

## Poverty, Inflation and Social Exclusion of Low Income Households in Rivers State: A Study of Rukpokwu Clan, Obio/Akpor, Local Government Area

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelationship between poverty, inflation, and social exclusion in establishing a cycle of deprivation among low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State, and to learn the consequences of this on social mobility. The research was conducted in a qualitative format, whereby 15 community leaders, heads of social groups, and political figures were interviewed in depth. The theoretical framework was the Capability Approach Theory, which was developed by Amartya Sen, and it emphasizes the fact that poverty and exclusion restrict the capabilities and freedoms of individuals, and they are unable to live fulfilling lives. The results of the interviews showed that inflation reduced purchasing power, and low-income households could hardly afford basic needs like food, education, and healthcare. This resulted in social exclusion, where families could not engage in community activities or receive basic services. In addition, poverty, inflation and exclusion hindered social mobility because children born in such families could not access education and this continued to perpetuate intergenerational poverty. The results highlight the fact that poverty, inflation, and social exclusion are closely interrelated, forming a vicious cycle of deprivation. To overcome these problems, policymakers are advised to introduce specific economic interventions, inclusive social programs, and better access to education to empower low-income households and eliminate the poverty cycle.

**Keywords:** Poverty, inflation, social exclusion, low-income households, social mobility

### 1. Introduction

Poverty is one of the most endemic socioeconomic issues in Rivers State and Nigeria in general. In its simplest definition, poverty is a state where individuals or households cannot achieve a minimum acceptable standard of living, which is usually defined in terms of income, access to basic needs, and participation in society [1]. Notably, poverty is not merely the absence of money but it is relative deprivation, in which inadequate resources deny individuals the opportunity to participate in vital social and economic practices in their societies [2]. Poverty in the Nigerian context is characterized by low access to food, shelter, education, healthcare, and productive resources, which negatively affect human well being

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Article history : submitted; 2026/01/15 revised; 2026/02/23 accepted; 2026/03/10, published; 2026/04/07

and societal development [3]. The state of Rivers with its strategic economic location in the Niger Delta is ironically characterized by high levels of poverty in rural and peri urban regions like the Rukpokwu Clan due to structural inequalities, inadequate infrastructure and lack of livelihood opportunities. According to scholars, this kind of rural poverty is entrenched in socio political and economic inequalities, which lead to systemic deprivation of low income households [4]. Therefore, poverty in Rukpokwu cannot be understood in a single dimension that only considers income but also access to services, social participation, and empowerment.

Inflation is a persistent increase in the overall price level of goods and services over a period of time, which causes a decrease in the real purchasing power of income. Inflation reduces the purchasing power of households, particularly low-income earners, to buy basic needs like food, shelter, and transport. Inflation has been a persistent problem in Nigeria, and at times, the high rates of food and energy prices have severely reduced household incomes [5]. To illustrate, research on inflation in Nigeria shows that the positive relationship between increasing consumer prices and poverty is that the poorer households are disproportionately impacted by the rising costs of living because their limited incomes are used up by basic spending [6], [7]. The local economic conditions in the context of Rivers State also contribute to the situation: low wages, lack of diversified sources of income, and economic shocks that render the cost of living unpredictable and volatile. The resultant effect is that inflation increases material deprivation and suffering, compelling most low income households to resort to coping mechanisms like cutting down on food intake, education or dropping out of productive activities. Therefore, inflation does not simply increase prices; it increases economic susceptibility and continues the poverty cycle among already disadvantaged groups.

Social exclusion is defined as the processes through which individuals or groups are excluded in a systematic manner in the economic, social, cultural, and political life. It entails the deprivation of access to resources, rights, services, and opportunities that are generally accessible to the wider society [8]. Social exclusion in Nigeria manifests in various ways such as access to quality education, health, financial services, and political representation, which tend to overlap with poverty and perpetuate disadvantage among low income households. Poverty is not the only cause of social exclusion, but exclusionary practices also restrict the capacity of people to leave impoverished situations by engaging in fair economic activities and social mobility [8], [9]. In the case of low income households in places like Rukpokwu Clan, exclusionary processes may be in the form of poor infrastructure, social services, and discriminatory access to markets and jobs. These obstacles reduce the ability of households to engage effectively in community life, contribute to local development, and enjoy social safety nets. Thus, the analysis of social exclusion in relation to poverty and inflation is essential to comprehend how structural inequalities perpetuate disadvantage and diminish the chances of social and economic progress. To solve the problem of exclusion, it is necessary to implement policies that increase access to resources and empower marginalized communities, creating a more inclusive environment that reduces poverty and economic instability.

The interaction between poverty, inflation and social exclusion in Rivers State forms a vicious cycle of deprivation that affects low income households the most. Although poverty restricts access to resources, chronic inflation undermines the purchasing power and real incomes of vulnerable populations, and it is becoming harder to sustain basic standards of

living. The resulting inflation, in its turn, causes economic pressure that tends to push marginalized households even further to the edges of the society, as they cannot afford to engage in the provision of basic services or local markets. At the same time, social exclusion puts these households in a cycle of low opportunities, where access to education, finance, and social services is limited, preventing upward mobility and trapping them in intergenerational poverty. This is dynamic in rural and peri urban settings such as the Rukpokwu Clan in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area where low income families are compound disadvantaged by poor economic structures, poor infrastructure and poor social interventions. Empirical research on Nigerian communities demonstrates that poverty and social exclusion are closely interconnected, and both material deprivation and exclusionary practices need to be addressed in a holistic policy response [8], [2]. Therefore, it is important to know the joint impacts of inflation and exclusion on poverty in order to develop policies that can alleviate living standards, increase social inclusion, and promote sustainable development among low income households in Rivers State. It is only through addressing these interrelated issues collectively that significant and sustainable changes in quality of life can be realized.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Poverty, inflation and social exclusion are not merely abstract socioeconomic measures in Nigeria; they are urgent lived experiences that define the daily plight of millions of families, especially in urban fringes and rural villages like the Rukpokwu Clan in Obio/Akpor. Although Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, the depth and magnitude of deprivation is widespread and continues to compromise human well being, as indicated by high rates of multidimensional poverty where access to basic needs like food, decent housing, healthcare, and education is limited to large segments of the population [10], [11]. According to national statistics, the poverty level in rural areas in Nigeria has been increasing by leaps and bounds, with the World Bank estimating that rural poverty may be as high as 75.5% and this is a sharp contrast between urban and non urban populations [11]. In the Niger Delta setting, and Rivers State specifically, this suffering is aggravated by economic shocks, environmental destruction, and poor social safety nets. These structural gaps have ensured that the abilities of many households, particularly those at the bottom of the income ladder, have been eroded over the years to ensure that they are unable to engage in stable livelihoods. With stagnant or falling incomes, households are further pushed into deprivation cycles, becoming caught in a vicious cycle of poverty breeding vulnerability and exclusion, which strengthens intergenerational patterns of disadvantage that make social participation and human development meaningful. The issue therefore does not just reside in the fact that there is poverty and inflation as discrete phenomena but in the manner in which they intersect and interact in the local socio economic fabrics to marginalize already vulnerable communities.

The rising rate of inflation in Nigeria in the past years has only increased material poverty among low income families. The real incomes of households have been reduced drastically by high cost of living and continuous inflation of food prices, compelling many to ration, forego basic health care, and pull children out of school, thus increasing inequality and deteriorating social mobility. Low income environments like Rukpokwu are characterized by increasing proportions of their scarce income going to food and basic needs, leaving them with little to invest in productive assets, save, or educate [12]. As daily costs exceed the rise in income or wage increases, the disparity between the rich and the poor grows, contributing to poverty and social exclusion. However, the actual question is how are these interconnected

economic forces influencing the life opportunities of people in such societies? Are low income households in Rukpokwu simply passive recipients of macroeconomic trends or are there deeper structural constraints that entrap them in exclusion and deprivation cycles, including lack of access to quality employment, financial services, and social protection systems? In trying to provide answers to these questions, it is clear that the socioeconomic issues that plague low income households are not a one time hardship but a systemic failure that requires holistic interrogation and context specific evidence to guide effective policy responses. This rhetorical dilemma highlights the urgency of the issue and the necessity to deconstruct the processes by which inflation and exclusion exacerbate poverty at the micro community level.

The interrelationship between poverty, inflation and social exclusion in places such as Rivers State highlights an important governance and development issue with extensive effects on social cohesion, economic productivity and human dignity. The negative impact of economic shocks on vulnerable populations is enhanced by social exclusion, which is characterized by the denial of opportunities and rights to others [13]. Marginalized households are excluded not only by economic participation but also by civic engagement and community networks that might otherwise be used as resilience resources in a setting where inflation is undermining consumption capacity and making markets less accessible to those with limited financial buffers. The effects are greater susceptibility to health shocks, greater risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty, and reduced chances of overcoming deprivation cycles. In addition, the low effectiveness of the current social safety measures and policy tools to sufficiently safeguard the poor has brought up issues of inclusivity and responsiveness of state actions. With these problems continuing to exist, they transform poverty as an individual problem to a structural dilemma that compromises the development objectives and equitable growth. It is on this basis that this research was conducted to investigate the poverty, inflation and social exclusion of low income households in Rivers State: A study of Rukpokwu Clan, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. To this end, the following research questions were stated to guide the study:

- 1) How does inflation contribute to the persistence of poverty in low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State?
- 2) What are the key drivers of social exclusion among low-income households in Rivers State, and how does this exclusion reinforce cycles of poverty?
- 3) How do the interconnected effects of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion create a cycle of deprivation for low-income households in Rukpokwu, and what are the implications for social mobility?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Poverty**

The phenomenon of poverty is multidimensional and unresolved, and it continues to be the center of developmental debate around the world. It is not just a phenomenon that can be attributed to the absence of financial means; it includes wider socio-economic deprivations that restrict the access to the basic life needs and opportunities. The meaning of poverty varies depending on the field, but essentially poverty means a state where people or a community is highly undermined in attaining a minimum level of livelihood. The classical economic definition tends to pay attention to material deprivation, and poverty is defined by the level of income or consumption below the necessary minimum to satisfy the most basic needs including food, shelter, and health care [14]. Its definition, however, is not limited only to economic indicators. Poverty should also be conceptualized as social exclusion, as

scholars in the sphere of sociology and development studies have indicated, marginalized groups should not have the right to access basic services such as education and healthcare, thereby hindering their participation in the society [8]. Social exclusion and economic deprivation tend to support one another, because people and families caught in poverty are pushed further outside the circle of essential social contacts, which further marginalize them. Thus, even though the income inequality and material deprivation can still be important indicators, they can only be considered as the wider and more sophisticated manifestation of poverty.

Moreover, poverty is considered to be a relative deprivation state, in which people lack economic, social, and cultural involvement in the society that other members have [15]. This interpretation brings in the concept that poverty is not merely an absolute state but it can be interpreted relative to the place one is in within a given society. As an illustration, in certain situations, people might be able to access the basic needs such as food and shelter, yet, they cannot be able to interact socially, receive education, and participate in political activities because of the economic limitations. Also, scholars like Sen (1999) have championed a more holistic concept of poverty by suggesting that poverty is not merely gauged by income but also by the capabilities of an individual or their capacity to make choices and live a good life [16]. This method will not rely on material deprivation but on the bigger question of whether people are free to seek education and personal growth as well as social involvement. Poverty therefore is not only an economic problem but also one which profoundly influences the potential of people to fulfill their potential and it is therefore important that the policymakers should consider both material as well as capability based dimensions in formulating interventions to reduce poverty [16]. This multidimensional perspective is especially relevant to the problem of poverty in developing countries such as Nigeria, where such factors as insufficient infrastructure, lack of sufficient medical facilities, and limited access to education contribute to the situation of poverty, and vulnerable populations cannot escape the poverty trap.

In accordance with all these different academic views, my own definition of what poverty is is more of a refined view toward deprivation that encompasses not just economic aspects but also the restricted access to developmental and social assimilation. I understand poverty as a social-economic state when people or households are in a state of persistent deprivation in various aspects, i.e., material, social, and psychological. It is characterized by the failure to satisfy the fundamental needs like food, shelter, health, and education and at the same time be denied meaningful engagement in social, economic, and cultural life. This definition is more than mere financial inadequacy, because poverty is also a relational state, in which people become peripheral to opportunities that allow social mobility and social integration. As an example, the poor can have food, but they cannot afford to educate their children, get healthcare, or even develop their communities. This exclusion complicates their ability to get out of the poverty trap because they are not a part of the vital services, financial networks, and job opportunities that are usually dominated by other more privileged groups [4]. Moreover, the social aspects of poverty, including stigma, exclusion and isolation, are also instrumental in perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty. Thus, this subjective definition indicates the multidimensionality and multifacetedness of poverty by including the material, relational, and exclusionary dimensions that restrict the agency of people and their progression.

The emphasis on the multidimensionality of poverty, also brings out the necessity of the intersectional policy interventions in order to deal with the various barriers that people encounter in order to come out of poverty. Not only is it necessary to supply monetary resources or basic physical resources, but the policies should also be aimed at increasing social capabilities in order to get individuals out of the deprivation cycle, including access to quality education, healthcare, and jobs. Poverty, as it is stated by development scholars like Ajakaiye (2002) and Magaji (2022), needs to be addressed in a holistic manner, which, in addition to aiming at reducing the immediate material deprivation, is also aimed at creating long-term empowerment and social inclusion opportunities [2], [3]. Economic policies that promote economic growth and enhance infrastructure, as well as access to services, play a crucial role in addressing poverty, particularly where social exclusion exacerbates the predicament facing low-income families [3]. Thus, this subjective definition demands poverty alleviation policies to be holistic, context-based, and focused on enhancing material prosperity and social inclusion so that the individuals would be able to realize their potential and be productive members of society.

### **Inflation**

Inflation is a key economic term that describes the mechanisms of prices and the worth of money within an economy. On the most general and commonly agreed-upon level, inflation is the persistent rise in the overall level of prices of goods and services over the course of time, leading to a relative fall in the purchasing power of money [17], [18]. Most of the major economic organizations and academic sources have restated this central notion, stating that inflation does not consist only of individual price increases but rather price changes that are widespread and persistent throughout an economy [19], [20]. To illustrate, the European Parliament briefly describes inflation as a process of ever-increasing prices and declining purchasing power, placing the phenomenon in a dynamic environment, but not in a snapshot [19]. In the same way, inflation is measured in economic measurement systems, including Consumer Price Indices (CPI), as the percentage change in the price level of a representative set of goods and services over a given time [21], [18]. The definition is both empirical and policy relevant because this approach is both an economic reality in the changes in the cost of living and the statistical instruments employed to quantify inflation.

In addition to the simple common concept of inflation as increasing prices, the literature shows a variety of subtle and even conflicting definitions that emphasize various theoretical perspectives within economics. The classical monetary theorists define inflation as a growth of the money supply that is higher than the rise in goods and services and thus decreases the worth of money and increases the prices [22], [23]. This definition is consistent with monetarist views, which view inflation as a monetary phenomenon in essence, a view with its roots in classical and neoclassical economic schools. Other researchers stress the macroeconomic character of inflation as a general upward pressure on prices that is not related to supply specific shocks or to particular market movements [24]. According to this perspective, inflation will ignore the idiosyncratic price movements to concentrate on economy wide movements that indicate systemic changes in the price levels [24]. All these academic definitions are used to describe inflation as a complex economic process that has effects on purchasing power, monetary policy, wages, savings, and investment choices. Although the overall meaning of this phenomenon is widely accepted, there is still a debate about the causes, methods of measurement, and theoretical definitions, and this fact highlights the complexity of inflation as a concept in both the theory and empirical studies.

## Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon and has become eminent in academic, policy, and development literature as a means of comprehending how individuals and groups are being systematically denied the opportunity to enjoy the full benefit of the usual social, economic, political, and cultural life of their society. In its simplest meaning, social exclusion is a process that prevents access to rights, opportunities, resources, and participation, which are usually accessible to the majority of individuals in a society [25], [26]. This definition highlights that exclusion is not merely a result but an experience that is procedural in nature, that is, it is something that changes over time and that it tends to overlap with other types of disadvantage, i.e., poverty, discrimination, and marginalization. The United Nations also defines social exclusion as a condition where people cannot enjoy a full economic, social, political, and cultural life, and poverty is only one aspect of the phenomenon [27], [28]. Social exclusion in this case goes beyond material deprivation to encompass the denial of civil rights, access to basic services and meaningful social relationships, highlighting the extent of deprivation deprived populations can undergo [29]. Notably, researchers emphasize that the aspects of social exclusion are relational and dynamic: it entails interpersonal, inter-institutional, and structural forces that either integrate or marginalize individuals in terms of identity, socio economic status, and power relations [30], [31].

It is on these bases that social exclusion has also been broadly conceptualized as a relational and structural process that does not only express absence of participation but also generates inequalities in various spheres of life. The studies emphasize that exclusion is not the lack of social engagement but the outcome of systematic barriers based on discrimination, social norms, and institutional practices that restrict the agency and access to basic opportunities in individuals [32], [33]. As an example, the academic literature defines social exclusion as the deprivation or unavailability of resources, rights, goods, services and relationships that individuals need to participate in mainstream society in economic, cultural and political spheres [29], [25]. This multidimensional perspective is consistent with the conceptual frameworks highlighting the interaction of social exclusion with identity categories, including gender, ethnicity, and age, to generate various experiences of disadvantage [30]. Researchers also observe that social exclusion is a combination of structural factors (e.g., labor market, institutional discrimination) and relational processes (e.g., stigma, social distancing) that alienate groups of people to social networks and opportunities [32], [31]. Therefore, social exclusion is a matter of power, inequality, and access: not only who lacks resources, but who is not allowed to be fully involved in the economic, social and political processes of the society due to visible and invisible barriers.

## Low income households

Low income households are a key unit of analysis in inequality, social policy, and economic well being research since they constitute families or household units whose income is considerably lower than the established norms within a society, which in most cases leads to limited access to basic goods, services, and opportunities. In a basic level, academic literature usually defines low income households in relative income terms i.e. those whose income is below a given proportion of median or average income of a given population [34]. In numerous global settings, it usually means households in the low 20 (lowest 20) of the income distribution, relative deprivation, and socioeconomic disadvantage in relation to the rest of the wider society [35]. Relative definitions of this nature take into consideration that low income is contextual and depends on the current economic situation, cost of living and

household composition; e.g. equivalised measures adjust incomes to household size and composition to enable meaningful comparisons among different types of families [36]. Researchers also observe that low income households often live in a state of long-term economic deprivation, incapable of affording the basics, including decent housing, healthy nutrition, medical care, and education, which themselves are factors and effects of their income position [37]. This renders low income a quantitative measure in terms of income or resources, as well as a qualitative measure in terms of narrowed options and economic insecurity.

In addition to income levels, studies point out that low income households are also defined based on sociodemographic and structural variables that define the economic vulnerability of the household. Empirical research demonstrates that low income households tend to have larger households, less participation in the labour market, underemployment, or low-waged jobs, which in turn lower economic resilience and increase the risk of food insecurity, housing instability, and poor access to services [35], [38]. In public policy and programmatic research, including affordable housing and welfare assistance, low income households are not only defined by income cutoffs (e.g., below 80% of area median income) but also their inability to afford basic expenses despite working, saving, or receiving aid, as is reflected in the specialized term of the ALICE category (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) in U.S. studies [39]. Moreover, research in health and social sciences highlights that low income is often linked to various unmet social necessities, including childcare, transportation, and utilities which amplify economic insecurity and have quantifiable impacts on physical and mental health [40]. All these views point to the fact that low income households are better understood not simply as households below arbitrary income lines but as households that are structurally economically disadvantaged with wider consequences in terms of social inclusion, health outcomes, and participation in civic life.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

To gain a better insight into the problems of poverty, inflation and social marginalization of the low-income households in Rivers State, we might turn our attention to the Capability Approach Theory. This theory was formulated by an economist Amartya Sen in the early 1980s, which provides a more sophisticated approach to analyzing poverty and exclusion based on the capacity of individuals to obtain well-being instead of focusing on their access to resources [41]. The Capability Approach focuses on personal freedoms and opportunities unlike the Dependency Theory which focuses on structural limitations posed by external forces. It suggests that poverty does not only mean the absence of income but the deprivation of basic abilities that enable people to live the type of life they cherish. The study of Rivers State is very suitable to this approach since it transcends the financial aspects to examine how poor households cannot receive the services or opportunities needed to engage in all aspects of social, economic, and political life, particularly in a setting where inflation is prevalent and marginalized.

Nobel laureate economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, who argued that economic well-being could not be simply measured by income or resources, was the founder of the Capability Approach [41]. The focal point of this theory is the notion of capabilities, the actual freedoms or possibilities that individuals possess to attain valuable states of being and doing, including being well-nourished, educated, and employed. The theory is constructed on the idea that the policies of the economy and social systems were not only supposed to maximize income but also the capabilities of people. Sen created a model of poverty that relies on the

deprivation of capability and is applicable in the analysis of the poor household in low income earners because it enables a more comprehensive analysis of poverty rather than just looking at the insufficiency of income [41]. Practically, the strategy can be seen as the evaluation of the capacity of people to receive education, healthcare, jobs, and other vital aspects of well-being, which are also prioritized by the social exclusion theory.

The Capability Approach is especially suitable to the research of poverty, inflation and social exclusion in Rivers State because it enables more comprehensive view of how the economic and social structure restricts the opportunities of low-income households. As an illustration, although inflation reduces the household income, the Capability Approach would analyze how these households are also denied the capability to receive healthcare, education, or meaningful jobs, and they become excluded in the entire society. The theory also emphasizes how poverty in Rivers State is not only about poor income but lack of freedom to live a life that these households hold dear. The applicability of this theory to social exclusion is also quite evident, because exclusion is not just seen as the deprivation of material goods but also the deprivation of the right to live a dignified and active life in society. In such a way, the Capability Approach enables a more comprehensive interpretation of the correlation between poverty, inflation, and social exclusion, which is why it is a perfect model to use in the given study.

## 2. Research Method

The research approach employed was qualitative research methodology, which is especially effective in in-depth perspective and experience exploration. Personal interviews were used to gather primary data of 15 adult members of the Rukpokwu Clan in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The researcher used purposive sampling method to identify 15 adults to use in the study. These interviewees encompassed major local individuals like traditional rulers, heads of social groups and other political leaders who are well acquainted with social and economic dynamics of the community. In order to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents, the personal identifiers were not used and each participant was given a number to protect his identity during the analysis. This was done to enable the interviewees to express themselves freely, as their personal information will not be disclosed in the research findings hence they will be honest and open up. Besides primary data, secondary data were also collected based on various sources such as textbooks, newspapers, government publications among other pertinent materials. The thematic and content analysis methods were used to analyse the data obtained both through primary and secondary sources carefully. The process assisted in determining important patterns, themes, and insights associated with the issue of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion as the focal point of the study.

## 3. Results and Discussion

How does inflation contribute to the persistence of poverty in low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State?

For the purpose of exploring how inflation contributes to the persistence of poverty in low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, a qualitative interview methodology was used. The 15 adult members of the community, including traditional rulers, heads of social groups, and political leaders, were interviewed, and they have a lot of knowledge regarding the local socio-economic conditions. The main question of each interview was as follows: How does

inflation lead to the continuation of poverty in low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan? Participants were given numbers to ensure that their identities were not disclosed.

**The Interview revealed the following key findings:**

1. Inflation and the Erosion of Purchasing Power: One respondent (Interviewee 1) says that inflation mostly impacts low-income households by reducing purchasing power. The respondent said that the cost of goods and services has increased and the wages that people earn are not in line with the increased prices and as a result, families are spending more on basic needs such as food and have little to spend on education or healthcare. This was echoed by many of the interviewees, and inflation is a direct cause of material deprivation, especially in families that are already low-income earners.

2. Greater Economic Vulnerability and Social Exclusion: Respondents reported that the escalating cost of basic commodities worsens social exclusion. According to one of the interviewees (Interviewee 5), who is a community leader, he said, When prices go up and people cannot afford food or healthcare, they are excluded in social and community activities. They can no longer afford to attend local events or contribute to group activities. This exclusion makes them feel isolated. This underscores the role of inflation as a social exclusion mechanism, which forces people and families to the periphery of society because they cannot afford even the most basic forms of social engagement, which perpetuates poverty cycles.

3. Coping Mechanisms and Informal Social Structures: In order to deal with inflationary pressures, most respondents said that low-income households have to resort to strategies like cutting down on food consumption, pulling children out of school, or turning to informal networks to help them. One interviewee (Interviewee 8) said, "The extended family networks provide financial assistance to most families, but they are also strained by the high levels of poverty, forcing many individuals to resort to savings or borrowing money among friends, which further exacerbates their financial problems in the long run.

4. Long-term Effect on Poverty: The interviewees unanimously held that inflation is a major cause of chronic poverty in Rukpokwu Clan. A traditional leader (Interviewee 12) commented, "Inflation keeps the poor in a poverty trap. People may strive to work harder but they realize that their efforts are not sufficient to sustain them as the worth of their income reduces with time.

Based on the interviews, it was clear that inflation is a key factor in the continuation of poverty and social exclusion in Rukpokwu Clan. The direct impact of inflation on purchasing power is that low-income households use a higher percentage of their income on basic needs, and they have little to spend on other expenditures, thereby trapping them in poverty. Moreover, social exclusion is strengthened because increasing costs do not allow individuals to engage in social activities to the full extent, and they cannot develop social capital. The coping mechanisms used including the use of informal networks show that inflationary pressures make people more vulnerable to long-term poverty and restrict mobility opportunities, which keeps people in a deprivation cycle.

The results confirm the hypothesis that inflation is a major factor in the continuation of poverty and social exclusion among low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State. The cumulative impact of increasing prices and decreasing access to basic services drive already vulnerable groups into further poverty, and it is hard to escape these socio-economic traps.

What are the key drivers of social exclusion among low-income households in Rivers State, and how does this exclusion reinforce cycles of poverty?

To understand the major causes of social exclusion among low-income households in Rivers State and the ways in which social exclusion perpetuates poverty cycles, qualitative interviews were carried out with 15 adult members of the Rukpokwu Clan, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area. These interviewees were traditional rulers, heads of social groups, and other important political figures in the community, and they provided useful information on local socio-economic dynamics. The interviewees were assured of confidentiality and their answers were anonymised by using numerical identifiers to preserve privacy and facilitate free discussion.

**The Interview revealed several important findings:**

1. **Low Education and Skills Training:** The inability to access education and skills training was one of the main causes of social exclusion reported by respondents. According to Interviewee 3, a local community leader, he said, most low-income households are unable to send their children to school regularly because of the increasing cost of education, uniforms, and transport, which restricts their children to acquire skills that would help them to break the cycle of poverty. This was also echoed by another respondent (Interviewee 6), a traditional ruler, who said, "Education is the ladder to upward mobility, when people are denied access to education, they are relegated to low-paying jobs or informal work, which traps them in poverty. The inability to access quality education denies these people the ability to learn skills that will help them secure better jobs, thereby perpetuating social exclusion and restricting their chances of getting out of poverty.

2. **Inequality in Access to Healthcare:** Access to healthcare was another major theme in the interviews. A political figure, Respondent 2, emphasized, "The healthcare system in Rivers State is not only underfunded but also geographically inaccessible to most low-income families. When families cannot afford basic healthcare or medications, they are denied one of the most important rights in society, which results in poor health outcomes, which keep families in poverty. Another interviewee (Interviewee 10) also added, "Besides the physical suffering of sickness, the inaccessibility of healthcare leads to psychological suffering, which supports the sense of being out of the society and its opportunities. Unhealthy conditions increase economic susceptibility, as people find it harder to work or pursue educational opportunities, which leads to poverty and exclusion cycles.

3. **Discrimination and Stigma:** Economic, ethnic, and gender-based discrimination and stigma were also found to be major causes of social exclusion. The head of a local women group, Interviewee 5, elaborated, "Women and poor household members are usually not given a chance to hold leadership positions or to access economic resources, this is not only social but institutional because most government programs are tailored to favour some groups at the expense of others. Interviewee 8 also shared this feeling, saying, "Poverty is sometimes perceived as laziness or undeserving of assistance, and this stigma makes it difficult to access social support programs, which further isolates them in terms of community resources. This discrimination further increases social exclusion and contributes to poverty by restricting access of low-income households to opportunities that would enable them to better their socio-economic status.

4. **Inadequate Housing:** Another important aspect of social exclusion was affordable housing. According to Interviewee 12, a local community leader, many low-income families in Rivers State are compelled to live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, which are not

conducive to good health or productivity. The inability to afford proper housing keeps them isolated and excluded by the rest of the community. Lack of access to clean water, sanitation, and safety are also poor living conditions that further isolate families and restrict their participation in the social, economic, and political life of the community.

The results indicate that social exclusion in Rivers State is caused by a number of interrelated factors such as lack of access to education, poor healthcare, discrimination, and poor living conditions. These drivers pose an obstacle to economic participation to low-income households and deny them the resources and opportunities to leave poverty. The key to upward mobility, as emphasized by interviewees, is education. The inability to access education or skills development traps people in low-wage employment, which continues to perpetuate poverty and exclusion. In the same way, access to healthcare is essential to economic stability; when families are unable to afford healthcare, they experience both physical and psychological effects that prevent them from working or raising their living standards. The stigma and discrimination of low-income status further isolates people of vital social and economic networks, which strengthens their marginalisation. In addition, inadequate housing conditions also play a major role in physical and social isolation, which further increases the cycle of exclusion and poverty.

**Strengthening the Cycle of Poverty:** The responses to the interview indicate that social exclusion is not only a consequence of poverty but also a cause of it, which forms feedback loops that perpetuate disadvantage. Since people and families are not included in education, health care, and social networks, they are more susceptible to economic shocks, such as inflation and unemployment, which continue to keep them poor. Lack of access to education means that people cannot access better-paying jobs, and lack of health means that they cannot work regularly. Discrimination reduces access to financial services or credit, which further reduces the capacity to enhance living standards. All these contribute to the poverty trap, in which low-income households are trapped in a cycle of exclusion, and they cannot escape the socio-economic hardship. The inability to access essential resources and opportunities contributes to the further gap between the marginalized and more economically stable, which contributes to the intergenerational spread of poverty.

How do the interconnected effects of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion create a cycle of deprivation for low-income households in Rukpokwu, and what are the implications for social mobility?

In this interview-based research, 6 important respondents of the Rukpokwu Clan, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, were interviewed on the interrelated impacts of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion. The interviewees were community leaders, heads of social groups, and local political figures who are well informed about the socio-economic status of low-income households in the area. The respondents were questioned on the interaction of these factors to form cycles of deprivation and their effects on social mobility within the community. The research design was confidential and all the respondents were identified by numbers to maintain their anonymity.

**The Interview revealed that:**

1. **The Erosion of Purchasing Power and Greater Vulnerability:** The erosion of purchasing power through inflation was one of the most prevalent themes that interviewees identified and was found to worsen the already existing poverty. According to Interviewee 1, who is a community leader, he said, "Inflation impacts the cost of food, fuel, and other daily commodities, low-income families use nearly all their income on basic needs such as food,

and even then, they can hardly afford other needs such as education or healthcare. Political figure, Interviewee 3, added, "The inflationary pressures have decreased the disposable income of most households, people are in a vicious cycle where they can no longer save or invest in their futures. This inflationary impact is interrelated with poverty because the increasing cost of living increases financial limitations, driving families further into economic distress.

2. Social Exclusion and Poverty and Inflation: The social exclusion caused by poverty and inflation was a significant theme in the responses. Interviewee 2, who is a head of a women social group, said, "Already struggling families are further marginalized in the society since they cannot afford to participate in social activities or even contribute to community projects, they become invisible in the society since they cannot afford the same things as others. This feeling of marginalisation results in the feeling of not belonging to the rest of the society, which further complicates their socio-economic plight. Interviewee 5 reiterated this, saying, "The cycle is reinforced by the lack of access to education and healthcare, both as a result of social exclusion and poverty, which leaves these families unable to escape the poverty trap as they are excluded by important social processes that would provide them with opportunities to grow. Since social exclusion limits their participation in education, employment, and social networks, families are left out of the economic and social opportunities that can offer them a means of escaping poverty.

3. Barriers to Social Mobility and Future Generations: The other important finding of the interviews was the barriers to social mobility due to the interplay of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion. According to Interviewee 4, a local elder, children are not given a chance to attend school when their families are unable to afford basic needs, which restricts their future opportunities, and they find it difficult to come out of poverty. Interviewee 6, a leading political figure, further explained, "Inflation and increasing costs make it more difficult to send children to school or invest in their future, without education, there are fewer job opportunities and families are left in the same economic status across generations. These reactions indicate the cyclicity of poverty and social exclusion: when families are unable to invest in the education of their children because of inflation and poverty, it results in the future generations being trapped in the same cycle of deprivation. This poses a social mobility obstacle, as the lack of access to education and stable sources of income continues to perpetuate intergenerational poverty.

The results indicate that poverty, inflation, and social exclusion are closely interrelated in forming a deprivation cycle among low-income households in Rukpokwu. The direct effect of inflation is on the purchasing power of households, as it becomes harder to afford basic needs and invest in opportunities like education and healthcare. This leads to increased poverty entrenchment of households. Social exclusion, on the other hand, denies such families access to important social networks, job opportunities, and education resources, which would enable them to escape poverty.

This denial of the opportunities of the society results in a further cycle of deprivation: families unable to afford education or engage in economic and social activities are left in low-paid jobs or informal work, thereby continuing the cycle of poverty. The social mobility, the possibility to change socio-economic status and belong to another group, is practically prevented because low-income families are deprived of the access to the essential resources that could help them to change their socio-economic status. With the further loss of income due to inflation, poverty increases, and social exclusion becomes more established, a

scenario arises in which economic and social obstacles do not allow these households to access economic progress opportunities. The interrelationship between poverty, inflation and social exclusion forms a vicious cycle of deprivation among low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, which makes it hard to escape poverty. Inflation decreases the purchasing power, social exclusion restricts access to basic opportunities such as education and healthcare, and both of these elements contribute to the cycle of poverty. One of the significant effects is the absence of social mobility because these households are stuck in generational poverty.

## Discussion

### Inflation and Poverty in Rukpokwu Clan

The results of the interviews with low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State, are very informative on the role of inflation in perpetuating poverty and social exclusion in these societies. The respondents identified a number of interrelated factors such as loss of purchasing power, vulnerability, social exclusion, and coping strategies, which strengthen the deprivation cycle. These results are consistent with the current literature, which gives a wider perspective on the effects of inflation on the poor.

Among the most notable results of the interviews is the fact that inflation is undermining purchasing power, which directly contributes to material deprivation. Respondents observed that with the increase in the prices of basic goods and services, low-income households find it difficult to afford their basic needs, and in most cases, they have to cut on spending on non-essential goods such as education or healthcare. This is similar to the results of [3], who states that inflation greatly decreases the purchasing power of low-income families, and it becomes more difficult to sustain even the most basic standard of living. This loss of purchasing power limits the capacity of households to invest in long-term requirements like education or healthcare, which are both essential to escape the poverty trap. Thus, the contribution of inflation to material deprivation is a major obstacle to economic growth and social mobility as observed in [2], where inflation has a direct impact on the capacity of families to amass wealth or enhance their living standards.

The interviews showed that increasing prices of basic commodities and services, including food and health services, contribute to social exclusion among low-income families. Interviewees observed that people who are unable to afford basic needs are not included in social activities, which further isolates them in the community networks. This aligns with [8], who writes about the process of social exclusion when individuals cannot receive the necessary services because of financial limitations. The failure to engage in social activities causes psychological isolation whereby people feel out of place in the society. Moreover, as observed in [3], low-income households cannot gain access to social capital, which is essential in times of economic stress, when they are excluded in terms of access to basic services and community involvement. This forms a vicious cycle, as marginalization increases the susceptibility of such families to even greater poverty.

To cope with inflation, most households in Rukpokwu Clan resort to coping strategies like cutting down on food consumption, pulling out children out of school, or turning to informal networks. One of the respondents said that individuals usually seek the assistance of family members or friends in terms of finances, which is also in line with the findings of [2] on the coping mechanisms of poor families. Informal networks like family and community support were found to be important resources to low-income households in distress in his study. But with the increasing inflation, these informal support systems are stretched and families cannot

depend on them in the long run. This is particularly problematic in the cases when the rest of the community is also economically disadvantaged, which results in a reduced capacity to get out of poverty and emphasizes the lack of social mobility of the people living in poor circumstances.

One of the themes that emerge in the interviews is that inflation perpetuates the poverty cycle. Although people may work more or earn more money, the increase in prices leads to a decline in their real income, and it is hard to change their living conditions. This observation is consistent with [4], who describes how inflation may leave people in intergenerational poverty, particularly when wages or income fail to keep up with the increasing cost of living.

With the decline in real wages due to inflation, low-income families struggle to escape economic vulnerability, and their social mobility prospects are constrained. Social mobility is the capacity of people to alter their economic and social position, and the cumulative impacts of inflation, poverty, and exclusion present a situation in which many people in Rukpokwu Clan can hardly move up the social ladder. In this regard, the results confirm the hypothesis that inflation is a major cause of endemic poverty, social exclusion, and low social mobility, which keeps low-income households in a state of constant economic hardship.

### **Social Exclusion and Poverty in Rivers State**

The results of the interviews with low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State, give a holistic picture of the major causes of social exclusion and how they contribute to the perpetuation of poverty cycles. The respondents pointed out a number of interrelated causes of exclusion, such as lack of access to education, healthcare, discrimination, and poor housing conditions, which pose a major obstacle to economic participation and mobility opportunities. Access to education and skills development was found to be one of the key drivers. According to [2], education is a key determinant of upward mobility and in the absence of quality education, people are doomed to low-paying jobs, which continue to keep them in poverty. The absence of skills training continues to place people in informal, low-paid jobs, further exposing them to economic vulnerability. Likewise, another important factor was healthcare access. Respondents described how poor health contributes to poverty by reducing the capacity of people to work or engage in education opportunities, which strengthens economic vulnerability. This observation is echoed by [8], who writes about how being locked out of healthcare and education can keep people in poverty, and it is hard to escape the deprivation cycle.

Economic, ethnic, and gender discrimination and stigma were also major factors that contributed to exclusion. [4] discovered that discrimination does not only restrict access to jobs and financial resources but also leads to psychological exclusion, which further marginalizes people. This stigma denies access to essential resources and opportunities, further increasing the cycle of poverty. Lastly, inadequate housing conditions, as noted by respondents, are a form of exclusion that isolates families to the rest of the community and restricts their social and economic involvement. This is consistent with the results of [3], who states that poor housing is one of the main causes of poverty and marginalization in disadvantaged

### **Poverty, Inflation, and Social Exclusion in Rukpokwu**

The results of the interviews underscore the interdependent nature of the impacts of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion that lead to a deprivation cycle among low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State. Inflation is a key factor in increasing poverty by lowering the purchasing power of households. According to Interviewee 1, increasing prices

make it more difficult to afford basic needs by low-income families, which further restricts their capacity to invest in education or healthcare. This observation is consistent with [42], who states that vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected by inflation, which further traps them in poverty by reducing their disposable income. The interviewees emphasized that inflation worsens the already existing financial constraints, making it harder to save or invest in long-term opportunities, which further drives families into economic hardship.

Another important factor that exacerbates poverty is social exclusion. Interviewee 2 also indicated that low-income households are further marginalized by the fact that they cannot engage in social activities or contribute to community projects. This observation resonates with [4], who explains that social exclusion leads to psychological isolation and economic marginalisation, which denies people access to important social networks or economic opportunities. Since families are not involved in the social processes, they are not exposed to the resources that can assist them to come out of poverty.

In addition, poverty and inflation are a major impediment to social mobility. Interviewee 4 highlighted the role of the inability to educate children in perpetuating intergenerational poverty since the next generation is not given a chance to access education. [3] confirms this observation by saying that the inability to access education is among the main reasons why families remain in poverty because it restricts their chances of getting better jobs and salaries. Therefore, the results highlight the interdependence of poverty, inflation, and social exclusion in perpetuating deprivation cycles. The cumulative impact of these forces keeps low-income households in a cycle of chronic poverty, in which they cannot afford to obtain education, healthcare, or social networks, and thus upward social mobility is very challenging.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study investigated how the interrelationship between poverty, inflation, and social exclusion leads to a deprivation cycle among low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan, Rivers State, and how the cycle hinders social mobility. According to the results, it was clear that these factors are mutually reinforcing, which increases the economic vulnerability of low-income households and forms a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty.

The initial significant discovery was that inflation is at the center of the continuation of poverty as it greatly diminishes the purchasing power of low-income households. The increasing cost of food, fuel, and other basic commodities as reported by interviewees meant that families had to use the majority of their earnings to cover the basic needs, and they had no or little time to invest in education or health. This observation confirmed the hypothesis that inflation exacerbates material deprivation by reducing incomes, which aligns with [42], who emphasized that vulnerable groups are disproportionately impacted by inflation, which further traps poverty.

The second significant discovery was the contribution of social exclusion to the continuation of poverty. According to the respondents, low-income households in Rukpokwu Clan were not included in social activities, community projects, and economic opportunities because they could not afford to participate in these critical sectors. This exclusion not only led to psychological isolation but also denied them the social capital that they needed to achieve economic progress. These results echoed [4], who claimed that social exclusion is a key factor that prevents marginalized groups of people to access resources that can assist them in getting out of poverty.

Lastly, the research established that poverty, inflation, and social exclusion had a compounding effect that posed serious barriers to social mobility. Children in low-income families were not provided with educational opportunities, as Interviewees 4 and 6 explained, which, in its turn, restricted their economic opportunities in the future. The failure to invest in education because of the compounded effects of inflation and poverty continued to keep families in a cycle of intergenerational poverty. This observation was in line with [3], who found inaccessibility to education to be a significant obstacle to social mobility in low-income communities.

This study was based on the theoretical framework of the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen [41], which emphasizes the capabilities of individuals to attain well-being and freedom. The results were in line with the Capability Approach as they emphasized the limitation of capabilities of people due to inflation, poverty, and social exclusion, especially access to education and healthcare, which perpetuated deprivation cycles. These factors led to further marginalization of low-income households, as they did not have a chance to engage in the full life of society and the economy.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were stated:

1. **Economic Policy Interventions to address Inflation:** To reduce the effects of inflation on low-income households, it is suggested that local and national governments should adopt specific economic policy interventions. This may involve managing inflation levels by monetary policy, subsidizing essential commodities, or providing cash transfers to the needy groups. Such actions would assist in rebuilding the purchasing power so that low-income households could afford their basic needs and invest in other sectors such as education and healthcare, which are vital in breaking the poverty cycle.
2. **Social Inclusion and Access to Services:** Social exclusion may be reduced through the establishment of inclusive social programs that provide equal access to community activities, employment opportunities, and public services. Affordable healthcare, education, and job training programs should be prioritized by governments and community organizations to marginalized groups. By offering avenues of community involvement and making sure that low-income families have access to these avenues without financial constraints, the community would become more socially cohesive, lessening the feeling of exclusion and increasing the overall resilience of the community to poverty.
3. **Enhancing Education and Skills Development:** To break the poverty trap and enable social mobility, access to quality education among low-income households should be enhanced. This may be done through subsidizing the cost of education, offering scholarships or coming up with vocational training programs that are specific to the needs of the economically disadvantaged groups. By ensuring that children and adults in these communities possess the skills and qualifications to get better employment opportunities, they will be empowered to overcome poverty and intergenerational poverty.

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