

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF POVERTY ON URHOBOLAND AND THE PEOPLE

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## Abstract

*The environmental crisis is now the gravest crisis that the planet Earth and its people are facing. The crisis has resulted in a warming climate, environmental tragedies, emergencies, environmental refugeeism, destruction of biodiversity, deforestation, desertification, and so forth. All life on Earth is endangered as a result of the environmental crisis. A multitude of factors are responsible for the environmental crisis, such as mismanagement of solid and chemical waste, resource wars, violence and criminality, eco-terrorism, unplanned urbanisation, industrialisation, consumerism, etc. However, poverty can also have some negative impacts on the environment as a result of poor people over-exploiting environmental resources or lacking awareness of the issues of environmental conservation. This is not to blame all poor people for their predicament, for much of poverty is a result of structural injustice. This paper uses critical analytic, hermeneutic, and evaluative methods to examine the issue of environmental consequences of poverty as it relates to Urhoboland. The paper concludes that there is poverty in Urhoboland; that this poverty also affects the Urhobo environment; and that there should be poverty alleviation strategies to overcome this poverty.*

**Keywords:** Environment, Niger Delta, Nigeria, people, poverty, Urhobo.

## Introduction

The natural environment is essential for human survival and the well-being of all non-human life on Earth. All organisms, including human beings, depend on the Earth. However, it is unfortunate to note that human activities have also had negative consequences for the Earth. Human activities such as industrialisation, agriculture, urbanisation, rapid population growth, mining, and extractive engagements, etc, have affected and degraded the earth. The negative effects include deforestation, desertification, land degradation, depletion of the ozone layer, climate change, health hazards, forced environmental migration of humans, birds, and animals, and so forth. The "...ecosystem is dangerously undergoing a transformation that we can term unhealthy for continuous existence. Recently, issues like desertification, heat wave, erosion of top soil, reduction in sea level in some places, rise in sea level in other areas, among others, are becoming a popular topic in news articles" (Idemudia and Tenebe, 2021, p. 84). And so, "The issue of the environment has become one great concern to environmentalists and persons who are

humanity-friendly. For this and other reasons, there is the need for all humanity to find ways of making the environment a haven in our global community” (Enegho, 2021, p. 50).

Many factors and realities lead to environmental pollution and degradation. Oil exploration and exploitation often cause oil spillage, lead to petroleum fire, result in gas flaring, etc, which lowers the quality of the environment. The activities of herdsmen who invade people's farmlands and allow their cattle to eat up people's crops also cause land degradation. While there are many reasons responsible for environmental degradation, one reason that invariably causes environmental degradation is also poverty. Indeed, the link between poverty and environmental health/well-being is often a debated one. Even if there is no direct link, there is an indirect link for poor people, like others depend on environmental resources for their livelihood. Because of their poverty, they tend to depend deeply on environmental resources. This paper posits that there is a link between poverty and environmental well-being. The focus of this paper is to examine the issue of poverty and its effects on Urhoboland and the Urhobo people of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. To carry out the task that the paper sets forth to accomplish, the paper will make some conceptual analysis, examine the reality of poverty in Urhoboland, look at the environmental consequences of poverty, and thereafter propose a way forward in alleviating poverty to foster environmental protection.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

Key concepts that require explication here are poverty, environment, environmental consequences, Urhoboland, and the Urhobo people. There is no univocal definition of poverty. But the following definitions give some clues into how poverty is variously understood. It can be defined as lacking a socially acceptable amount of material possessions or money with which people need to satisfactorily meet their basic needs and survival; and in some contexts, it implies low skills, low level of education, ill health, unemployment, and even disruptive social behaviours (Editor of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). Poverty is a lack of financial resources necessary for having the minimum standard of living, and this lack often results in a lack of food, lack of medical attention, poor housing, etc (Chen, 2024). There can be different kinds of poverty, such as financial poverty, poverty of poor leadership, poverty of ideas, poverty of lack of opportunities, etc. The poverty of major concern here is the one centred on money or finance, in which the poor are unable to meet their basic needs. In this light, note the following: “...Poverty is now understood to be a state of long-term deprivation of well-being, a situation considered inadequate for a decent life. Poverty is thus synonymous with lack” (Imevbore, 2012, p. 18). As explained by W Dressler in 1976, “Absolute poverty...is a situation whereby an individual or household is unable to provide even the basic necessities of life; and....Relative poverty...is a situation in which an individual or household is unable to maintain the standard of living normal in the society in question” (Sola, 2015, p. 306).

The distinction between relative and absolute poverty is crucially important for this paper

is concerned with both. There is absolute poverty when people are unable to have enough resources to meet their physical health and nutritional needs, while relative poverty is defined by the general standard of living in a society; in this sense, poverty is relative to how society defines it (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 2000). In relative poverty, what one society considers to be poverty may not be in another society. The standard of living in which is considered to be a good standard of living, varies from society to society. The World Development Report in 1990 avers that poverty is the inability to attain the minimum standard of living that is required (Uniamikogbo, 1997). Generally, poverty goes beyond a lack of money. People can have enough money, but if they are deprived of the social environment to enjoy the money in living meaningful lives, then they are also experiencing poverty. Poverty is multifaceted and multidimensional.

According to the World Bank, poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life (Swetha Balasubramanian, 2021, para 1).

Understand that: “Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realise one's full potential as a human being” (Sen, 2006, p. 34).

Rightly them:

The basic definition of poverty is the inability of an individual to possess sufficient resources to satisfy his or her basic needs. The definition and range of basic needs depend on the place and time, or even the source of the definition. Hence, there are several ways to investigate the poverty levels of the countries. One of the most frequently used methods is to define poverty in monetary terms, like the US\$2.15 a day poverty line of the World Bank or the value of a minimum calorie requirement. Nevertheless, poverty is a complicated phenomenon that goes beyond monetary terms. In this sense, poverty is also investigated in non-monetary terms from a multidimensional viewpoint, considering education, health, and/or living conditions. The widely used nonmonetary poverty indices are the Human Development Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, and Global Hunger Index (COMCEC Coordination Office, 2023, p.1).

It is also important here to explain the concept of poverty alleviation. Poverty alleviation can refer to the reduction of poverty or programmes targeted at assisting the poor and those affected by poverty (Uniamikogbo, 1997). Social policies, programmes, and actions directed at helping the poor are poverty alleviation strategies (Aku, Ibrahim, and Bulus, 1997).

Another concept that requires clarification is that of the environment. It can be defined as: “... a sum total of all the living and non-living elements and their effects that influence

human life. While all living or biotic elements are animals, plants, forests, fisheries, and birds, non-living or abiotic elements include water, land, sunlight, rocks, and air” (Byjus, 2020, para.1). The environment refers to “... the sum of all living (biotic) and non-living (abiotic) things that exist around us and influence our lives.... Together, they form a system that supports life on Earth. Every single thing — from the rain that waters plants to the oxygen you breathe — is part of the environment” (Gro, 2025, para.4-5). Everything in existence in the universe is an environment and is part of the entire environment. The term, “environmental” refers to what is associated with or related to the environment. This paper is concerned with environmental consequences. This refers to the impact or influence of other factors, such as poverty, on the environment. The implications and effects that human activities have on whatever exists, such as land, mountains, plants, animals, etc.

Urhoboland refers to the land in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, indigenously owned by the Urhobo people from time immemorial. It is bequeathed to the present Urhobo people by their ancestors. They are the largest ethnic group in the present-day Delta State of Nigeria, and many Urhobo inhabit the Delta Central Senatorial District of the State. The Urhobo people are surrounded by Isoko in the East, the Ijaw to the South, the Ukwuani to the Northeast, the Edo to the North, and in terms of language, they are an Edoid-speaking language group (Darah, 2014). Some Urhobo people inhabit neighbouring states also such as Bayelsa, etc. As for the land territory, it covers 5,000 sq km, and the land is located in the tropical rainforest lowlands in the Western Niger Delta (Darah, 2014). “The Urhobo homeland (Urhoboland) is bounded by latitudes 5° 15' N and 6° N and longitudes 5° 40' E and 6° 25' E with an area of about 5,000 square kilometers<sup>2</sup> With an estimated population of 1.12 million in 1991 (about 1.5 in 2002)<sup>3</sup> the Urhobo people rank as one of Nigeria's 10 largest ethnic nationalities, constituting about 55% of the population of Delta State. Much of Urhoboland is flat land under 50 meters above sea level. There are many rivers, including the Ethiope, Warri, and Kiagbodo rivers, which drain into the Atlantic Ocean” (Ojameruaye, 2004, para. 7).

### **Reality of Poverty in Urhoboland**

Before a word is said on the causes of poverty in Urhoboland, it is important to understand some factors responsible for poverty. Poverty exists and pervades the entire world; even in so-called developed nations, there are pockets of poverty. There are urban poor and many homeless and vulnerable people in the major cities of the world. Ending poverty is so important that the United Nations made it number one of the Sustainable Development Goals. Poverty can arise from the race into which one is born, sexual orientation, sexual identity, ethnicity, geography, lack of access to education, and so forth (Chen, 2024). Other causes of poverty include poor socio-economic conditions, rising living costs, difficult situations arising from natural disasters, mental health issues, drug addiction, depression, poor social infrastructures, war and conflict, lack of economic growth, poor governance, and social barriers (Chen, 2024). It should be understood that the cause of poverty for one person may be different from the cause for another person. A person may be poor because of an inability to work, but for another person, it may be because of ill health. Some causes

of poverty as identified by the World Bank in 1996 are: inability to access employment opportunities, lack of capital and land, lack of market access where goods can be sold by the poor, “destruction of natural resources leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity,” marginalisation of the poor in development programmes (Imevbore, 2012, p. 14). Poverty can also be precipitated by population growth, lack of adequate technology, a poor economy, and lack of investment in critical economic sectors (Imevbore, 2012).

Corruption and bad leadership are major drivers of poverty. Corruption drains away money and resources that should be expended on social infrastructures and employment for the people. Corrupt leaders loot public coffers and cart the money away into their foreign bank accounts. As they do this, the people are impoverished, people get unemployed, and many suffer from the failure of public and private companies. In Urhoboland, companies like Delta Steel Company, Delta Glass Company, etc, have folded up. These companies are located in Urhoboland, and as they wind up, many people lose their jobs and are brought into poverty. Companies like Superbru in Agbarha-Otor have closed up. While some of these companies may not have closed because of corruption, poor management, or other factors likely led them to close.

The reality is that there is no part of Nigeria that is exempt from poverty. Not too long ago, Nigeria was called the poverty capital of the world, and over 90 million Nigerians are living in poverty (EdevbiE and Oyiborhoro, 2022). Poverty still pervades the land. Poverty in Urhoboland is caused by different factors as well. Like other parts of Nigeria, insecurity, especially arising from herdsmen killers who terrorise the forests and farmlands of the land and the activities of kidnapers and ritual killers, inevitably impoverishes people. As a result of insecurities, many people can no longer access their farmlands and harvest their agricultural products. Unable to access their farms, their source of income is diminished. As a result of the activities of herders, it is difficult to transport agricultural goods from city to city. That there is poverty in Urhoboland is noted by Urhobo traditional leaders when they visited then-President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018 in Abuja (Channels TV, 2018). As noted by Y Erhiurhoro in 2024, more than 70% of people in Urhoboland live in poverty, and the land is inundated with criminality (Ikeke and Agetue, 2025).

Poverty in Urhoboland is also caused by the activities of oil and gas companies. Oil exploration and exploitation have degraded environmental resources, destroyed farmlands and agricultural products through oil spillage, gas flaring, and petroleum fire. As people lose their farmlands and the quality of their land is degraded, their agricultural productivity is also affected. Their income diminishes, and some enter into a state of poverty. Demolition of illegal building structures can lead people into poverty, as some of these illegal structures are used for businesses and residences (Olatunji, 2006). This author can recall a time when illegal structures were destroyed on Refinery Road and Junction, and around the roundabout in Effurun (a town located in Urhoboland). Many people lost their

businesses and places of residence. As this happened, there were some who could no longer meet their basic needs, and they had to resort to begging. It is a fact that poverty exists in Urhoboland, and this can also be adduced from the following statement: “Urhoboland is rich in natural resources, yet the people suffer a very low living standard owing to either negligence or misappropriation of benefits by the government. The benefits of Urhoboland are used to maintain other regions within Nigeria that do not own and suffer the effects of resource extraction from Urhoboland” (Ndakara, Atuma and Boyitie, 2021, p. 1). There should be no doubt that in Urhoboland, many persons are suffering from situations that have impoverished them. Keep in mind that:

Economic activities have stagnated because of environmental conflicts, essentially caused by oil spills. The oil spills were caused by accident and sabotage, and this has brought untold hardship to the people of the area, as the destruction of the Urhobo ecosystem stifled economic activities. There are no investments in the ceramic industry despite the availability of natural kaolin to produce household and industrial wares. Professionals in palm oil, rubber, and lumbering who make a living cannot care for their families and contribute to national development (Atake, 2025, p. 41).

Concerning the consequences of poverty, it can result in substance and alcohol abuse, poor education, poor living conditions, poor housing, increased disease, social inequalities and high crime rates, and social tensions (Chen, 2024). Poverty makes it difficult for people to live life to the fullest. Poor people suffer from a lot of social and economic deprivation. In these deprivations, their lifestyles have an impact on the environment.

### **Environmental Consequences of Poverty in Urhoboland**

Poverty results in many things and causes many consequences. Some of them have been examined above. This section will focus on the impact of poverty on environmental quality and health. The environment, as understood here, is not just the natural environment but also the human, social, and cultural environment, or the built environment. Poverty affects all these environments. It is poor people who are likely to reside and do business in ghettos, slums, etc. In Urhoboland, you can see slums in many major cities, such as Effurun, Ughelli, and Sapele, in previous years. Many of the markets in Urhoboland are filled with unhealthy market stores, and corners and passages in the market are filled with garbage and refuse. At times, this garbage and solid waste can lie there in the market for days. Many of these marketers are people just struggling to earn a living. They are among the poor. Public facilities like motor parks, markets lack adequate sanitary conveniences (Olatunji, 2006). It is extremely rare to find the rich trading in these markets or staying in motor parks. It is the poor and those struggling to eke a living who are found in these places and who also exhibit poor hygiene and environmental cleanliness. In Urhoboland, you can find public markets and motor parks in Effurun, Sapele, Ughelli, Udu, Warri, Abraka, etc. What is said above equally affects these public markets and motor parks.

There is a link between poverty and environmental degradation. It is believed by many scholars that poor people often over-depend on environmental resources for survival, and this makes them over-exploit natural resources and may have little knowledge of

sustainability (Amoako-Asiedu, 2016). “Environmental degradation and poverty are interlinked. This results in a vicious cycle in which poverty causes the degradation of the environment, and the degradation perpetuates more poverty. As rightly observed by Fabra (2002) ‘...poverty and environmental degradation are often bound together in a mutually reinforcing vicious cycle, and thus human rights abuses related to poverty can be both cause and effects of environmental problems” (Amoako-Asiedu, 2016, p. 21).

Though there is a link between poverty and environmental degradation, the fact is that poor people should not be scapegoated for the environmental problems. Many environmental problems in society are caused by the wealthy arising from consumerism, capitalist greed, careless disposal of domestic waste from their houses, wastage of environmental resources, over-consumption leading to more waste, extravagant and luxurious with indulgent lifestyles that require more earth's resources to sustain, etc. Poverty is a structural problem in society, and it is difficult for many poor people to escape from poverty as the system is stacked against them. There are many structural injustices in society, including in Urhoboland, that make people poor. It is not the intention of this paper to blame the poor, but to see how their situations can be transformed for the betterment of society and the environment.

Many rural poor people depend on firewood for fuel and cooking. In the process, they overuse firewood. You can hardly travel through the forest roads of any Urhobo village without seeing heaps of firewood that are tied for sale.

Rising demand for fuel wood and charcoal for energy needs has been identified as one of the major causes of deforestation in sub-Saharan Africa. This is due to the poor people's incapacity to access modern and cleaner energy sources because of a lack of income. The cutting of wood for fuel and excessive burning for charcoal production for energy purposes have adverse effects, such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, as well as increased atmospheric air pollution in Africa. Research shows that charcoal production and consumption are believed to emit more GHGs than the industry and transport sectors combined. Where the poor depend on biomass fuel and confront increasing fuel-wood scarcity, they often shift to using animal dung, fodder, and crop residues for fuel. The reduced quantity of these materials returned to the soil may affect its fertility. Poverty may also constrain farmers' ability to maintain soil productivity through more intensive application of variable inputs (Amoako-Asiedu, 2016, p. 22).

The use of firewood leads to deforestation and soil erosion, which degrades the land, causing loss of fertility, destruction of biodiversity, and environmental quality (Geri, Anholo, and Aondohemen, 2024). In Nigeria, there is a poor and epileptic power supply. Many households in rural areas depend on wood as their main energy source. They cook with wood. They use wood in making local bridges. They use wood in carpentry work.

There are Urhobo villages without electricity. Even in those areas that have electricity, many people still depend on wood for fuel and resources. All these hurt the environment and environmental quality. It is a fact that in many rural areas in Urhoboland and beyond, many women are engaged in the use of natural resources to manage their households. These environmental resources include soil, water, forests, farmlands, etc. In Urhoboland, as a result of oil exploitation activities, the land to be cultivated had dwindled, and this being the case, they put pressure on the limited resources available. Continuous exploitation of resources leads to environmental stress and degradation (Okoji, 1997).

Many poor people in Urhoboland still depend on subsistence agriculture, in which they burn the fields to clear the land. Through bush burning, the resources of the land are depleted, organisms are burned, and the air is also polluted. Bush burning is very dangerous to the environment and causes many hazards for humans and other non-human life. There is also the fact that many poor people are the ones likely to have many more children and thus putting more pressure on the use of resources. In a place like Urhoboland and in much of Africa, where children are considered to be the wealth of a family and people believe in having more children, to farm the land and do chores for the family, pressure on forests, farms, and water resources is high. Y Ding in 2000 explains that there is a relationship between poverty and environment, for population increase leads to environmental degradation, and people believe in having more children to help them harvest the forests. To secure livelihoods, and also the more children are engaged in chores, the less time they have for educational development (Amoako-Asiedu, 2016). Many rural poor live in ecologically favoured but fragile lands, and they push to put more land into production, employing traditional farming methods (Barbier, 2013). This is not in any way to propose that mechanised agriculture does not have problems. Mechanised agriculture, which often involves the use of chemicals, can subject the land to more pressure. "A lack of control over resources, population growth, a lack of alternative avenues of livelihood, and inequity are all contributing to the degradation of the region's [Asia] resources. In turn, environmental degradation perpetuates poverty, as the poorest attempt to survive on a diminishing resource base" (FAO, 1992, p. 106).

### **Alleviating Poverty to Mitigate Environmental Degradation**

In the past, in Nigeria, various efforts and programmes have been initiated to alleviate or eradicate poverty. These programmes were intended to reach all regions and localities in the country, including Urhoboland. These programmes include the 2001 National Poverty Alleviation Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, the Directorate for Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution, the National Directorate of Employment, the People's Bank, etc. While it is true that some of these programmes may not be directly focused on poverty alleviation, the fact is that their achievements at least indirectly help to mitigate poverty. One fundamental problem with Nigeria is the discontinuity of programmes and inefficiency in achieving their goals, along with widespread corruption and bureaucracy. Reasons why these and many other

programmes in Nigeria have failed include: poor coordination, lack of community, lack of specific achievable targets, poor monitoring and evaluation, absence of collaboration among agencies, duplication of agencies, etc (Imevbore, 2012). Another perspective sees the programmes as 'economistic' and lacking a holistic and multidisciplinary dimension (Tella, 1997). Consider that the causes and solutions to poverty go beyond efficient pricing and macro-economic factors and equally border on people's behaviours, the environment in which poverty persists, the constraints and motivations that affect the poor, etc (Salop, 1992). There are socio-cultural contexts and even religious beliefs about poverty that can keep people in poverty. They all need to be examined. There are also the socio-economic conditions of injustice that damn people, and the corruption that eats away at the nation's resources.

Various measures can be taken to alleviate poverty in Urhoboland. These things include creation of more access to entrepreneurial, technical and vocational education; creation of more job opportunities; massive investment in agriculture; availability of public and social infrastructures; pro-poor public and social policies; creation of more poverty alleviation programmes; involvement of non-governmental organisations and the entire civil society in fighting poverty, etc. NGOs are close to the people and can mobilise resources to help alleviate poverty (Adebayo, 1997). In Urhoboland, there are faith-based groups such as the St Vincent de Paul, the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission, and other lay groups in the Catholic Church. You also have similar groups in other Christian churches. All over Urhoboland, there are orphanages that take care of poor and vulnerable children, and also old people's homes. All these help to alleviate poverty, but much more can be done.

Philanthropy and humanitarian efforts can help to alleviate poverty. Various forms of humanistic efforts existed in Urhoboland. The extended family system was a powerful form of social welfare. All over Africa, in traditional societies, it was difficult to find people suffering from abject poverty without any means to meet their basic needs. The extended family gave support to the poor and needy among them. But today, the extended family is threatened and weakened by the forces of globalisation, westernisation, migration, etc. Modern life makes it difficult for families to live together in the same household.

Proper and adequate management of environmental resources can also help to mitigate the effects of poverty. When the environment is abused, it has a way of affecting human livelihood and even bringing people into poverty. It has been noted previously that oil exploration and exploitation degrade the environment and affect people's occupations, such as agriculture and land-based human activities. Environmental disasters, for instance, can destroy people's crops and products. As people lose their farmlands and agricultural products to flooding, climate change, and other environmental realities, they sink into relative poverty. Mitigating flooding, climate change, and other environmental problems can help them mitigate poverty. The environment should be maintained for healthy and conducive living, and natural resources should be sustainably used. It should be on record

that:

Oil prospecting business may be a money-spinning enterprise globally, but it is a poverty-attracting venture for a large number of Nigerian farmers and fishermen whose farm fields and fishing waters have been polluted beyond any meaningful farming and fishing activities. Farmers and fishermen who rely solely on their farming and fishing skills for their daily bread are deprived of the opportunity to practice their trades as oil and gas exploration is preferred to agricultural and fishing activities (Olatunji, 2006, p. 214).

Urhoboland is filled with many oil wells, and oil is exploited in places like Ughelli communities, Ekakpamre, Kokori, Eruemukowarhien, etc. There are many farmers and fishermen, and women in these places. They, too, are extremely affected by the activities of oil companies. There is an absolute need to properly manage the environment to protect human livelihoods, occupations, careers, social and public infrastructures, the built environment, etc. In Urhoboland, petroleum fires have destroyed farmlands, factories, water resources, etc. Proper management in a sustainable manner is necessary to enhance human security, harmony, peace, development, and quality of life (Enegho, 2021). With proper management, the negative effects of environmental activities on the poor and others can be seriously mitigated. The oil companies have a duty and corporate social responsibility to ensure that they prospect and exploit for oil prudently and humanely, which protects the people and the land from harm. If the oil companies can protect the source of the livelihood of many of the people, such as streams, rivers, forests, land, etc, from pollution, it will help to secure the lives of the people and also protect the environment.

There should be targeted strategies to eradicate poverty, especially among the rural poor. These strategies can include hire and pay the poor in ecosystem service schemes, create investments that improve the household of the rural poor through agricultural resource production activities, help the poor to access land, credit and insurance; reduce high transportation cost required to take goods to the market, improve the education of women and address land degradation and over-grazing (Barbier, 2013). Intensive investment in mechanised agriculture can help to alleviate poverty. Some Urhobo leaders in 2018 met in Asaba in the third edition of the Urhobo Economic and Investment Summit, and in the summit, they spoke glowingly of the potential of agriculture to help create jobs, foster economic growth, promote rural development, and sustainable livelihoods (Guardian, 2020). Setting up microfinance and neighbourhood banks to give loans and outright grants to poor and vulnerable people in Urhoboland can help to alleviate poverty. About four years ago Urhobo nation promised to set up an Okugbe Microfinance Bank to help alleviate poverty in Urhoboland (Oyibo, n.d).

The development of human capital or resources is very necessary to overcome poverty. There are human beings who are poor because they lack the necessary skills or are

underemployed. This is where education comes in. Education at all levels can help to build human capital. Human resources can be developed through "...investing in people's education, health, and nutrition. Human capital is one of the keys to economic growth and social progress...Education is crucial to the elimination of poverty to the extent that it provides skills and abilities which allow the poor to secure productive and well-paying jobs" (Obadan, 1997, pp. 10-11). Well-educated human capital is likely to help in fostering social harmony and stability, too. Thus, it creates an enabling environment for people to live their lives and mitigate poverty. Lack of education and poverty can create social unrest. A popular adage says, "A hungry person is an angry person." Human beings are entitled to fundamental human rights, which are necessary for enhancing their dignity and well-being. When human beings are denied their basic human rights and their dignity is deprecated, it can foster in them a situation of restlessness. It is difficult to conquer poverty when people are denied their human rights, for poverty is beyond material poverty. It should be known that: "The inability of the system to provide the necessities of life to its members has been consequential in myriad ways. Specifically, in a society where the majority of its members are poverty-stricken, there is a general loss of confidence in the constituted authority, thereby generating disrespect and rendering government policies" (Bulus, 1997, p. 47).

### Conclusion

The paper examined the environmental consequences of poverty on Urhoboland. The paper noted that there are many factors responsible for environmental degradation in Urhoboland, such as industrialisation, agriculture, population growth, urbanisation, exploitation of oil and gas resources, management of solid and chemical waste, climate change, etc. Specifically, it argued that there is a connection between poverty and environmental degradation in Urhoboland. It was shown that poverty pervades Urhoboland like other parts of Nigeria. The link between poverty and environmental degradation was shown in the fact that poor people deeply depend on environmental resources, as they struggle for survival, they make use of firewood as energy resources and cause deforestation, and some of them lack an awareness of the importance of environmental protection, etc. Poverty must be mitigated to foster environmental protection. This can be done in various ways proposed above, such as empowering the poor through education, creating access to investment and wealth opportunities, revival and continuity of social programs targeted at alleviating poverty, and healthy exploitation of oil resources by oil companies to mitigate harm done to rivers, streams, etc. It is the position in this paper that if poverty can be alleviated in Urhoboland, it will invariably help in environmental conservation.

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