



# The Role of The United Nations in Poverty Eradication in West Africa

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## Abstract

This study critically investigates the role of the United Nations (UN) in poverty eradication in West Africa, examining both the effectiveness of its programs and the strategies employed. Adopting an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive, qualitative approach, the research analyzes secondary data from UN reports, policy documents, academic literature, and regional and international development datasets spanning 2000–2023. Case studies of UNDP initiatives in Ghana and Nigeria provide detailed insights into program implementation, outcomes, and contextual challenges. Thematic analysis identified three major themes: the effectiveness of UN programs, strategies for poverty alleviation, and implementation challenges. Findings reveal that UN interventions including economic empowerment programs, microcredit schemes, investment in education and skills development, and collaboration with national governments on policy, have contributed to poverty reduction, yet their impact remains limited. Constraints such as weak institutional structures, corruption, economic instability, climate change, and ongoing conflicts have undermined program effectiveness. Framed within Modernization and Institutional theories, the study highlights how UN strategies aim to foster economic modernization and strengthen governance, but their success is highly contingent on local socio-political and institutional contexts. The study concludes that sustainable poverty eradication in West Africa requires coordinated efforts among the UN, national governments, and local communities, alongside measures to improve transparency, accountability, and institutional capacity. Policy recommendations include enhancing partnerships with regional bodies like ECOWAS, strengthening program implementation, targeting interventions effectively, and promoting modernization initiatives that empower vulnerable populations.

**Keywords:** United Nations, poverty eradication, West Africa, Development strategies, institutional capacity, modernization theory.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of poverty eradication efforts in West Africa cannot be understood without reference to the region's colonial legacy. Before European colonization, West Africa thrived through dynamic trade networks that fostered economic exchange and socio-cultural interactions among diverse societies (Austin, 2010). Caravans moved across the Sahara, and East African merchants connected coastal cities with markets in India and Southeast Asia, trading valuable resources such as gold, salt, and ivory (Handy, 2024). However according to Settles (1996), the arrival of European colonisers fundamentally disrupted these established trade systems, leading to the extraction of resources primarily for the benefit of European economies. This exploitative framework established during the colonial period left West African nations economically underdeveloped upon achieving independence in the mid-20th century, fostering conditions that contributed to persistent poverty and socioeconomic challenges.

Since World War II, West Africa has witnessed numerous development initiatives aimed at tackling poverty and underdevelopment. Yet, despite diverse strategies proposed by scholars and policymakers, challenges such as economic stagnation, poor healthcare, and limited educational access persist (Mlambo 2024; Silvio, 2021). These long-term concerns are questions related to the efficacy of the solutions that are implemented and the structural aspects that perpetuate poverty, which still persists in most of the population living below the poverty threshold of \$2.15 a day (Sabatino et al., 2023).

The United Nations (UN) has been instrumental in addressing the global development issues since it was established in 1945. It has initiated many poverty alleviation programs through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP) among others. This commitment was reaffirmed in 2015 with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG 1 on ending poverty, in particular (United Nations, 2015; Better World Campaign,



2021). These efforts are evident in West Africa, where the UNDP Sustainable Livelihoods Programme in Ghana and the WFP food aid to the conflict-affected regions of Nigeria are interventions (Udofia, 2021). However, the fact that poverty remains high is something that needs to be evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of these interventions.

Although the United Nations has done much to reduce poverty in West Africa, the region remains a high-poverty and developmental area (Appiah-Otoo et al., 2022; Adams, 2024; Aribatise and Akintunde, 2025). These are poor access to basic services, high unemployment rates and lack of economic opportunities. Although the programs and strategies of the UN are well documented, their overall effects and effectiveness in alleviating poverty in West Africa are little known empirically. Such a gap indicates that there is a need to undertake a thorough evaluation of the role played by the UN in reducing poverty based on the strategies the organization is implementing, its successes, and challenges.

### Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the role of the United Nations in poverty eradication in West Africa. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess the effectiveness of UN programs in alleviating poverty in West Africa.
2. To analyze the strategies the UN employs to address poverty in West Africa.

### Research Questions

1. How effective have UN programs been in alleviating poverty in West Africa?
2. What strategies has the UN employed to address poverty in West Africa, and how successful have they been?

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

### Overview of West Africa

West Africa, often regarded as a distinct region within the African continent, holds significant historical, political, economic, and cultural importance. As defined by both geographical and socio-political frameworks, it encapsulates a collection of nations sharing common historical experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and developmental challenges (FAO, 2000). West Africa spreads across the westernmost region of the African continent, consisting of 16 countries which are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional economic bloc

established in 1975 to promote economic integration and cooperation (World Bank, 2024).

According to Worldometers (2023), West Africa is home to over 462 million people, representing diverse ethnic groups, languages, and cultures. The history of West Africa is deeply rooted in pre-colonial civilizations, the trans-Saharan trade, and the transatlantic slave trade. The colonial era, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked a period of significant upheaval for West Africa. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 partitioned the region into European colonies that interfered with the traditional system of governance and traditional economic systems. The colonial policies formed the basis of current problems, such as artificial boundaries and ethnic tensions and financial interdependence on the raw material exports (Rodney, 2018).

West Africa is resource-endowed with many challenges in socio-economic fronts, such as poverty and unemployment, coupled with poor healthcare and education. A report by Sabatino, Diaz-Bonilla, Nguyen, et al. (2023) shows that the region is among the poorest in the world with millions of people living below the global poverty threshold. Also, there have been international bodies such as the United Nations that have been working on solving these developmental issues in West Africa. UN agencies, including the UNDP, UNICEF, and WFP, have introduced programs aimed at reducing poverty, improving health, education, and gender equality.

### Poverty

The definition of poverty is a highly debated issue, and theorists stress the different aspects of it. In financial terms, the World Bank calls poverty living below the international poverty line of less than \$2.15 a day (Sabatino, Diaz-Bonilla, Nguyen, et al., 2023). But this has been criticized as too limited, since it does not consider deprivations in health care, education, sanitation, and economic opportunities. Moreover, applying a uniform global poverty line often masks regional realities. While \$2.15 may sustain basic needs in rural Africa, it is grossly inadequate for survival in urban settings (World Bank Data Help Desk, 2023).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) broadens the World Bank's monetary definition by incorporating human development indicators. It defines poverty as "a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity," encompassing low income, inadequate living conditions, and social exclusion (UNDP, 2022). Sen's (1999) capability approach frames poverty as the deprivation of basic freedoms



such as access to education, healthcare, and political participation. Thereby shifting the focus from income levels to the overall quality of life.

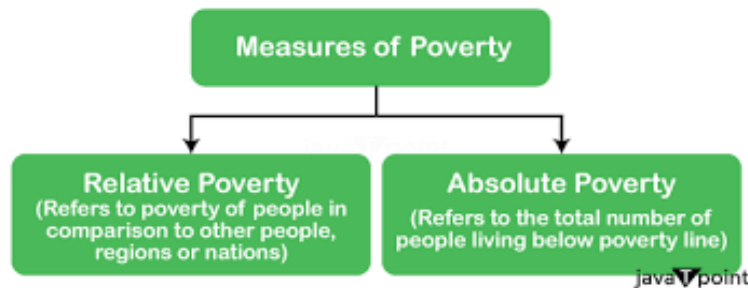


Fig 1: Measures of poverty (Javatpoint, 2024)

A better way to understand the concept of poverty is through the types and forms it exists. There are two types, namely: absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute Poverty is typically assessed against a fixed benchmark, such as the international poverty line. However, it assumes that the same income has equivalent value across different locations, overlooking factors like local inflation, cost of living, and access to public services (Decerf & Ferrando, 2022). For instance, income sufficient in a rural area may be inadequate in an urban setting. Moreover, focusing solely on income can neglect other dimensions of poverty, including access to education and healthcare.

The concept of relative poverty evaluates an individual's economic position relative to society at large. Townsend (1979) argued that people are considered poor if they lack the resources needed to participate in societal norms (Chen et al., 2023). This approach recognizes that poverty is context-dependent and emphasizes economic inequality within a society. However, relative poverty measures can be misleading: during economic downturns, if median income falls, the relative poverty threshold declines, potentially suggesting reduced poverty even

when living conditions remain poor. Thus, relative measures may not fully capture changes in absolute well-being over time.

#### Poverty in West Africa

Poverty in West Africa remains a significant challenge, characterized by both high prevalence and deep-rooted structural issues. As of recent data, a substantial portion of West Africa's population lives below the international poverty line of \$2.15 per day (Statista, 2022). The World Bank reports that, despite a decline in the percentage of individuals living in extreme poverty, the absolute number has increased due to rapid population growth. This trend underscores the persistent and growing challenge of poverty in the region (World Bank, 2021). West Africa has one of the highest population growth rates in the world, averaging around 2.7% per year (World Bank, 2023). Countries like Nigeria, Niger, and Mali have fertility rates above 5 children per woman, contributing to an expanding low-income population. Even if economic growth occurs, it often fails to outpace population increases, leading to a situation where more people remain trapped in poverty despite improvements in per capita income.

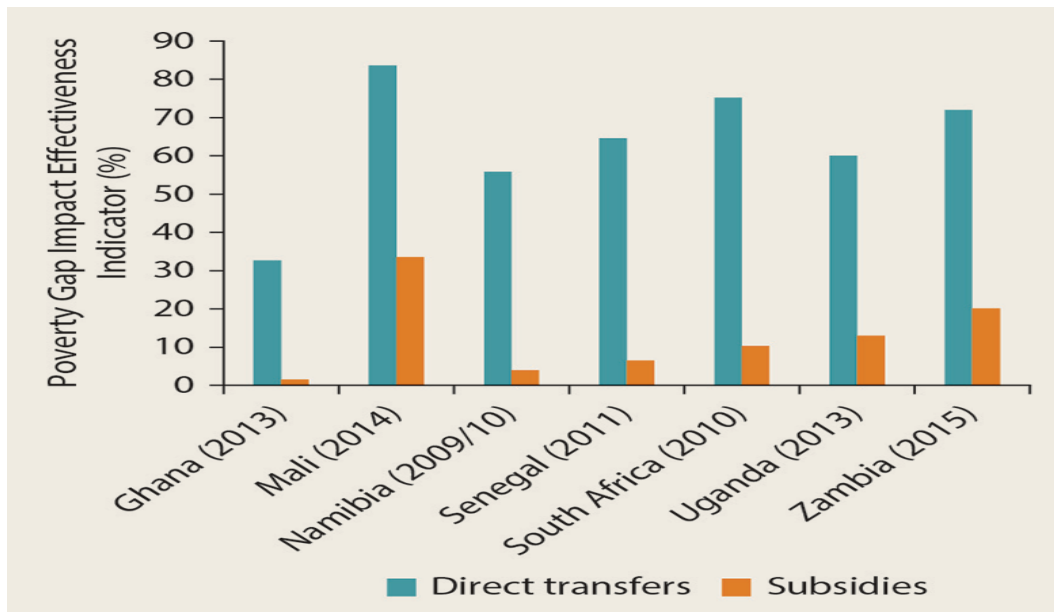
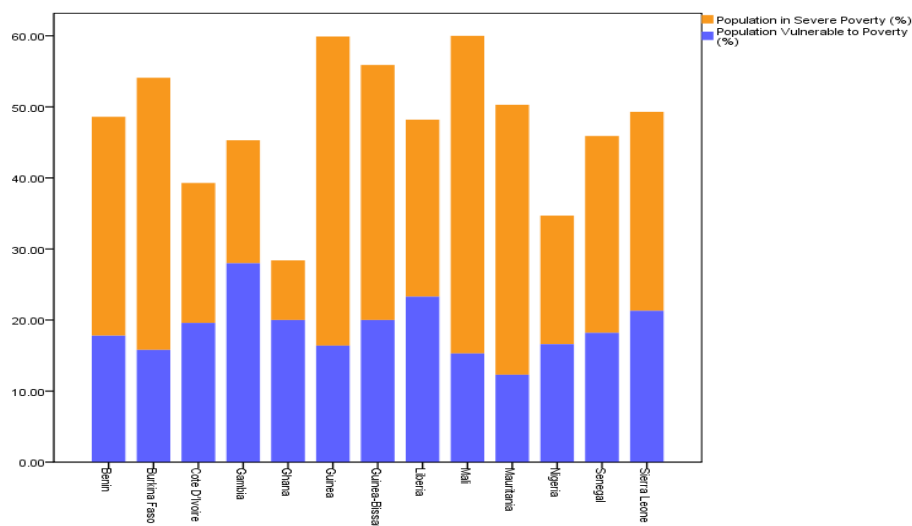


Fig 2: Direct transfer vs subsidies (World Bank, 2019)

The impact of poverty is unevenly distributed between urban and rural areas. Rural communities experience higher poverty rates, often exceeding 60%, compared to urban areas where poverty is around 30-40% (UNDP, 2024). Although West Africa has seen economic growth in recent decades, with an average GDP growth rate of 3.5-4.5%, this growth has not translated into significant poverty reduction (UNDP, 2024). The gains are usually concentrated among the elite as income inequality continues to grow. Gini coefficient, which

is an indicator of income inequality, is still high in such countries as Nigeria (35.1), Ghana (43.0), and Cote d'Ivoire (41.5), which implies that there are inequalities in the distribution of wealth (World Bank, 2024). Cyclical interaction of factors that lead to the persistence of poverty in West Africa can be explained by the presence of economic instability, governance issues, inaccessibility to quality education, health issues, conflict in the region, and insecurity.

Figure 3: Poverty Statistics Estimates of Countries within West Africa based on 2018-2023 Survey



Source: Author's compilation from (World Bank, 2022)



### Role of UN in Poverty Eradication in West Africa

The United Nations (UN) has been the key player in eradicating poverty in West Africa through its specialized agencies, programs, and working alongside governments and development organizations. The United Nations (UN) was established in 1945 as a successor to the League of Nations, with the primary aim of maintaining

international peace and security, fostering cooperation among nations, and promoting human rights and socio-economic development (United Nations, 2024). Over the decades, the UN has evolved into a global organization with 193 member states, addressing issues ranging from conflict resolution to poverty eradication, climate change, and humanitarian aid.



Fig 4: United Nations Agencies (Dreamstime, n.d)

UNDP (2021a) asserts that initiatives funded by the UN, including the Sustainable Livelihoods Programme in Ghana and the Microfinance for Poverty Reduction Initiative in Nigeria, have led to the creation of income and jobs. In a study, Adomako and Danso (2022) discovered that microfinance programs had positive impacts of enhancing access to credit; however, the sustainability of businesses that were started with the help of UN-sponsored loans was low because of low financial literacy and weak market connections.

Poverty is widespread even in those countries that have experienced economic growth following the intervention of the UN. According to the data provided by the World Bank (2023), more than 40 percent of the population of Nigeria, the largest recipient of UN development aid in West Africa, continues to live below the poverty line. This begs the question of whether economic activities led by the UN are doing enough to solve structural problems, including income inequality and dependence on primary goods. However, the United Nations has played a major role in social protection in the region where programs by the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and International Labour Organization (ILO) have aimed at improving food security,

education and access to healthcare to vulnerable populations.

In a research conducted by Osei-Fosu (2011) in Ghana and Burkina Faso, the study assessed the effectiveness of WFP school feeding programs and concluded that school attendance was improved by 15 percent in target communities, with better nutrition outcomes observed among children in food-insecure families. In Sierra Leone, Child Survival and Development Program (2019-2023) by UNICEF contributed to a 12% decrease in the number of children with malnutrition with the help of food supplementation and maternal health intervention (UNICEF, 2023). Regardless of such accomplishments, there are weaknesses that have been pointed out by empirical evidence.

Mokomane (2012) states that the UN social protection programs tend to have funding crises and dependency on donors, and most of these programs are based on short-term funding cycles that could abruptly cease when the priorities of donors change. This was seen in Mali and Guinea, where a WFP food distribution program was canceled in 2022 because of a lack of funds and thousands of vulnerable households are left without support (WFP, 2023).

Enhancing the governance structures is a critical aspect of eradicating poverty and in this





regard, the UN has played a major role. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNDP and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) have facilitated institutional change, such as anti-corruption efforts, training in the management of public finances, and election-related support in West Africa. The evidence has been hesitant: Transparency International (2016) found that UN-led anti-corruption initiatives, including the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Côte d'Ivoire, led to an 8% decline in illicit financial flows in the mining and oil industries by 2015-2022, and UNDP assistance to digital governance in Ghana led to better taxation and less evasion (UNDP, 2022a).

UN institutional support, however, is not as effective in different countries. In a poorly governed country, like Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, UN-supported anti-corruption reforms have in many instances been symbolic due to the opposition of the political elites (Eze & Albert, 2017). Besides, Taylor (2024) observes that the UN governance programs often overlook the underlying causes of political instability, such as ethnic tensions and power plays, which remain the impediments to poverty reduction. Such instability has been witnessed in other countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, hindering the work of UN. According to the data of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2023), the violent conflicts of the Sahel region have already displaced more than 2 million individuals, making it difficult to fight poverty and development efforts.

In summary, the role of the UN in eradicating poverty in West Africa is complex and entails direct interventions by its agencies and through other partnerships with the regional bodies. Although food insecurity and economic instability remain issues, the all-inclusive social protection offered by the UN remains one of the pillars of curbing poverty in the region. Empirical results indicate that although the United Nations has had a significant role to play in poverty eradication in West Africa, the organization has not spread its effects evenly and has been limited by structural issues.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Modernization Theory**

The theory of modernization, which was developed in the middle of the 20th century, is used to interpret how societies change to become modern states (Sharma, 2024). It assumes that the development has a linear pathway where the societies evolve through phases characterized by industrialization, urbanization and rationalization. In

this view, underdevelopment is largely brought about by internal forces including the existence of traditional cultural beliefs, technological backwardness and poor institutions, and the embrace of Western values and practices are considered key to economic and social development (Nolte, 2001; Sharma, 2024). This is the view that the United Nations has long held, and it has been carrying out programs to enhance industrialization, education, governance, and development of infrastructure in West Africa by agencies like the UNDP.

Critics, however, reckon that Modernization Theory is a simplistic concept in the sense that it does not consider extra variables, such as historical exploitation, economic inequalities in the world, and the cultural specificities of African societies. According to Matunhu (2011), the theory frequently tends to marginalize the local communities by not focusing on the poor as the center of the poverty reduction efforts. Moreover, the notion that Western models are universal has also been contested, since such methods might not align with the socio-economic conditions of West African countries. This shortcoming is often depicted through the metaphor of the Development Ladder, which is typically used as a reference point to the discourse of modernization, suggesting a one-size-fits-all model of development that might not suit different situations (Zambakari, 2019).

#### **Institutional Theory**

Institutional Theory emphasizes the significance of institutions, defined as the formal and informal rules, norms, and organizations that shape social behavior in influencing economic and social outcomes. According to this theory, robust institutions are crucial for effective policy implementation and sustainable development (Bhasin, 2017). The UN, through various agencies, has played a pivotal role in shaping poverty reduction policies in West Africa by strengthening institutional capacities. For instance, the UNDP focuses on enhancing governance structures, promoting transparency, and building the capacity of public institutions to deliver services effectively. Applying Institutional Theory to poverty eradication in West Africa involves examining how institutions, both formal (laws, regulations) and informal (cultural norms, traditions), affect development outcomes. The UN, through various agencies, has focused on strengthening institutions to create an enabling environment for development which includes areas like governance, legal framework, and social norms.

Empirical studies support the importance of institutional quality in poverty reduction. A study



examining the role of economic growth and institutional quality on poverty reduction in West Africa found that strong institutions are instrumental in translating economic growth into poverty alleviation (Appiah-Otoo et al., 2022). This highlights the approach of institution-building by the UN as a tool towards promoting sustainable development. However, problems still exist. According to Matunhu (2011), the UN social protection programs are usually characterized by funding gaps and reliance on donors, which results in sudden termination following changes in donor priorities. This points to the necessity of establishing strong institutions capable of maintaining poverty alleviation initiatives without depending on foreign assistance.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the role of United Nations programs in poverty eradication in West Africa. The study adopted a qualitative research design that seeks to understand the socio-economic realities of the region. An interpretivist philosophy was adopted to comprehend the subtle perceptions and institutional effects of UN interventions, due to several subjective realities that influence the outcome of development (Saunders et al., 2007; Walsham, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The study employed an inductive method whereby study findings were generated based on empirical evidence. The study's theoretical framework is guided by Modernization and Institutional theories (Thomas, 2006).

The research was approached by evaluating the case studies of the chosen UN programs, such as UNDP projects in Ghana and Nigeria, to investigate the implementation processes, challenges, and results in detail (Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995). It utilized a mono-method qualitative design based on secondary data sources, such as UN reports, policy documents,

academic literature, and regional and international development reports (Bowen, 2009). This methodology facilitated a thorough thematic analysis and avoided logistical and ethical difficulties related to primary data collection within politically sensitive environments. Secondary data from 2000-2023 were examined to present a cross-sectional analysis of program efficiency and development. Thematic analysis was used to recognize and explain patterns across the documents, focusing on policy implementation, sustainability, and institutional issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Coding and theme development facilitated the organization of findings, which were then linked to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. Where available, descriptive statistics were incorporated to contextualize poverty rates, program reach, and economic indicators, complementing the qualitative insights. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring data integrity, anonymizing sensitive information, and maintaining objectivity throughout the analysis. Publicly available, ethically sourced documents were used exclusively, and findings were critically evaluated to reflect both successes and limitations of UN interventions.

#### V. DATA ANALYSIS

To identify themes, UN's agency reports, World Bank reports, UNDP reports and relevant literature were manually analyzed, and three main themes were identified: effectiveness of UN programs in alleviating poverty, UN strategies for poverty alleviation and challenges in implementing UN's poverty alleviation programs. These themes were ensured to align with the research questions and objectives of this study, aligning with the assertion (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) on the importance of ensuring themes directly address or provide answers to the research questions.

Table 1: Summary of Themes

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Effectiveness of UN programs in alleviating poverty.	Impact of data availability in alleviating poverty. Impact of UN 2030 agenda. Impact of UNDP micro-credit schemes.
UN strategies for poverty alleviation.	Collaboration with the government to create policies. Investment in economic empowerment programs. Investment in education and skills development.
Challenges in the implementation of UN's poverty alleviation programs.	Impact of Climate change and conflicts. Data collection and program targeting challenges.



### **Theme 1: Effectiveness of UN Programs in Alleviating Poverty in West Africa**

The availability of new data for Nigeria and for other West African nations in 2018 provided a better foundation for the UN to combat poverty in West Africa (Aguilar et al., 2022). The UN has been able to reduce poverty as an increased income for bottom-income earners contributes significantly to economic growth while also reducing poverty, aiding impressive progress in reducing poverty in West Africa (World Bank, 2018). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is a key program of the UNDP, focuses on addressing the problem of income inequality with a goal to ensure a 40% faster increase of the least income earners compared to the average income earners (Bourguignon, 2018; United Nations, 2024a).

Although, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development program was effective in reducing poverty globally, significant challenges were faced in West Africa with respect to poverty alleviation with less significant effect on the poverty rate within the West African region (World Bank, 2018). However, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development program has not effectively alleviated poverty in West Africa due to economic and political challenges such as the ongoing crises in countries like Nigeria and Burkina Faso (UNDP, 2024). Furthermore, (Udoh & Mboho, 2023) in their study assert that although UNDP alleviation programs such as the micro-credit scheme were established in some areas within Nigeria, it has not been effective in alleviating poverty in its target areas, with less significant contributions to agricultural and small businesses in target areas.

### **Theme 2: UN Strategies for Poverty Alleviation**

The UN, in its 2030 agenda, highlights that ensuring inclusive and sustainable development through fundamental changes in the structure of an economy plays a significant role in the eradication of poverty (United Nations, 2018). This has created a bedrock on which the UN collaborates with the governments of several nations to ensure that this goal is met. In the alleviation of poverty in West Africa, the UN employs several strategies. The UN collaborates with the government to create policies that aid poverty reduction. In collaboration with the government, the UN created the fiscal policy, which significantly protected vulnerable households from poverty during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, with statistics showing that the poverty rate would have been 2.4% higher without fiscal policies in place (World Bank, 2022). The UN

collaborates with the government to ensure that policies to be implemented are effective in alleviating poverty, considering its impact on different groups of the population and the overall impact.

Also, the UN invested in economic empowerment programs, supporting individuals and firms while promoting rapid agricultural productivity growth and rural development (United Nations, 2018). The UNDP micro credit scheme is one of the strategies utilized by the UN to alleviate poverty. This scheme is designed to aid the eradication of poverty by providing microloans to individuals who are unable to meet the requirements of commercial banks for loans, empowering them to improve upon their agriculture and start or expand small businesses, thereby improving their standard of living (Udoh & Mboho, 2023). Furthermore, the UN focuses on investing in education, development of skills and enhancement of employability, actively working to ensure that every child has access to quality education while ensuring young people are equipped with relevant skills and continued learning opportunities for the rapidly evolving labor market (United Nations, 2018). This strategy ensures that there is a sufficient number of educated labor force to meet the requirements of the job market, reducing unemployment and aiding poverty reduction.

### **Theme 3: Challenges in the Implementation of UN Poverty Alleviation Programs**

Climate change has created a barrier to poverty alleviation, with disasters increasing the number of individuals living in poverty (United Nations, 2024b). According to (Rustad, 2024), in 2022, Africa became the major hub for state-based conflicts, with about 50% of the global state-based conflicts concentrated in Africa. Also, the ongoing conflict in the Northeastern part of Nigeria from 2008-2021 has resulted in a cumulative loss of between \$91.2 billion and \$112.8 billion, which has greatly contributed to the economic downturn of the country and the region in general (UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), 2023). The rising intensity of conflicts in recent years is driving millions of people to displacement, food shortages, economic disruption and infrastructure destruction, posing a challenge to the efforts of the UN in the alleviation of poverty (UNDP, 2024). This has resulted in difficulties implementing poverty alleviation programs in certain areas within West Africa while also rendering several years of development efforts irrelevant, pushing communities back into poverty.

### **Institutional Theory and the Effectiveness of UN Programs in Alleviating Poverty in West Africa**





Institutional theory emphasizes the impact of formal institutions and policies on economic and social outcomes (Zucker, 1987). The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the impact of institutions in the alleviation of poverty by addressing income inequality and boosting low-income earnings. However, the weaknesses of institutions in West Africa, due to corruption and conflicts, have significantly hindered the success of UN poverty alleviation programs. For instance, the UNDP microcredit scheme had limited effectiveness in achieving its poverty alleviation goals due to inadequate institutional structures (Udoh & Mboho, 2023). Also, the crisis in Nigeria and Burkina Faso has weakened government institutions and disrupted economic activities (UNDP, 2024), significantly hindering the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs.

#### **Modernization Theory and the UN Strategies for Poverty Alleviation in West Africa**

Modernization theory asserts that societies progress through different levels of economic, social and technological advancement, which are based on several factors within the society (Goorha, 2010). The UN, by investing in education, economic empowerment programs, and skills development aligns with the modernization theory, promoting economic, social and technological changes. For instance, based on reports, without the implementation of fiscal policy through the collaboration of the UN with national governments, poverty rates during COVID-19 would have been 2.4% higher (World Bank, 2022), highlighting policy-driven change as a factor for development, which aligns with the modernization theory.

The economic empowerment strategy also aligns with the modernization theory, as the effects of this strategy are essential for attaining modernity and progress in West Africa. The UNDP micro-credit scheme provides a ground on which low-income individuals can access capital to invest in their farms or businesses, enhancing economic activities and the development of larger economic systems. Modernization theory posits that a well-educated labor force is essential for economic growth, the UN programs align with this theory by investing in the education, skill development and employability enlightenment of young people.

#### **Institutional Theory with Respect to Challenges in UN Poverty Alleviation Programs**

West Africa has faced several institutional, economic and social challenges which have greatly hindered the success of UN programs in the

alleviation of poverty (UNDP, 2024). The conflict in Northeastern Nigeria, which resulted in an economic loss between 2008 and 2021, political instability, weak government and conflicts all resulted in economic downturn and instability, aligning with institutional theory, which highlights that weak institutions and instability hinder economic growth.

Also, accurate data is essential for ensuring poverty programs are effectively targeted at the right audience; however, reports show that the UN has struggled with accessing sufficient data within West Africa (UNDP, 2024); this aligns with Institutional Theory, highlighting the importance of strong institutions in ensuring effective data collection, data monitoring and evaluation. The UN's poverty alleviation programs in West Africa are influenced by both the institutional and modernization theories and the success of these programs relies heavily on the strength of the institutions and the efforts made towards modernization.

#### **VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

While the UN has responded in numerous ways to alleviate poverty in West Africa, poverty remains a significant challenge greatly influenced by economic instability, weak institutions, climate change and conflict. Also, although the various UN interventions such as the economic empowerment programs, collaboration with the government to create policies and investment in education have been instrumental to the alleviation of poverty in West Africa, their impact on poverty reduction is often hindered by challenges and overcoming these challenges are essential in the success of poverty eradication. Furthermore, majorly, the objectives of poverty alleviation programs in West Africa are usually not achieved due to weak institution structures and corruption, which have greatly limited the effectiveness of these programs. Also, the high rate of low-income earners continues to hinder the alleviation of poverty in West Africa.

#### **VII. CONCLUSION**

The UN plays a vital role in the alleviation of poverty in West Africa, however, operational and institutional challenges have limited the impact of UN interventions. Also, the implementation of sustainable strategies for the alleviation of poverty requires the collective effort of the government, society and UN in its achievement. Addressing the challenges hindering the implementation of the UN poverty alleviation programs is essential for effectiveness of the role of the UN in the alleviation of poverty in West Africa.



## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has identified that the role of the UN in the alleviation of poverty in West Africa is not effective; hence, there is a need to ensure the effectiveness of the UN's role in poverty alleviation. The UN should collaborate with other agencies, such as ECOWAS, to distribute funds for poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria to enhance accountability, effectiveness and transparency and ensure better allocation of resources and planning. The UN should strengthen the implementation of UN programs with efficiency, transparency and accountability. The UN should also implement measures to tackle corruption so as to ensure that funds and UN programs are directed at the target audience. The UN should focus on implementing programs that encourage modernization of the economy, such as innovative, industrial and entrepreneurship programs.

### Limitation of the Study

This research encountered the limitation of accessing comprehensive data on the poverty rate and UN strategies in most West African countries.

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