

AICAD: A BEACON OF HOPE ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION

A Presentation by

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*"Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met me outside my house. Look at my house and count the number of holes (in the wall). Look at my utensils and the clothes I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you can see. What you see is poverty."
Ex-Mau-Mau Freedom Fighter - Kenya.*

Introduction

Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing mankind and the miseries it inflicts should be checked urgently to improve the quality of human life. It prevails when one cannot afford a decent life. Being a multidimensional phenomenon, it is a state of human deprivation with regard to personal incomes, clothing, housing, health care, education, sanitary facilities and human rights.

About one and a half billion people in the world live on less than US\$1 a day. Majority of them are found in the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The situation is worsened by the fact that many of them are found in the harshly fragile and vulnerable areas such as those with saline soils, arid conditions, degraded or hilly. Some of these areas have experienced severe environmental degradation that can also be attributed to poverty among the inhabitants.

In a country where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, and where most of the developing countries have this feature, poor agricultural systems worsen the poverty situation by pushing up the cost of living. It is not surprising therefore that a relatively greater incidence of poverty prevails in the rural than in the urban sectors. For instance, overall rural poverty in Kenya is about 52 percent compared to 49 percent in the urban sector. It is disheartening that poverty is rampant among the female especially those in the urban sector where 63 percent of them are considered to be poor (GOK, 1996).

Two of the basic questions that need to be addressed in a bid to tackle the problem of poverty relate to what the causes are and whether or not they can be eliminated. The possible effective measures that can be taken to alleviate it should also be analysed.

Causes of Poverty

Although the specific factors that cause poverty may vary with countries, there are fundamental factors that predispose a country to poverty. One of these is lack of adequate income generating opportunities. A problem arises even where the income generating opportunities are abundant but unevenly distributed. Worse still, the poor may lack the necessary skills and productive resources such as financial credit and land to size and exploit the opportunities.

However, the three East African countries are counted among the poorest countries of the world. Taking the case of Kenya, wealth distribution is uneven with a huge proportion of wealth in very few hands. While the bottom 20 percent of the Kenyan population enjoys only 2.5 percent of the total income, the top 20 percent receive more than 50 percent. The poor state of wealth distribution is severe amongst 22 of the poorest countries and Kenya is only exceeded by Guatemala, South Africa and Brazil with a per capita incomes of US\$1,340, US\$ 3,160 and US\$ 3,640, respectively.

Malnutrition is a major component of the problem of poverty with more than 20 percent of children below the age of five suffering from complications associated with it. This has severe socio-economic implications with regard to school dropout rates, infant mortality and others. It further exacerbates disease complications such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and

tuberculosis among others. It is also associated with hidden hunger and the nutritional deficiency disease that constantly plagues the poor communities.

Thus, poverty is brought about by such factors as unemployment, landlessness, poor infrastructure, insecurity and cattle rustling. Lack of basic social-economic services like health and education, coupled with inadequate credit facilities, high incidences of corruption and underdeveloped human resources are known to accelerate poverty levels.

In Kenya, for instance, 76 percent of the poor cannot afford private health care while 81 percent of the urban poor rely on public health facilities whose services are overstretched. However, 20 percent and 8 percent of the urban and the rural poor, find government health services unaffordable. Fifty-eight and 56 percent of the same groups of people do not seek public health services due to the unavailability of drugs. Besides, only 37 percent of poor mothers give birth in hospital compared to 58 percent of the women living above the poverty line.

Due to the high cost of education, 13 percent of the urban poor have never attended school at all while the comparative figure for the rural poor is 29 percent. It is only 12 percent of the rural poor who have access to secondary education compared to 28 percent of the urban poor.

Gender disparities have grown wider especially in education where the girl child drops out of school early and is forced into early marriage leading to more than 50 percent gap in attendance at secondary and tertiary levels of education. Regarding employment, about 69 percent of the active female population work as subsistence farmers compared to 43 percent of the men.

Readily accessible reliable safe drinking water is a major ingredient in good living standards. In Kenya, over 50 percent of the households lack access to safe drinking water and rely on unsafe water for their domestic and other needs. These are comprised of rain and unsafe water from unprotected wells, lakes, rivers, ponds and vendors. The solution to this problem alone would go along way in easing some of the discomfort experienced by the rural and urban poor as well as ensuring safety from waterborne diseases. This is coupled with provision of adequate sanitary disposal systems.

Overall, life expectancy declined from 59.5 years in 1989 to 54.7 years by 1999. Hunger, malnutrition and disease, particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic has exacerbated this decline. Poverty has continued to adversely affect participation in social and political processes and denied life choices while the poor are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters.

Poverty Reduction Initiatives

The fight against poverty, ignorance and disease has been a major goal of the Kenya government since independence. In an effort to address the poverty problem, governments of the three East African countries, namely: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, drew up poverty reduction strategy papers as blue prints for the future social-economic development in the region. Generally, the strategies embraced in the blue prints are

participatory in nature with emphasis being laid on involvement of communities at all stages of problem identification, evaluation, and prioritisation.

The thrust of the blue prints is to improve the quality of life of the poor and the general population, ensuring good governance and security and achieving an overall sustainable economic growth and structural transformation leading to poverty reduction. Consequently, the priority areas in poverty reduction include improved agriculture and overall rural development, human resource development, physical infrastructure, information technology, public administration, trade, tourism and industry, public safety, law and order and gender status.

It must be realised that Food Security, defined by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) as access by all people at all times to enough food to maintain an active and healthy life is a key issue in poverty alleviation. After all, a hungry man is an angry man with little energy to direct towards meaningful development.

Income deficiency is a severe problem that hampers access to food and other social amenities like education. One of the ways of overcoming this problem is therefore the development of the small-scale enterprises or informal sector. This burden is especially felt in the urban areas. Methods of providing micro financing for small businesses, imparting relevant skills and knowledge would go along way in providing sustainable livelihoods.

In their fight against poverty, governments of the three East African countries appreciate the importance of the multidisciplinary approach to solving the problem. This explains their participation in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative and partnerships with bilateral and multilateral institutions. Thus, donor support from friendly countries and multilateral institutions is enlisted in the fight.

The African Situation:

Generally, the poverty situation in Africa is worrying and unless concerted efforts are made by both the Governments and especially through the sharing of knowledge, experience and information from research findings by institutions of higher learning such as Universities, it will soon become a catastrophe. Comparative to other *Least Developed Countries* (LDC) in other parts of the world, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) points out that the proportion of people in 29 African LDCs living below \$2 per day increased from 82 per cent in the late 1960s to 87.5 per cent in the late 1990s while those in extreme poverty – under \$1 per day – the increase was from 55.8 per cent to 64.9 per cent, according to UNCTAD's June *Least Developed Countries 2002* report. This made the number of Africans living in extreme poverty in these countries rise dramatically from 89.6 million to 233.5 million over the same period.

As stated earlier, not only is poverty in African LDCs widening, it is also deepening. Among Africans living on less than \$1 a day, average daily consumption declined from \$0.66 in 1975-79 to \$0.59 in 1995-99. This is quite a contrast when compared to the

average daily consumption of the extremely poor in five Asian LDCs which rose from \$0.84 to \$0.90. It is worth noting that the proportion of poor people in Asian LDCs also has declined steadily.

However, our weak economic performance and increased poverty as African countries is closely linked to our economies' high dependence on exports of raw materials as also most of our countries depend on small number of low value-added commodities such as minerals or agricultural products. This in most cases makes them highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the international market, especially with the erosion of primary commodity prices in recent years. To lessen this dependency, however, some governments have turned to tourism as a main source of foreign exchange earnings.

During the World Summit on Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 for instance, the international community adopted the goal of reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half by the year 2015. Five years later, during the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders equally reaffirmed their commitment to the same objective and to measuring their performance against the comprehensive targets articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Surprisingly, reviewing the situation today in rural areas of Eastern and Southern Africa where poverty persists and the number of the poor and malnourished is growing, it is clear that the challenge of a rapid and major reduction in poverty was vastly underestimated. During the summit, there were many assumptions made which have proven to be seriously over-optimistic, and progress in reducing rural poverty has been quite slow.

A New Dawn

In an effort to address the poverty problem, the three East African Countries governments, namely Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda drew up the poverty reduction strategy papers as the blue prints for future development of the region. As noted above, these strategies were participatory in nature with communities themselves being involved at all stages of problem identification, evaluation, and prioritisation. These have now been written into the current development plans of these countries.

Areas of Concern for Poverty Alleviation

As the countries prepare to implement their action plans within the current development phase, the priority areas if poverty is to be addressed effectively are:

- **Agriculture and Rural Development**

The Government committed itself to reforms and increasing efficient resource allocation to improve the performance of the sector. Budget provision for water supply was increased to support expanded supply and rehabilitation of water projects. The pace of institutional reforms in the rural sector, which aimed at giving ownership and control to stakeholders, has been accelerated.

- **Human Resource Development**

The Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP) did outline several measures to improve education, health, HIV/AIDS and labour. For instance, primary and secondary schools curriculum have been reviewed to reduce the number of examinable subjects and the costs to parents. In making learning accessible to all, the new Government (NARC) declared primary school education free, hence alleviating the burden on parents. The move has seen massive recruitment in schools. Other areas that have equally been looked into to develop human resource include:

- ◆ The approval by the Cabinet of the published Equity Bill and the Affirmative Action Bill.
- ◆ The Rights of the Child Bill.
- ◆ The Family Protection Bill.
- ◆ The Ministry of Health put in place the Health Sector Policy Framework that outlines in detail specific measures for implementation.
- ◆ The Establishment of the National Aids Control Council (NACC) to strengthen capacity and co-ordination in responding to HIV/AIDS pandemic at all levels. AIDS control committees have been established in all ministries, provinces and constituencies.

- **Physical Infrastructure**

The major concern in this sector is to rehabilitate and improve the state of Kenya's roads and railways network and improved supply of reliable hydroelectric power.

- **Information Technology**

Like most developing countries, Kenya lags behind in her state of information technology. The Government needs to promote access to the Internet for majority of Kenyans. The use of computers needs to be promoted in Kenya's learning institutions and industries and among the general public at large.

- **Public Administration**

The key concern here is encouraging efficient service delivery and hence good governance. This will ensure a good enabling environment for socio-economic activities in the country.

- **Trade, Tourism and Industry**

The Government set out to reduce control and licensing requirements, expand tourism and export markets, and to improve financial service delivery among other things. The harmonisation of tariffs was undertaken by eliminating all suspended duties. A Joint Public/Private Sector Task Force was established while Joint Trade Missions to promote Kenyan products and secure market access were conducted.

- **Public, Safety, Law and Order**

The Kenyan Government strives to reduce the level of crimes in urban areas and foster good neighbourliness among communities. It also seeks to ensure efficient service delivery by Kenya's judiciary system.

- **Gender**

Literature and practical daily experiences indicate that women in Kenya constitute a disadvantaged social group and are discriminated against in many spheres of society and especially in decision-making. However, the gender campaigns in the country seem to have born fruits. The new Government's sensitivity on gender issues manifests in its provision of equal opportunities to all across the gender divide with women heading key ministries and public institutions.

Previously, women were marginalised in the realms of politics and economics. This situation had a lot do with the traditional African set up in which women were more involved in decision making processes within the household than at community level.

These steps taken by the Government are with the view of improving the quality of life of its population, increasing the incomes of the poor, ensuring good governance and security and achieving an overall sustainable economic growth and structural transformation leading to poverty reduction.

However, a point to be noted here is that there is absolutely no possibility that individual countries can achieve the said implementation on their own. A multidisciplinary approach is therefore called for that not only relies on donor support from friendly countries and multilateral lenders, but also calls upon the affected populations to mobilise whatever resources they have towards achieving the country's aspirations. This means that not only do communities identify the problems, but also own them and propose ways and means by which solutions can be attained.

The resources available in the three East African countries include: -

- Institutions such as universities, research organisations, etc.
- Human resources etc
- Unutilised and under-utilised natural resources.

The Emergence of AICAD

In an effort to fight poverty in the African continent from another front, the Japanese Government through the First and Second Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD I and II) initiated the African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD) in 2000. The Institute, which became operational from January this year (2003), seeks to augment the education and research function of African universities and other institutions to accelerate human capacity development in the continent.

Role of the African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD)

As an autonomous regional body, AICAD, which is situated on the grounds of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), whose Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ratemo W. Michieka is first project manager and the brain child behind the project, aims to tackle poverty reduction in Africa through human resources development. As a start, it has drawn membership from the public universities in the region in order to augment teaching and research functions whose practical perspective is to accelerate capacity development in the region.

The regional body also aims to promote mobilisation and utilisation of existing capacity in terms of manpower, facilities and equipment through encouragement of joint projects in teaching, research and information sharing. This not only assists researchers and other professionals in the region to know one another, but also what is being done where and by whom and what exists where so as to expedite the dissemination of technology and information to the end users.

The Goal:

AICAD challenges the regional universities to take a leading role in facilitating development and poverty reduction at community levels through appropriate capacity building. It aims to augment the education and research functions of the regional universities and institutions with a more practical perspective, and act as a vehicle for capacity development of the local communities, exposing them to the existing and newly developed knowledge. It is hoped that, by actively joining the activities of AICAD, the participating countries will make maximum efforts in solving socio-economic problems related to the development of the region.

As stated earlier, it aims at achieving poverty reduction and socio-economic development by facilitating Africans to solve the problems of Africa through: -

- Utilization of existing knowledge and technology
- Creation of new technology suitable for local conditions.
- Development and utilisation of the potential capacity of local expertise.
- Building a bridge between institutions creating technology and communities using technology.
- Exchange of information, experiences and practices.
- Human exchange with other regions to share information and expertise.

While the regional body was established for promoting regional human capacity development for poverty reduction and socio-economic development in Africa as earlier stated, the main focus of AICAD is for “Africans to solve African Problems” and to achieve poverty reduction in African society through Human capacity Development from grassroots and community level, to the highest level through active participation in Research and Development projects, Training and Extension programmes and sharing of information, practices and experiences.

Collaboration:

It would be important to note that the regional body collaborates with both government and private organisations such as universities, Research Institutions, Industries, NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Government Agencies. In its Phase 1 (One), which ran from August 2000 – July 2002 for instance, the project approved 11 pilot researches from eight public universities in East Africa. These universities include, the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology which hosts AICAD facility, University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton University and Moi University, all based in Kenya. Others are Makerere University in Uganda and Universities of Dar – es – Salaam and Sokoine, both in Tanzania. Phase II of the project, which is on going, has 24 research programmes approved. AICAD utilizes human resources and other suitable facilities in these institutions and partner organisations. However, the rest of the African countries are expected to get involved during Phase III of the project.

AICAD’s objectives are to:

1. Research on socio-economic development issues in the continent – as a basis for crafting strategies and programmes to tackle poverty.
2. Be an institute for information gathering and dissemination.
3. Be a centre where workshops and seminars on poverty related issues – meant to enhance people’s capacity to play an active role in development would be held. This is a major strategy in:
 - a) Technology transfer and provision of appropriate needs – based skills.
 - b) Bringing together various stakeholders in poverty reduction – to share their knowledge and experiences in the subject, and provide an opportunity to develop a common front.

Which Way African universities and the African Association of Universities (AAU)?

Unless African Universities get down to serious joint efforts through unity of purpose, information dissemination and networking and meaningful collaborative research findings being passed on to their consumers aiming at providing solutions to teething problems afflicting the society, their efforts to development will be futile and would remain the ‘white elephants’ they have always been known to be.

Formed in 1997, the AAU Constitution had among the best objectives any organisation could formulate among them being: -

- (a) To promote interchange, contact and cooperation among university institutions in Africa.
- (b) To collect, classify and disseminate information on higher education and research, particularly in Africa.
- (c) To encourage increased contacts between its members and the international academic world.
- (d) To study, and make known the educational and related needs of African university institutions and as far as practicable to coordinate the means whereby those needs may be met and
- (e) To organise, encourage and support seminars and conferences between African universities teachers, administrators and others dealing with problems of higher education in Africa.

While the famous adage, “Birds of a feather flock together” is expected to be so about institutions of higher learning, in reality, the situation has not been the same about our universities most of which have opted to operate individually, and have been adamant in sharing information despite being the generators of knowledge and experiences. The available information (research findings) that, should otherwise have been filtered for consumption by the public up to the grass root level has always remained, locked in the shelves. It is such information, as this of poverty alleviation, which ends up getting nowhere.

The challenge at this stage is for AAU to focus on priority areas of society and act on them promptly. It should be AAU’s responsibility to mobilise African universities to rethink their role in alleviating poverty. They have the capacity, the resources and the experience. As it is, it has done very little in its eight years of existence and yet poverty has been with us all along.

As pillars of our Governments important wheel that can spearhead serious development revolution and hence alleviate poverty through our genuine collaborative institutional concerted efforts, alleviating poverty in our African continent is possible. The immediate challenge therefore would be to stop the increase in the incidence of absolute poverty and gradually reduce the current level. This objective can be achieved if the challenge of development among the rural poor is directly and systematically addressed because it is in rural areas where the large majority of the region’s poor lead their lives. The basic human and natural resources that these rural poor require to put extreme poverty behind them exists. The poor need focused assistance in establishing adequate access to national resources. We can give that help which can in turn bring the desired change.

It is with this focus that despite its relatively tender age of about two years AICAD’s role in the region has become quite significant in bringing about desirable change and hope of poverty reduction in the region. There is no doubt that through AICAD, and with total commitment, vision and focus, the region will be able to effectively participate and collaborate through training research and relevant information in the South-South Cooperation.

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