top-down approach; poor project planning, poor project quality, high level of corruption and lack of transparency and accountability, poor level of participation of the people of the Niger Delta in policy/programme conception, implementation and management, inadequate funding.
POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPERS: NEEDS 1 & 2	2003-2007 2008 - 2011	The Poor, the underprivilege and middle class, private sector.	Poverty Reduction; Wealth creation; Employment generation and Value re-orientation, anchored on three pillars; • Empowering people and improving social delivery, • Fostering private sector led growth through creating the appropriate enabling environment, and • Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government, by changing the way government does its work.	Lack of sectoral linkages, poor policy periodization, lack of concrete project and programmes design, poor funding and lack of political will amongst the states and Local Governments.
MINISTRY OF	2008	The Niger	-Infrastructure Development	Lack of consistent

THE NIGER DELTA		Delta Region	-Economic empowerment, social transformation. -Security of the Niger Delta Region.	policy direction, corruption, poor financial management, nepotism.
TRANSFORMATION AGENDA (TA)	2011-2015	-The indigent -The private sector -Public sector, Ministries, Departments; Agencies MDA.	-Economic Coordination and support for private investment. -Infrastructural development. -Public Service reform -Land use reform -Electoral reform. -Power sector reform. -Job creation. -Niger Delta Development. Etc coordinated by the National Planning Commission. (NPC)	Lack of sectoral linkage, policy inconsistency, high level of corruption amongst the MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies), Macroeconomic instability and volatility.

Source: Ogwumike (2002); Onwumele (2012); Osisioma (2012); Central Bank of Nigeria (2013)

An objective assessment and review of the various interventionist measures of the government suggest that the desired impacts were not fully realized or attained within the period under review. This is in spite of the huge sums expended across the various regimes. In appraising the National Economic, Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), *Nna and Igwe (2010)* observed that government’s poverty reduction programme was yet to be complemented by other macroeconomic policies that would yield the desired results of poverty reduction, wealth creation and capacity building. They noted that in spite of the massive inflows of revenue, very little impact was felt on the level of poverty reduction, as over 70 per cent of Nigerians remained poor.

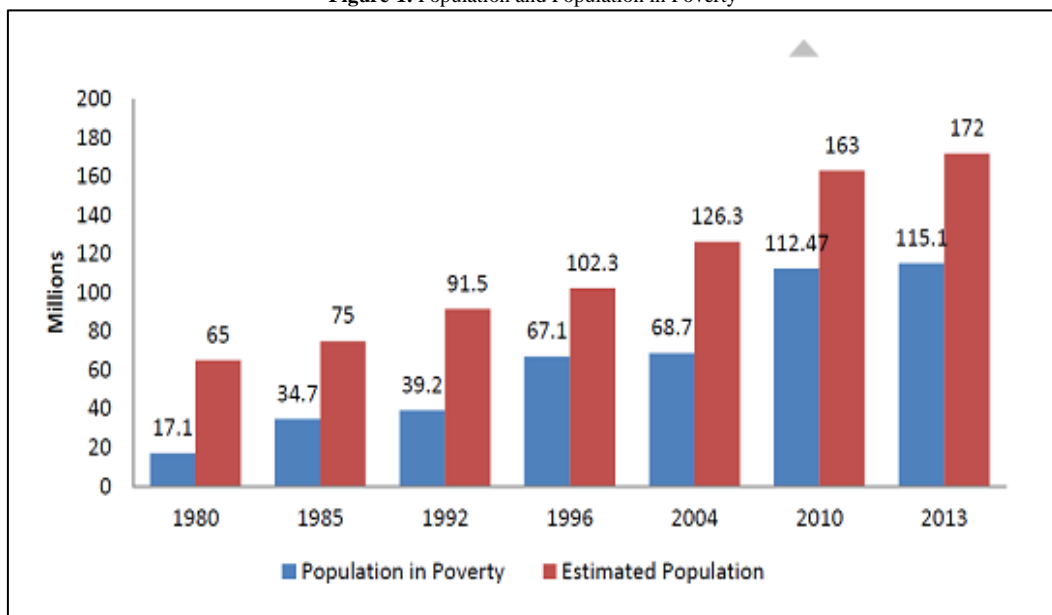
Contributing in this regard, *Okafor (2016)* noted that despite the 5.6 per cent annual GDP growth between 2006 and 2013 the overall standard of living, poverty and income inequality were on the rise. He observed that poverty level rose from 53.3 percent in 2003 to 61.2 per cent in 2010 while income inequality widened from 40.0 per cent in 2004 to 42.95 per cent in 2010. Unemployment rate, he also observed, increased from 18.0 per cent in 2006 to 27.1 in 2014, while per capita GDP narrowed from US\$3,200 in 2007 to US\$2,970 in 2014. The below *Table 6* and *Figure 1* appear quite illuminating in this regard.

Table-6. Relative Poverty Headcount (1980 – 2013)

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Population (Million)	Population in poverty (Million)
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
1998	79.2	118.4	81.2
2000	84.5	126.1	96.91
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47
2013	33.1	172	115.06

Source: FOS, 2000; National Bureau of Statistics HNLSS 2010 and World Bank Report (2013).

Figure-1. Population and Population in Poverty





What is worthy of note from the above is that there has been a steady growth of the number of people living in poverty in Nigeria across various regime types. The spatial distribution of poverty also shows a steady rise in rural poverty with significant numbers of dwellers. As the FOS reports reveal while the number of the rural poor (RPov) was 48.47% and 70.02% in 1990 and 1998 respectively, the figures rose to 72% in 1999, 73% in 2000 and 76% in 2003. These numbers suggest a policy gap between objectives and outcome, democratic governance notwithstanding.

The above evidential illustrations seem to negate the link between economic growth and poverty reduction. The 2012 Report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) corroborates the foregoing when it showed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010. It notes specifically that the number of persons living below poverty line rose from 68.7m to 112.5m. More importantly, the report remarks that, during the same period, Nigeria economy grew strongly at an average annual growth rate of about 6.6%, making the country the 5<sup>th</sup> fastest growing economy in the world in 2010 at 7.87% real growth rate.

In a similar vein, Akpomovie (2011) observes that the various measures of government have had so little impact on the poverty of the people of the Niger Delta and created a striking human development dilemma. More than that, Akpomovie argues that behind the Delta's poor performance on human development, is a complex brew of economic, social, political and environmental factors. Social instability, poor local government, competition for economic resources and environmental degradation has taken a toll. The below Table 7 shows the poverty level of the nine Niger Delta states of Nigeria.

**Table-7.** Absolute Poverty Headcount vs Food Poverty in the Niger Delta (2010)

States	Absolute Poverty	Food Poverty
Abia	50.2	66.30
Akwa Ibom	51.00	67.90
Bayelsa	44.00	72.60
Cross Rivers	60.40	73.40
Delta	53.80	74.80
Edo	64.10	78.60
Imo	39.40	67.00
Ondo	57.70	70.10
Rivers	47.20	92.30

Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics, Vol. 1, National Bureau of Statistics (2017)

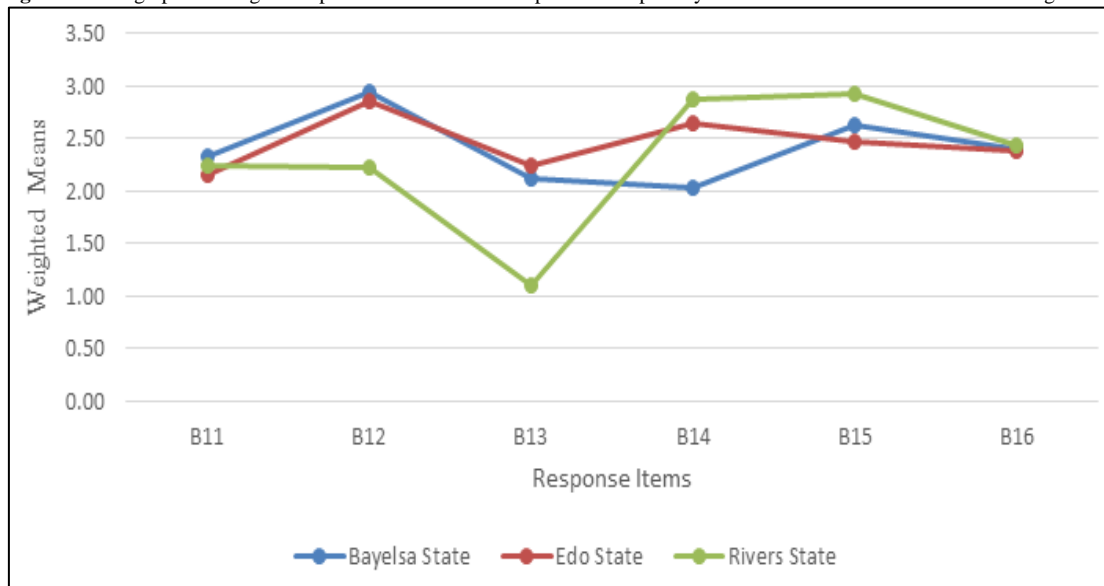
The Niger Delta poverty profile shows that the menace of poverty has remained unabated. Victor (2010), notes that the Niger Delta region is the worst hit by the menace of poverty. He adds that the Niger Delta region is the least developed region in Nigeria with its per capita income below the national average of the \$280. World Bank Report (1995), vividly illustrates the view when it notes thus;

Despite its vast resources, the region remains poor, (GNP) per capita is below average of \$280... education levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian Children attend primary schools this level drops to 30% in some parts of the Niger Delta. The poverty level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria.

It is important to remark that the World Bank Report (2016), based on NLSS 2003–04 and GHS 2010–11, 2012–13, noted that the total number of the poor in the south declined by almost 6 million between 2004 and 2013 while the number increased by almost 7 million in the north within the same period. This paper holds that when poverty is construed using the multidimensional index (MPI) which takes cognizance of the human development index (HDI), physical quality of life index (PQLI), voice, political participation and socio-economic freedom the Niger Delta is worse off. This is even more appalling when compared with other oil producing regions of the world with higher HDI coefficients.

A review of the results of the critical primary data generated in this study as appearing hereunder is also worthy of note. Figure 2 below shows the impact of the democratic experience on poverty reduction in the studied states in the Niger Delta.

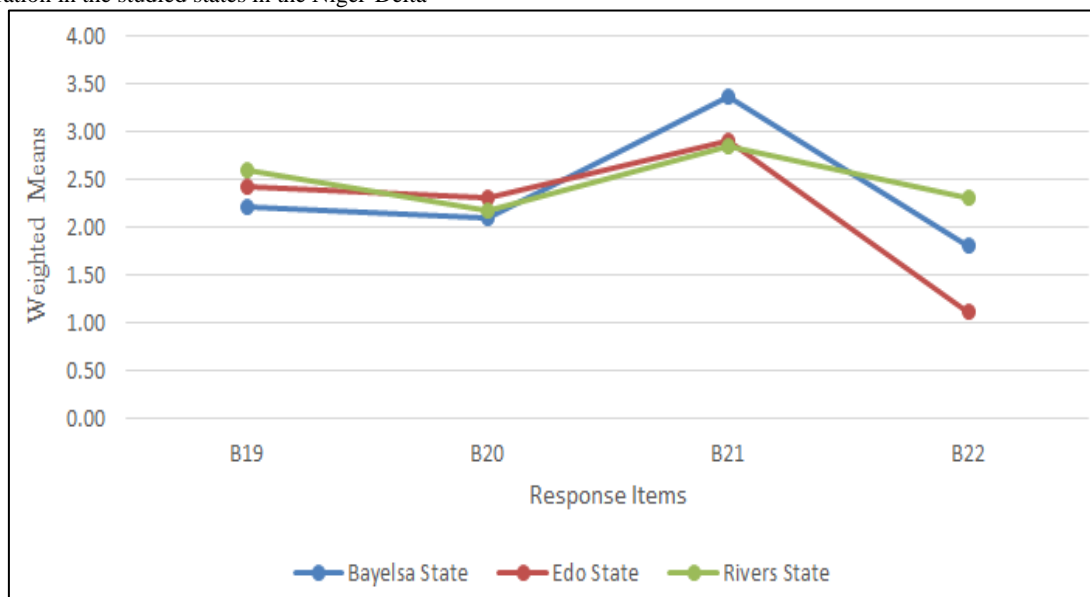
Figure-2. Line graph showing the impact of the democratic experience on poverty reduction in the studied states in the Niger Delta



The results of the scores of the weighted mean and standard deviation of responses of heads of households on the impact of the democratic experience on poverty reduction in the Niger Delta between 1999 – 2015 show that the respondents disagree that the democratic government has significantly performed well in terms of poverty reduction, provision of social amenities and better salary/wages to workers ( $\bar{X} = 2.24$ , Std= 0.91;  $\bar{X} = 1.82$ , Std= 0.94;  $\bar{X} = 2.40$ , Std= 0.98) respectively, since the weighted means were less than the criterion mean of 2.5. Also, the respondents agree that the democratic government has significantly performed well in the improvement of health and medical facilities, job creation, education standard and better facilities ( $\bar{X} = 2.52$ , Std= 0.82;  $\bar{X} = 2.67$ , Std= 0.85;  $\bar{X} = 2.67$ , Std= 0.78). Conclusively, the results reveal that the grand weighted mean score was 2.39, which is less than the criterion mean of 2.5. Thus, Nigeria’s democratic experience has not witnessed the introduction of policies that significantly ameliorated poverty in the Niger-Delta.

Furthermore, figure 3 below reveals the impact of the poverty reduction strategies adopted by Nigeria’s democratic government on poverty reduction in the Niger Delta in the areas of improved agricultural land reform in the Niger Delta and enhanced fishing and farming activities; access to micro credit and improved entrepreneurship and skill acquisition; enhanced telecommunication since 1999-2015;

Figure-3. Line graph showing the impact of poverty reduction strategies adopted by Nigeria’s democratic government on poverty amelioration in the studied states in the Niger-Delta

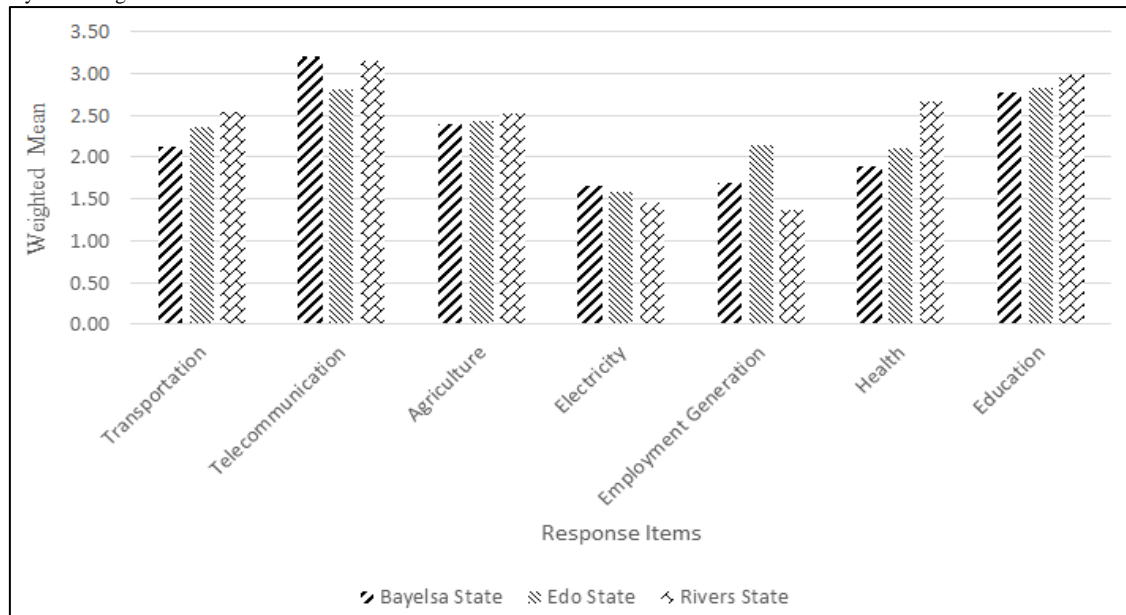


The result shows that the respondents disagree that the poverty reduction strategies of the government have improved agricultural land reform in the Niger Delta and enhanced fishing and farming activities; provided greater access to micro credit and improved entrepreneurship and skill acquisition and that they have enhanced the provision of water, sanitation and road network ( $\bar{X} = 2.41$ , Std=0.78;  $\bar{X} = 2.19$ , Std= 0.64;  $\bar{X} = 1.74$ , Std= 0.71), since the weighted means were less than the criteria mean of 2.5. However, the respondents agree that the democratic

governments reforms and development strategies have enhanced telecommunication since 1999-2015 ( $\bar{X} = 3.04$ , Std= 0.59) since the weighted mean is greater than the criteria mean of 2.5. Conclusively, the result reveals that the grand weighted mean score was 2.35, which is less than the criterion mean of 2.5. Thus, poverty reduction strategies under Nigeria’s democratic era have not significantly ameliorated poverty in the Niger-Delta

With respect to the extent to which democracy in Nigeria (1999 – 2015) has created a necessary and/or sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty in the Niger-Delta, the result below is worthy of note.

**Figure-4.** Bar chart showing the extent to which Nigeria’s democracy from 1999 to 2014 is a necessary and sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty in the Niger-Delta



The results reveal that the respondents agree that the performance of government from 1999-2015 in telecommunication and education has significantly reduced poverty ( $\bar{X} = 3.06$ , Std= 0.60;  $\bar{X} = 2.87$ , Std= 0.66). Also, the respondents disagree that the regime from 1999-2015 has performed well in transportation, agriculture, electricity, employment generation and health ( $\bar{X} = 2.35$ , Std= 0.70;  $\bar{X} = 2.45$ , Std= 0.76;  $\bar{X} = 1.57$ , Std= 0.78;  $\bar{X} = 1.74$ , Std= 0.69;  $\bar{X} = 2.23$ , Std= 0.63) since the weighted means were less than the criterion mean of 2.5.

Conclusively, the results reveal that the grand weighted mean score was 2.32, which is less than the criterion mean of 2.5. Thus, the regime since 1999-2015 has performed poorly in reducing poverty in the Niger Delta. Therefore, we can posit, based on the above results, that while democracy in Nigeria is necessary (as it led to the improvement in telecommunication and education et al), it is not a sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty as it has not significantly reduced poverty in the Niger Delta. Democracy, like any other form of government, is a necessary mechanism for the functioning of the state and tool for public administration. The system itself does not guarantee poverty reduction unless it conscientiously pursues policies that are pro-poor.

The poor performance of the democratic government thus, has significant nexus with the ineffectiveness of poverty reduction strategies adopted by government in the amelioration of poverty in the Niger-Delta. This goes a long way to explain that even though a democratic government has been in place, reform strategies geared towards poverty reduction or eradication have not had direct impact on the rural populace who to a large extent are targets of poverty reduction schemes.

## 5. Summary and Discussion of Findings

The results of the analysis show that pro poor policies and programmes during Nigeria’s democratic experience have not significantly ameliorated poverty in the Niger Delta States under review. In terms of effectiveness of programmes and reforms with particular reference to the NDDC, NAPEP and the Ministry of Niger Delta, the people appear not to have had any significant benefit to elevate them from their conditions of penury and impoverishment. The standards of living have not improved significantly as the foregoing results reveal. Using the adopted Physical Quality of Life (PQLI) index which measures access to basic necessities, the results reveal that people of the region lack decent housing, toilets, drinking water supply, cooking equipment and poor transportation type. The results reveal that there is a significant linear relationship between the measure of living standard and poverty in the Niger Delta. The net effect is that the people of the Niger Delta are living in unacceptable conditions of poverty. It is worthy of note that the extant conditions of the subject states reflect the extant conditions of most of the states of the Niger Delta region. They share similar historical, geographical and exploration experience that tend to lock them in conditions of marginalization, expropriation, degradation and impoverishment. Ekekewe *et al.* (2010), acknowledged the foregoing when they noted that the problems of the Niger Delta are homologous as they exhibit a measure of similarity suggesting the same origin.

Alapiki *et al.* (2013), in the report of opinion poll on good governance in Rivers State: October 2007 – June 2013, sponsored by Rivers State Economic Advisory Committee (RSEAC), (2013) appear to corroborate the research findings with respect to the poverty situation of the region. The report remarks that; ‘GNP per capita in Rivers State is below the national average of \$280 and unemployment in Port Harcourt, the premier city of the Delta, is as high as 30 percent’. The Report further remarked that government’s poverty reduction measures were below the people’s expectations and performance of government in contracts award, contract execution, transparency and accountability returned very negative feedback. The RSEAC research report corroborated and confirmed an earlier United Nations Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006) which had noted that ‘... the majority of the people of the Niger Delta do not have adequate access to clean water or health-care and that the poverty and its contrast with the wealth generated by oil has become one of the world’s starkest and most disturbing examples of the resources curse’.

The UNDP report further held that long years of neglect and conflict, however, have left a large part of the population with a siege mentality, particularly the youth. This amidst others, appears to account for the state of restiveness and insecurity assailing the region. The [United Nations Development Programme \(2006\)](#) Report contended further that while

Several years of military rule have left their mark on the culture of governance, with rulers not acknowledging any obligation to be accountable to citizens. *Civil democratic rule has not changed the situation much* because elections are flawed in several ways. (emphasis mine)

Contributing in this regard, [Nna and Igwe \(2010\)](#) noted that the level of corruption and electoral malpractices debilitate the capacity of government to effectively mobilize the people to a true economic development strategy resulting in the long run to the anti-people stance, repressiveness and alienation. [The Report of the Transparency International \(2014-2015\)](#), further lends credence to the endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria. Previous reports of Transparency International show that corruption in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003 were worse than the military regimes of 1996 – 1998.

Beyond the UNDP 2006 survey, the Report of the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, ([Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey, 2010](#)) appears to further corroborate our research findings when it showed that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010 which was the period the so-called pro-poor policies and programmes were already mature. In terms of income inequality, the South-East and South-South regions were worse off especially when compared to national average. While the national average increased by 4.1% between 2004 and 2010, income inequality in the South-East and South-South States increased by 18.1% and 12.8% respectively. The research findings show that poverty situation of the people in the Niger Delta region has not significantly improved despite huge finances spent by successive governments to alleviate poverty. Most of the efforts made by the government, though not enough are mostly concentrated in urban centres or areas. For instance, the presence of tricycle popular called ‘KEKE’ are mostly found in urban centres as a way of alleviating poverty.

[Ighodalo \(2012\)](#), observed that the ‘KEKE’ has reduced the ‘army’ of unemployed Nigerians by providing them with tricycles, thereby adding to the means of transportation. This however, does not translate to a significant improvement in the poverty situation of the rural areas where the bulk of the rural poor reside. It thus reveals that poverty alleviation strategies by the government and especially the National Poverty Eradication Programme have not fared well in the rural areas. A visit to several of the rural areas or communities covered by this study reveals that the peoples’ standard of living is still poor. Some interviews conducted in the course of this study also show that these people do not have an idea about most of the programmes or intervention strategies rolled out by the government to curb the poverty situation. This position lends credence to [Ighodalo \(2012\)](#) where he argued that despite the efforts made by the government to alleviate poverty in the country, available evidence reveals that the phenomenon [poverty] has not changed in any qualitative way. He posited that the situation in the oil-rich Niger Delta was instructive:

while the internal resources needed to support eradication of poverty from the Niger Delta region are available through oil resources, poverty eradication has remained a problem of astonishing dimension. Oil exploitation by multinational oil companies in collaboration with government have destroyed farmlands, aquatic life and other sources of livelihood of the rural populace and further worsened the rate of poverty and underdevelopment of the region.

There has not been any significant improvement as recorded under Nigeria’s democratic experience in the region. The living conditions of the people in the rural areas, as shown by this study, have remained essentially unaffected by the poverty alleviation programmes adopted by the Nigerian government over the years. Again, we find support for this result in the work of [Egweni and Udo \(2013\)](#) in which they assert that the most common features of rural Nigeria are poverty, unemployment and inequality in incomes as well as absence of social amenities. Despite the fact that the Niger Delta region is one with oil and natural gas resources that sustains the economy of the nation, no significant improvement has been made towards the living conditions of the rural people. This again corroborates [Egweni and Udo \(2013\)](#) who maintain that “it is most disappointing to note that such essential services like water, electricity, health, housing, roads, schools and other social services are limited and low in standard”. This position is supported by the data generated for this study.

Notwithstanding the increasing poverty level in the region, most respondents’ responses indicate that there is significant improvement in the telecommunication sectors. The telecommunication sector is noted for this improvement following the reform in ownership and provision of GSM services. This aided creation of multiple streams of income for most rural dwellers who engaged in providing phone-call services etc as well as ease of communication and better flow of information and voice over internet protocols. Nevertheless, these improvements at least tend to suggest that a democracy is necessary for poverty reduction. An improvement in the living standard



of the Niger Delta would imply a drastic reduction in the number of slums that harbour the rural poor. The poverty alleviation programmes would have taken into consideration the environment in which the people dwell. The persisting presence of slums is an indication that the poor still live in abject poverty (Egweni and Udo, 2013).

To this end, it has been observed from this study that several poverty alleviation programmes that were aimed at addressing poverty in the region appear not far-reaching to actually alleviate or address the sufferings of the people. The inability of the programme to meet its targets is the most reason why poverty in the region is alarming or increasing by each passing day. The situation appears to have been worsened by corruption, bad governance and insincerity on the operators of the programmes. The enthronement of democracy in Nigeria since 1999 has not translated effectively to an improvement in the standard of living of the rural populace of the Niger Delta, particularly Bayelsa, Edo and Rivers States for which this study focused on. The World Bank's Report (2014) appears to further lend credence to the research findings when it noted that 83.9% of Nigerians are living in poverty. It further noted that;

The number of Nigerians living in poverty is not decreasing. Due to rapid annual population growth averaging about 3 percent, Nigeria needs to experience a strong reduction in the poverty rate in order to reduce the absolute number of the poor. The new estimates ...imply that the number of poor Nigerians did not decrease between 2010/2011 and 2012/2013, remaining at 58 million.

What is deducible from the foregoing is that democracy in itself appear incapable of eliminating poverty. As our findings show, Nigeria's democratic experience has not significantly reduced poverty in the Niger Delta. This ideological position seems to be supported by Varshney (1999) when he contends that democracies are incapable of eliminating poverty. He holds that authoritarian regimes that pursue the right economic policies are in a better position to reduce poverty more than democracies. In a related survey, Fabella and Oyales (2008) using the Freedom House Democracy Index notes that politically repressed countries, on average, have better economic growth and development performance above the politically free countries. They add that there appears to be an inversely proportional relationship between democracy and poverty reduction within the confines of developing countries. It is against this background that they conclude that there is a strong negative relationship between poverty reduction and democracy. What the above further seem to buttress is that democracy in itself does not eliminate poverty, but economic strategies do. The government that is not pro-poor, focused and goal-oriented cannot lift the people from their conditions of penury.

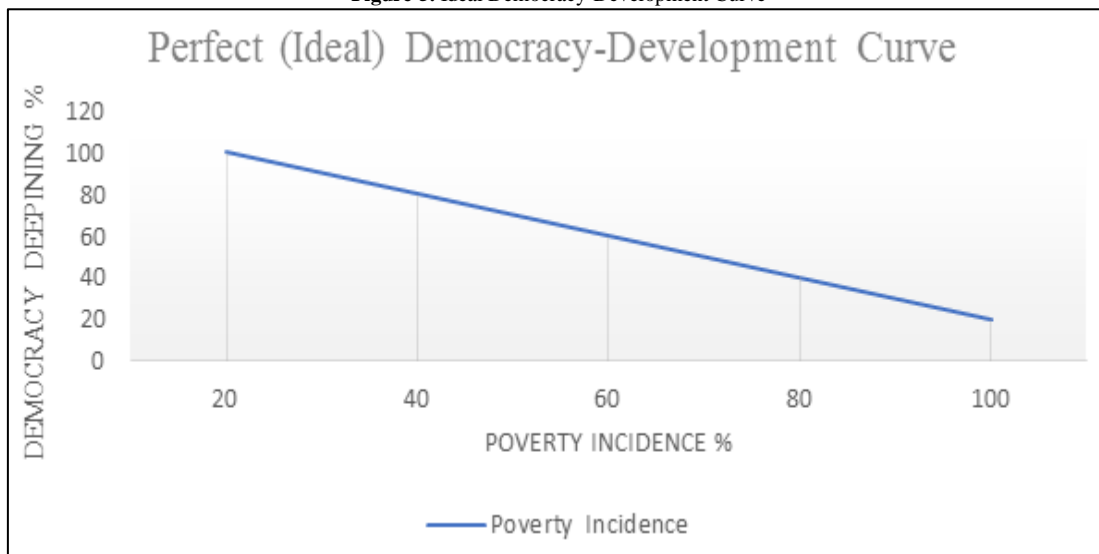
Democratic politics is class based and while the inherent majoritarian concept is requisite for the purpose of securing votes and forming the government, the actual running and functioning of the government is elitist and oligarchic. This appears to form the bedrock of Robert Mitchel's Iron law of Oligarchy which tends to show the elitist nature of all governments be it a democracy or otherwise. What this explains is that only a few classes of persons run the machinery of government. If the interests of those few do not coincide with the interests of the majority that elected them, then such populist agenda as poverty reduction would be relegated. It is the privileged class that determines what policies, programmes and projects to pursue and how they are funded and administered. This further explains the top-bottom and ineffective approach to poverty reduction adopted by successive governments. Most Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Programmes-NEEDS/NAPEP/NDDC were determined by the Federal Government without any clear input from the local communities. These programmes eventually became immersed in prebandalism and favouritism. The NDDC projects for instance were criticized for being a medium of appeasing political loyalists through the uncoordinated award of contract Okolo (2014) supports the foregoing when he notes that in spite of NDDC's clear mandate and fairly reasonable funding, the commission failed to resolve the perennial conflicts in the region by embarking on programmes and projects that are not sustainable. Supervision and quality control of most of these projects are either poor or wholly absent. These same privileged class define social and economic justice as they deem fit in accordance with Thrasymachus' postulations. (Ndu, 1998).

From the political economy approach adopted in this study, it can be seen that there appears to be a strong class bias in favour of the ruling class (and petty bourgeoisie) and the relegation of populist agenda that do not seem to further their personal aggrandizement. This further explains the expenditure patterns of government which tend to favour recurrent expenditure over capital expenditure. The impact of this is readily appreciated when we note that recurrent expenditure favours more of those in government as it tends to fulfil their bogus lifestyles and needs (e.g. salaries, running and inflated operating cost) as against investment in capital projects. In Rivers State for instance, during the military era, out of a total budget of N3,079,522,111 in 1997, the capital expenditure was N1,000,871,508, while recurrent expenditure was N2,078,650,603 representing 67.49% of the entire budget. In 1999, out of a total budget of N6,998,819,875, the capital expenditure was N2,358,148,380 while the recurrent expenditure stood at N4,640,671,495 representing 66.30% of the entire budget. The budget summary shows that recurrent expenditure still has preeminence over capital expenditure in most of the states and Local Governments (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2013). Thus, the expenditure patterns appear not to have changed irrespective of the country's transition to democratic rule.

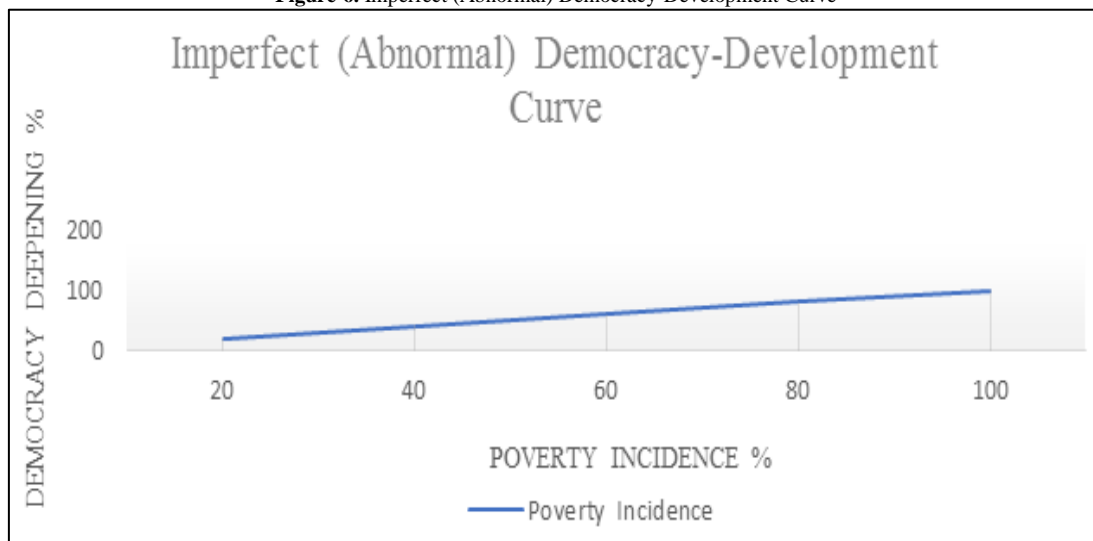
During the military era in Nigeria, little attention was paid to key primary welfare sectors such as education, health, agriculture, water supply and housing. The same trend continued unabated during the civilian regimes which tends to suggest that the requisite paradigm shift is yet to occur, the transition to democratic regime since 1999 notwithstanding. Thus, while democracy appear to be growing in geometric progression (i.e. electoral democracy by way of the transition to different civilian regimes), poverty seems to be growing in same geometric progression instead of the reverse. An ideal democracy-development model/curve should show a downward spiral of poverty level as democracy deepens. Graphically represented, this should slope from left to right like a typical 'demand curve' signifying that the more democratic the government is (democracy deepening), the less the incidence of

poverty in the society (*ceteris paribus*) and the imperfect (abnormal) model on the other hand would slope from right to left, like a typical ‘supply curve’ signifying that the more democratic the government is (perceived to be), the more the incidence of poverty (poverty aggravation).

**Figure-5.** Ideal Democracy-Development Curve



**Figure-6.** Imperfect (Abnormal) Democracy-Development Curve



With democracy as an independent variable, the above graphs show the impact of deepening democracy on the incidence of poverty. The imperfect (abnormal) curve shows the un-developmental nature of democracy in certain nations like Nigeria, as this study tends to suggest. It may be more appropriate to rename these democracies as *demon-cra*tic societies where evil (injustice) permeates the nucleus of the governmental system, travestying justice and repugnant to equity and good conscience. It is within this context that [Ake \(1994\)](#) posits that the democratization occurring in Africa is disempowering instead of emancipating, hence his preference for a social democracy which invests heavily in the upliftment of ordinary people to enable them participate effectively in governance and be more competitive in promoting their material interests.

Reinforcing the class character of the state in capitalist formations, [Ekeke E. N. \(2015\)](#) notes that ‘in the interplay between the nature and value of human life vis a vis the state and capital, the people for whom they should serve have been seriously shortchanged both conceptually and empirically’. He adds that, ‘our claim to the practice of liberal democracy notwithstanding, the human person has been devalued and his political will subverted by the bearers of capital and the managers of the state’.

True democracy ought to be people oriented and emancipatory. Where this is not the case as the research findings suggests, then the utility and preference of democratic governments appear diminished. The prevalence of sustained poverty and entrenched impoverishment appear to be a denial of socio-economic justice and an affront to democracy.

## 6. Conclusion

The results and findings from this research work show that Nigeria’s democracy (1999-2015) has not led to a significant amelioration of poverty in the Niger Delta. The results further show that the Nigerian democratic government’s key poverty reduction strategies (NEEDS, NAPEP, NDDC) have not significantly ameliorated poverty

in the Niger-Delta, and that democracy is not a sufficient condition for the reduction of poverty. There exists, therefore, a negative nexus between democracy and poverty reduction in Nigeria. What the above further seems to buttress is that democracy in itself does not eliminate poverty, but economic strategies do. The government that is not pro-poor, people-focused and goal-oriented cannot effectively drive poverty reduction initiatives that could free the people from the shackles of want and deprivation.

Democratic politics is class based, and this work reveals a strong class bias to the detriment of the impoverished and underprivileged class in society. The adoption of the political economy method illuminates further that the multifarious poverty reduction measures, strategies and projects seem to serve the interest of the governing class more than anyone else. The character of the Nigerian democratic state shows a lack of such democratic ideals as accountability and responsibility. The high incidence of poverty and diminishing standards of living in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general is an affront to democracy. This strongly suggests a disconnect between the goals of the people and the government implying a lacuna between system cum policy objective and policy outcome.

The ideal social contract that serves as the bedrock of democratic thought appears severely breached and compromised in the situation studied here. Democracy in both procedural and philosophical terms underscores process and principle respectively. Procedural democracy enunciates the methods of choosing and authorizing governments. This lends credence to the entire spectrum of the country's electoral system and institutions and their ability to conduct credible, free and fair elections. Democracy in philosophical terms emphasizes the inherent principles of democracy which revolve around the ideal of equality, liberty, justice, socio-economic and socio-political rights and above all that man is the centre of all governance structures. The philosophy of democracy, thus, extols such ideals as transparency, accountability and responsibility. The prevalence of sustained poverty in the Niger Delta as shown in this work implies that democracy in both procedural and philosophical terms have been compromised. Nigeria's democracy appears not to be participatory, transparent, responsible and accountable and seem to have lost the emancipatory and developmental vigour and virtue associated with democracy. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that the 'security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.' The severity of social deprivation, abject poverty, filth, squalor and endemic conflict prevalent in the Niger Delta region can rightly be interpreted against the declared objective, as evidence of the failure of governance and a lucid example of 'resource curse.'

## **Recommendations**

In line with the research findings, this study recommends adopting a long term and multi-dimensional approach in tackling the menace of poverty. This implies broadening the conceptual and causal framework as well as the creation of social safety nets and functional palliative measures in order to mitigate vulnerability. Beyond that, this study recommends the strengthening of Nigeria's democracy by making it more participatory, transparent, accountable and responsible. This includes overhauling the electoral system and embarking on deep-rooted reforms including but not limited to building institutional capacity. This institutional capacity building should cut across all the paraphernalia of the government including but not limited to the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA). What is required in this regard is a strong institutional base and not strong personalities operating in isolation within the system and wielding enormous powers. The poverty reduction strategies should be institutionalized and made sustainable rather than being political programmes of the government in power which in most cases do not outlive the initiating regimes.

Furthermore, the operation of a true federal system of government and separation of powers where the various constituents are truly co-ordinate and independent will not only curb executive arbitrariness that often leads to corruption and administrative tyranny but will guarantee the voices of the poor as a legal prerequisite. The poverty reduction initiatives of the government should be collaborative and local inputs from the grassroots should form the bedrock of the strategy papers.

The poverty reduction strategies of the government should be cognizant of the historical, cultural and environmental features of the various states and regions in order to be better targeted and therefore, more effective. These poverty reduction strategies should appropriately target and above all, locate the poor who are mainly in the rural areas. Focus should be on the basic and immediate needs, like housing schemes, portable water supply, electricity, health, education, (especially primary and secondary education), modern skills acquisition and entrepreneurship in the first instance as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship studies at the tertiary level. The promotion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises through access to flexible credit facilities are also necessary for the reduction of unemployment. Adequate funding of programmes and projects is key, but more importantly efficient management of available funds and resources are sine qua non for the success of poverty reduction programmes.

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