

**PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF POVERTY
ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the prospects and challenges of poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria. It studies various aspects and dimensions of poverty as well as the strategies adopted in the past to alleviate poverty. It found that the strategies have failed to achieve the intended goal; the reasons identified include non-inclusion of the beneficiaries during strategies formulation and corruption in government. The paper recommends that government should intensify the war against corruption and involve the beneficiaries in formulation of its programmes.

Keywords: Poverty; Alleviation, Strategies, Challenges, Corruption.

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty has become a major problem, acclaimed internationally deserving urgent attention, especially in the sub-Saharan African countries, which include Nigeria. In these countries, abject poverty has increased, and has become ramified, engulfing an overwhelming majority of the population. Poverty anywhere is a threat to peace of security (Odekunle, 1975). As poverty intensifies, with ravaging consequences in a democratizing country such as Nigeria, posing potential threats to the democracy project, there is a greater need to go beyond the hollow strategies and fashionable rhetoric and frontally confront reality (Obadan, 1997).

Poverty seems to have defied solution, in spite of the massive investment of resources and targeted programs to deal with it, hence it has become acute and chronic and has been contributing significantly to underdevelopment, generalized insecurity and instability in these countries. For example, in Nigerian context, poverty is clearly one of the most profound problems being grappled with, and it has contributed substantially to the erosion and undermining of the foundations of peaceful co-existence and stable national development. This is clearly an inexplicable issue of poverty amidst plenty. Poverty connotes a criminal exclusion of the teeming population of citizenry from the mainstream of the economy. At present, due to high rate of illiteracy and unemployment, resulting from blatant mismanagement by a few Nigerian political class, there is an alarming increase in the number of the pauperized in both urban and urban areas with attendant social decay (Bulus, 2006).

Poverty is the condition of not having the means to afford the basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter. It may also include lack of access to opportunities such as education and employment which aids the escape from poverty and allows one to enjoy the respect of fellow citizens (Eneh, 2011). Poverty is closely linked to the shortage of certain vital resources. It often results from an enduring harsh, inhospitable environment, but more often than not, from the breakdown of economic, demographic, ecological, cultural and social system. In the developing countries, it is usually a fall-out of bad governance. True poverty emerges when distortions become too pronounced that people, groups and countries lose their capacity to adapt, change and survive. Poverty is also closely linked to insecurity, both about the present and the future. Furthermore, poverty is not spread across society evenly. It is socially distributed, tending to be more prevalent among those who experience inequality and social exclusion in other areas of life.

Islam (2005) quoting from the work of Simmel (1978) described poverty and its common consequences thus: "It is the common end of the most diverse destinies, an ocean into which lives derived from the most diverse social strata flow together. No change, no development, no polarization or breakdown of social life occurs without leaving its residuum in the stratum of poverty. Thus, what makes one poor is not the lack of means. The poor person, sociologically speaking, is the individual who receives assistance because of this lack of means".

Poverty is multi-dimensional. It is characterized by lack of purchasing power, exposure to risk, malnutrition, high mortality rate, low life expectancy, insufficient access to social and economic services and few opportunities for income generation. Poverty is a condition whereby considerable members of the society are deprived of adequate basic necessities and the supporting opportunities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The model used in this study is political economy approach. This approach emphasizes system of social production in human society. Its argument is based on the relationship between individuals and the means of production in the society. It raises question as to whether the means of production and distribution is collectively owned by the society as in socialist system, where the principle of social organization is from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs or is the means of production and distribution privately owned by the individuals in the society as in the capitalist societies.

Since individuals privately own means of production and distribution, capitalism is characterized by mass production in order for the owners of means of production in order for the owners of means of production (the money bags) to accumulate more of the means. This tendency leads to the exploitation of the working class (taking away of their labour surplus value). Two classes emerged under this mode of production-the dominant class and the dominated, the bourgeois and the proletarians, the conscious and the unconscious class, the class of haves and that of have not's, a relationship exists of exploiter and exploited in this system of production.

This system also creates an avenue for competition for the means of production and distribution in the society. This can be seen in the class struggle inherent in the system. The working class will be struggling to move from their position to that of dominant class by acquiring more means of production. While on the other hand, the dominant class that acquired

the product of other people's labour power will go further to institute or protect and reserve class privileges for the organization of more surpluses. This system has indeed impoverished many and rendering them politically impotent. It has made them vulnerable to political manipulation by the few privileged group. The few privileged individuals who benefit from the system strive to maintain the status quo.

Poverty is a recurring decimal according to (Obayori,2009). Poverty is a major weapon in the hands of the neo-colonial elite for alienating the people from participation in democratic process and sustaining the power structure. It particularly asserts that by denying them access to education, skill acquisition and self-development, the people are conditioned to a state of social melancholy while the other in a sadomasochistic complex.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Given its multi-dimensional nature, poverty has been defined using different criteria. Poverty may be seen as a reflection of glaring defects in the economy as evidenced in mass penury. Pauperization of the working and professional class including artisans, mass unemployment and poor welfare services. It denotes absence or lack of basic necessities of life including material wealth, common place regular flow of wages and income and inability to sustain one- self based on available resources. In such a state, the means of achieving minimum subsistence, health, education and comfort are absent. Johnson (1974) defined poverty as a situation when the resources of individuals or families are inadequate to provide a socially acceptable standard of living. In other words, the individuals live below the conventional poverty line demarcating the poor from the non-poor.

Aluko (1975) defined poverty as lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing and/or shelters; such lack of resources to meet the basic needs incapacitate the individual in protecting himself against social, economic and political deprivations. Based on these concepts, Anyawu (1997) categorized the following as poor, especially within the Nigerian context:

- a. Households or individuals below the poverty line and whose income are insufficient to provide for their basic needs

- b. Households or individuals lacking access to basic services, political contracts and other forms of support
- c. People in isolated areas who lack essential infrastructures
- d. Female-headed households whose nutritional needs are being met adequately.
- e. Persons who have lost their jobs and who are unable to find employment as a result of economic reforms.

Absolute poverty is often known as subsistence poverty since it is based on assessments of minimum subsistence requirements, and it is usually measured by pricing the basic necessities of life, drawing a poverty line in terms of these prices and defining as poor those whose income fall below the figure. Absolute poverty represents the problem of poverty in its rawest form. It means lack of food, cash and many assets. It is a “condition of life so degraded by disease, illiteracy, malnutrition and squalor as to deny its victims basic necessities” (Haralambos, 1980; Kiros 1985).

Relative poverty has replaced the idea of absolute poverty according to researchers. This idea is measured in terms of judgements by members of a particular society of what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and style of life according to the convention of the day. This is poverty relative to the standard of living which is considered to be normal by most in that society.

Peter Townsend’s study in 1980 defined poverty thus :

“Individuals, families and groups can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong”.

Poverty has been a serious challenge to governments in Nigeria effect, which includes lack and deprivation of the basic necessities of life, is worrisome. Poverty humiliates and dehumanizes its victim. As Ukpong (1995:6) noted:

...poverty has earned recognition in the extent of its ravaging society and the affairs of humanity at the international, national and local levels... the need exists now for urgent actions towards its eradication and control...indeed, poverty is a snare. It is dehumanizing. It must be eradicated... (Cited in Obadan, 1996).

f. In a bid to overcome the problem of poverty in Nigeria, successive governments have initiated different policies and programmes between 1986 and 2004. These programmes include Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRFI), Better Life Programme (BLP), Directorate of Employment (NDE), People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Bank(CB) AND National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). The programmes were meant to ameliorate the suffering of the people by providing them employment opportunities and accesses to credit facilities to enable them establish their own business. Scholars and observers alike have expressed concern on the high incidence of poverty in Nigeria in spite of the abundance of human and natural resources including oil and gas. For instance, Nigeria realized the sum of \$300 billion from crude oil between 1970 and 1990. In addition, the government earned the total sum of N998.4 million from crude oil in 2003, yet there was nothing meaningful to show in terms of development (Ikelegbe, 2004).

CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

For poverty to be alleviated its root causes must be identified and until this is actually done, poverty will continue to defile all solutions. People hold two basic different views of the causes of poverty, that it is due to 'circumstances beyond an individual's effort'. Based on this, three main causes of poverty can be identified: the individual, the culture or subculture of poverty and the social structure (Elash, 1973). An individual is, therefore, poor because of playing the ponies, drunkenness, laziness or shiftlessness. If he/she fails, he/she has no one but himself/herself to blame, because individuals have the power to achieve success through their own exertion, honesty, frugality and hard-work (Bulus, 2006).

The second cause is the culture or subculture of poverty. Such a culture blocks any attempt of society to change the value, norms, beliefs and life style of the poor (Wole, 2000). The third cause of poverty is the social structure itself which is commonly accepted globally by the liberalists, radicalists and sociologists. Nigerian social institutions, especially our economy (capitalist), stack the deck against the poor. Nigerian social, educational and political institutions and even the welfare system are designed to cause and perpetuate poverty. Subscribing to the power theory of poverty causation, it is posited by Edoth(2003) that some are naturally poor, because of the exploitative tendencies of the political class in most societies and poverty,

therefore becomes an artificial phenomenon induced by man to man as a result of greed, selfishness, painlessness and hopelessness.

Collectively, there are many social forces acting and reacting on one another that instrumentally enslave people in to the iron-cage of poverty. These include ignorance, unemployment, low productivity, environmental degradation, inadequate access to market for goods and services, rapid and mushroomic population growth, bad governance, criminal corruption, energy crisis, poor and devastating social infrastructures, poor health status, drug and alcohol addiction (Obada 1997, Edoh 2003).

Another major cause of poverty in Nigeria in recent times is the persistent increase in the prices of petroleum products, due to unfortunate self-seeking and corrupt Nigerian leaders, who lack the capacity to initiate a genuine socio-economic policy position that could pave direct bearing for human existence. They operate and act on leadership with gallant pretence and deceit; also they make unfulfilled promises to their people (Bulus, 2006).

DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

- (1) **Material Poverty:** This implies absence or insufficient monetary source of income for a living due to lack of job, or battered economic condition for ensuring a sustainable life.
- (2) **Physical Poverty:** This entails a lack or absence of natural endowment within a geographical space or territory. It implies an environment that is agrarian and lacks mineral resources for human habitation.
- (3) **Mental Poverty:** This connotes lack or absence of ideas and initiatives due to illiteracy, ignorance and primitivism in an individual to improve his/her lifestyle for a conducive living. This kind of poverty is the root cause of other dimension of human poverty (Wilmot 1985).
- (4) **Social Poverty:** This connotes absence or insufficient infrastructural base and lack of stable and peaceful environment to usher in development and civilization. It connotes barbarism, underdevelopment and antisocialism.
- (5) **Political Poverty:** This entails absence of qualitative leadership, good governance under corrupt, selfish and greedy leaders.

POVERTY SITUATION IN NIGERIA

According to the Federal Office of Statistics (1991), 65.6% of Nigerians are living below poverty line of one dollar (\$1) per day. In addition, the World Development Report (2001) studied seven African countries in order to know the percentage of people that are living below

poverty line and it was discovered that 56.0% of Nigerians are living below poverty line while 29.0% of Ghanaians are living below poverty line. In Burkina Faso, the figure is 45.0% while Zimbabwe also has high proportion of people living below poverty line. It can therefore, be concluded that though poverty is a universal phenomenon, it seems to be more pronounced in developing countries of Africa, part of Asia and Latin America while poverty level in Europe and America is said to be predominantly relative.

Poverty is universally acknowledged as a societal menace requiring urgent attention. It is largely associated with the developing countries particularly those in the Sub-Saharan Africa where large proportion of the world poor are found. It has debilitating effects on individuals, groups and the society at large (Yusuf, 2000). Mabogunje (1992)) noted that poverty has assumed a global phenomenon, threatening the development efforts of government and survival of humanity. About 1 billion people are in abject poverty (The World Bank, 1994; UNDP, 1997). The poor are those who lack a stable income, have little property and could not maintain a healthy living. They also lack an adequate level of education, they have no access to basic necessities of life, they are unable to meet social and economic needs and obligations, they lack skills and gainful employment, have few physical assets and sometimes lack self esteem (Olayemi, 1995).

The incidence of poverty in Nigeria has always been high. Among the apparent implications include decline in total productivity and the real wage, stagnant agricultural production and increased unemployment. The period between 1993 and 2000 saw a steady rise in the declining per capita private consumption, rise in inflation rate and low per capital real income as well as significantly deteriorated condition of physical and socio-economic services. On a global level, Nigeria ranked low in the Human Development Index-being ranked as one of the world's poorest countries (UNDP, 1997; Yusuf, 2000).

A report on poverty profile in Nigeria (1980-1996) by the Federal Office of Statistics in 1999 elucidated the magnitude of poverty and the trend of poverty in Nigeria. In its sectoral desegregation (a sectional analysis of poverty between the urban and rural) as indicated in the survey of 16 years period, it was observed that rural poverty increased more rapidly than in the urban areas. The analysis shows that in 1980, urban poverty was 17.2% and moved in 1985 to 37.8% where it remained until 1992, but by 1996 it had moved sharply to 58.2%.

EFFECTS OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

There are a number of effects of poverty that are in turn causes of its persistence in individuals, families, racial and other groups. The debilitating effects of aspects of such so-called vicious circles of poverty include the following:

- Poor people have less-nourishing diets and more birth defects, accident, disease and reported mental illness than others. They are also more likely to be alcoholic and narcotic addicts. As a result, they have higher absenteeism at work and school, lower energy levels, lower productivity and shorter lives. There is high rate of mortality in the society of poor, especially women and children.
- Less money is spent per pupil on schools attended by poor children who spend few years in school, do less while there, and do not obtain a degree and diplomas essential for later job success.
- Violent crimes such as assault, rape, homicide, thuggery and armed robbery are committed by and against the poor people are more likely to be arrested (falsely or rightfully), less stiffer sentences than the non-poor. Due to poverty crisis in Nigerian system, the socio-political space of Nigerian nation is riddled with the collapse of social values, kleptocracy, political corruption, transition crises, manipulation of electoral process, unstable, weak and vulnerable political institutions and structures as well as brigandage (Bulus 2006). The perception rating of the ruling class in Nigeria is jaundiced by intense power struggle to access statistic structures, private economic accumulations, flamboyancy, profligacy, poor management of economic resources, mass illiteracy and political ignorance, ill-conceived projects and programmes, the repressive and malevolent nature of the state, preoccupied with political struggle to the neglect of critical development issues and interest of poor Nigerians today, it is those that have used the instrument of state policy to enrich themselves, created naked poverty, criminal neglect, hunger and other forms of socio-economic conflicts, that are seen as role models in the Nigerian society. Their wealth is applauded and as criminals, they have used their acquired state-wealth to integrate themselves into the Nigerian social system, re-emerging as politicians, opinion leaders, religious mentors and 'Reputable Businessmen', the act that gave birth to God-fatherism in Nigerian politics (Wole 2000).
- Another effect of poverty in Nigeria is that poor people vote in much smaller numbers than the rest of society and they are poorly organized to influence any government policies and agencies.

Poverty breeds inferiority complex in people and makes them alien and slaves in the societies which are genuinely owned by them. The poor people pay higher prices and interest rates and more frequently victimized in their purchases (Jega, 2007).

Poverty is dehumanizing and destabilizes the society and degrades the economy. It breeds other vices, because out of poverty, grew the greed and desperation to get rich at all cost through dubious exploitations and all sorts of illegalities such as bribery, circulation of fake and adulterated products, prostitution, ethno-religious crises, ethnocentrism, vandalisation of government properties(oil, electricity equipment)etc. (Sancho, 1996).

CHALLENGES OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA

There is no gain saying that both the government and Non-governmental organizations have made great efforts in alleviating poverty in the country. There are however some problems militating against effective implementation of the programme which are:

Lack of Social Security

The Nigeria government does not operate a welfare system. Thus, the poor, the aged and the unemployed are not catered for by the government or any of its agencies. This apparent state of insecurity among the less privileged people has contributed to the myriads of social vices in the country.

The high spate of corruption, lack of patriotism, youth restiveness and gansterism, robbery, prostitution, etc are results of government failure to address the issue of social welfare in the country.

Deregulation Policy of the Petroleum Sector (Down-Stream)

Deregulation of the down-stream petroleum of the oil industry is one of those polices of government that has contributed to the elevation of poverty in the country. Going by the way the policy was formulated and implemented; it meant incessant price increases of petroleum products. For instance between 1999 and 2005, the price of petroleum rose from 11Naira to 65Naira per litre. These incessant increases of the price of petroleum products have led to high cost of transportation, food and essential services, which has increased more than 500% within a space of two years to the detriment of the common man on the street. While the cost of living is rising, wages and salaries remain the same as low as less than \$50 as average salaries per month paid to public servant at both the state and federal levels.

Faulty Design/Implementation Strategies

Poverty alleviation programme like most government policies, are formulated using ‘top-bottom’ or bureaucratic approach. In other words, the target beneficiaries are usually not involved right from initiation to the completion of policy programmes, the non-involvement of beneficiary has often made the sustainability of policy programmes difficult and unacceptable by the local inhabitants. The problems are further compounded by poor feasibility study, unstable economic environment and high inflationary trend which adversely affected the design/implementation.

Political Instability

Nigeria has witnessed series of rapid political changes leading to political instability within the polity since independence. These changes have often led to discontinuity in the planned programmes, and sometimes, total re-arrangement of priorities. No progress can take place in a country that is beset with political instability.

Good Governance

Nigeria is yet to experience good governance: this has deprived her people the dividends of democracy. Policies of government are still being formulated without due consideration to the welfare of citizens, the outcome of which is further poverty.

Corruption

This is a serious problem in the country. Money that accrued to governments at all levels is stolen and kept in private bank accounts at home and abroad by public officials. No meaningful investment, which would have generated employment for the people could take place in an environment plagued with corrupt practices.

PROSPECTS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES

In spite of the expressed concerns of past governments and the plethora of programmes and policies that have a bearing on poverty, the incidence and scourge of poverty have worsened over the years. The factors which constrained the effectiveness of the programmes and policies have been identified previously.

Broad-based Economic Growth with Equity

Rapid growth is important for poverty reduction. Therefore attention must be focused on those macro and microeconomic policies and programmes which would ensure the rapid growth of the economy. Economic growth is crucial in efforts aimed at conquering poverty as it would generate income earning opportunities for the poor, make job creation possible, produce additional resources for the government to sue for social programmes aimed at overcoming poverty, and increase the incomes poor people receive as remuneration for their labour. However, economic growth alone is not sufficient for poverty reduction.

Therefore, growth must be accompanied by a deliberate policy of redistribution and equity, promoted by participation. In this direction, broad-based growth that involves the poor and generates employment is recognized to have a tremendous impact on poverty. In Nigeria, targeted efforts are required to induce broad-based growth and provide social services and infrastructure aimed at reducing the depth and severity of poverty across the country. Given the high incidence of poverty in the country, the pursuit of rapid economic growth cannot be over-emphasized in the current and future efforts at poverty reduction.

Indeed, for a considerable decline in poverty, indications are that an economic growth rate of 7-8 percent is required and policies to foster growth would need to be complemented by those aimed specifically at reducing poverty.

Involvement of Beneficiaries

Experience from the past poverty alleviation programmes has shown the inability to involve the people in their planning and implementation. The non-involvement of such communities is always detraction from appropriateness of projects, as well as their sustainability. This is because the top-down approach widely adopted in project identification and selection has often led to beneficiaries not associating themselves with such projects. Therefore, there should be sufficient participation of the grassroot people in the identification and implementation of projects affecting their lives. This will not only increase their commitment to such programmes but will also de emphasize the erstwhile perception of such programmes as conduit pipes for national cake sharing, which they think is responsible for their poverty. It also promotes empowerment on project management as well as its sustainability.

Political Allegiance and Continuity of Programmes, Projects and Service

Poverty Alleviation programmes should not be limited to the life span of any particular government or administration in power but should be sustained to elicit desired objectives and

impact. However, the Nigerian reality points to the fact that political differences could be a strong factor in the accentuation of poverty in particular areas. This arises when relevant schemes and programmes are resisted in some regions/zones or states simply because of the perceived advantages the implementation could confer on some political parties. For instance, there were reports of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) government in Old Anambra State refusing the construction of Federal roads in the State because the rival National Party of Nigeria (NPN) could make it a campaign issue.

Similarly, in year 2000, there were reports that the Alliance for Democracy (AD) Governors of South-West Zone were apprehensive that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the centre might have conceived of the PAP for strategic political gains. Indeed, there were allegations of the AD Governors working against the PAP in order to frustrate the PDP Federal Government. The point to stress is that poverty is too critical an issue that everyone, irrespective of party affiliation and learning should be deeply concerned about its eradication. The idea of sabotaging a scheme simply because it was initiated by a rival political party/group should not arise. It is only with such a spirit that a scheme could live beyond its initiators. Perhaps, consideration could be given to making poverty alleviation an explicit constitutional matter in view of the fact that no one administration can meaningfully bind its successor to its programmes.

This also reinforces the need to give expression to poverty alleviation objectives in national development plans with the strategies consolidated into the nation's overall development/policy management framework.

The Research department of CBN (2003) and Aliyu (2004) aptly mentioned some reasons in the past also behind the failure of poverty alleviation programmes. These are:

1. Policy inconsistency and poor governance
2. Ineffective targeting of the poor(leading to leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries)
3. Unwieldy scope of the programmes resulting in resources being thinly spread among projects
4. Overlapping of function which ultimately led to institutionalization of rivalry and conflicts
5. Lack of mechanism in various programmes and projects to ensure sustainability
6. Lack of complementarities from beneficiaries
7. Uncoordinated sectoral policy initiatives

8. Lack of involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in planning, implementation and evaluation
9. Poor human capital development and inadequate funding.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES/PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

The government programmes aimed at elevating the socio-economic status of people and consequently eradicating poverty in the country include the following: The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Better life/family support programme (BLP/FSP), the family Economic Advancements Programme(FEP), the National Directorate of Employment(NDE), the establishment and promotion of Rural Financial Institutions(RFI), National Poverty Eradication Programme(NAPEP).

1. Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure(DFRRI)

The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure was established by decree No. 4 of 1986. The Directorate was to gear all efforts towards the development of the entire rural areas of Nigeria in order to improve the quality of life of the rural dwellers. In this regard the directorate was required to:

- a. Identify, involve and support viable local community organization in the effective mobilization of the rural population for sustained rural developmental activities, bearing in mind the need for promoting greater community participation and economic self-reliance.
- b. Identify areas of high production potential for the country, promoting food and fibre requirement and to support production of such commodities along agro-ecological zone within the context of one national market with unimpeded inter -state trade in farm produce.
- c. Encourage contribution of labour, time and materials by local communities to be complemented by a system of matching grants from the Directorate and the local and state governments.
- d. Formulate and support a national rural water supply programme together with a national on-farm storage programme with emphasis on full involvement of local communities and local government personnel to ensure sustained maintenance of existing infrastructure.
- e. Identify and promote other programmes that involve enhanced greater productive economic activities in the rural areas as well as help to improve the quality of life and standard of living of the rural people.

2. The Better Life/ Family Support Programmes(BLP/FSP)

The Better Life programme (BLP), aimed at poverty alleviation, was put in place in September 1987 and was transformed into family support programme (FSP) in November 1994 under the same broad objectives. These were among others, to encourage rural dwellers particularly women to improve their standard of living via the promotion and formation of self-help rural development organizations, inculcating the spirit of self development in rural women via the promotion of education, business management and recreation and the creation of greater awareness among the populace, about the plight of women in particular and rural dwellers in general. In addition, the programmes were put in place to bring women together to highlight their developmental problem and offer solution through collective actions, educate them in simple hygiene, family planning and the importance of child care and above all, enlighten them on the opportunities and facilities available to them at the local level for improving and enriching their lives.

The programmes and projects of the organization focused on the following areas: formation of cooperative societies which were the bedrock of participation in the activities of BLP or FSP, establishment of cottage or small-scale industries to improve the productivity of credit facilities and grants; enlightenment campaigns on the activities of the agency.

3. National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The NDE was established in 1987 to tackle the problem of unemployment involving all categories of labour(skilled and unskilled) including university graduate, graduates of other institutions, the disguised unemployed street hawkers, both in the rural and urban centres. It was also designed to check the wave of robbery among young school leavers. The four core areas of the Directorate activities include agriculture, small scale enterprises, special public works and vocational skill development.

4. The Poverty Alleviation Programme(PAP)

This was an interim measure introduced early in 2000 to address problems of rising unemployment and crime wave, particularly among youths. It was ultimately aimed at increasing the welfare of Nigerian youths. It was ultimately aimed at increasing the welfare of Nigeria The primary objectives of Poverty Alleviation Programme are three fold; reduce the problem of

unemployment and hence raise effective demand in the economy; increase the productiveness of the economy and drastically reduce the embarrassing crime wave in the society. One could glean from government pronouncements that the targets/components of the Poverty Alleviation Programme include the following, among others; provide jobs for 200,000 unemployed, create a credit delivery system from which farmers would have access to credit facilities: increase the adult literacy rate from 51 percent to 70 percent by year 2003; shoot up health-care delivery system from its present 40 percent to 70 percent, increase the immunization of children from 40 percent to 100 percent; raise rural water supply from the present 30 percent to 60 percent and same for rural electrification; embark on training and settlement of at least 69 percent of tertiary institutions' graduates; and development of simple processes and small-scale industries.

To actualize the objectives of Poverty Alleviation Programme, several measures were put forward in the 2000 budget as well as other policy documents such as: increase in the salary of public sector workers that has been decimated over the past two decades; improving the supervisory capacity within the nation's institutions; rationalization of organizations and methods within the system, particularly that of the existing 16 poverty institutions in Nigeria; encouraging and rewarding all deserving Nigerians for industry and enterprises; substantial reduction of avenues for easy and illegitimate acquisition of wealth; and the launching of Universal Basic Education Programme.

The orientation of the Poverty Alleviation Programme is holistic in nature, and if properly planned and managed could tame the menace of poverty in Nigeria, but in spite of the broad features of the programme, emphasis seemed to have been placed more on the creation of jobs through public work system. To this end, avenues were to be provided for the gainful employment of 200,000 idle hands. This aspect of the programme was designed to provide jobs for at least 5,000 unemployed in each state. To actualize the programme, the Federal Government earmarked N10.0 billion, which was later raised to N17.0 Billion by the Senate. No doubt, this pointed to the Government's commitment to the programme. However, in implementation, the programme appeared to be ad-hoc in orientation with little attention paid to the policy framework. The emphasis on massive construction and other public work projects made it look like a one-off affair rather than making it a revolving one.

The programme also paid little attention to the framework of allocation of funds, sustainability aspect of the Poverty Alleviation Programme and the needed collaborative

arrangements marred its success. The political connotation of the Poverty Alleviation Programme served as an important threat to the success of the programme. The programme was portrayed as the ruling party's programme and hence had met with resistance from the chief executives of the states controlled by other political parties. This was quite noticeable in the launching of the programme at the state level in February, 2000. Besides, the Poverty Alleviation Programme also emphasized provision of credit to micro-enterprises and trading to the exclusion of income and employment generating projects. The programme also lacked appropriate framework for beneficiary targeting. The timing and phasing of the direct labour (200,000 jobs) were not explicitly stated. Yet, this aspect was very crucial to the success of programme.

5. The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

Introduced early in 2001, NAPEP is the current program which focuses on the provision of "strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria (FRN, 2001:3). NAPEP is complemented by the National poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) which is to coordinate the poverty reduction related activities of all the relevant Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. It has the mandate to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of policy continuity and sustainability are achieved.

Upon consideration of the Joda Panel and Abdullahi Committee REPORTS, fourteen (14) core poverty alleviation Ministries were identified as follows:

- i. Agriculture and Rural Development
- ii. Education
- iii. Water Resources
- iv. Industry
- v. Power and Steel
- vi. Employment, Labour and Productivity
- vii. Women Affairs and Youth Development
- viii. Health
- ix. Works and Housing
- x. Environment
- xi. Solid Minerals Development

- xii. Science and Technology
- xiii. Finance, and
- xiv. National Planning Commission

Similarly, thirty-seven (37) core poverty alleviation institutions, agencies and programmes were identified. The poverty related activities of the relevant institutions under NAPEP have been classified into four namely:

- i. **Youth Empower Scheme (YES)** which deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprise promotion?
- ii. **Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)** which deals with the provision of portable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power support.
- iii. **Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)** which deals with special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centres, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit and maintenance culture.
- iv. **National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)** which deals with the harnessing of the agricultural, water, solid mineral resources, conservation of land and space (beaches, reclaimed land, etc) particularly for the convenient and effective utilisation by small-scale operators and the immediate community.

In effect, the current poverty eradication programme of the country is centered on youth empowerment, rural infrastructure development and conservation. It adopts the participatory bottom-up approach in programme implementation and monitoring:

It provides for national framework which lays emphasis on appropriate and sustainable institutional arrangement; it provides for pro-active and affirmative action's deliberately targeted at women, farmers and the disabled; it provides for inter-ministerial and inter-agency cooperation; it provides for the participation of all registered political parties, traditional rulers, and the communities, it provides for technology acquisition and development particularly for agriculture and industry; it provides for capacity building for existing skills acquisition and training centres; it provides for the provision of agricultural and industrial extension services to rural areas; it provides for institutional development for marketing of agricultural and industrial

products; and it provides for integrated schemes for youth empowerment, development of infrastructure, provision for social welfare services and exploitation of natural resources.

In all, it is very clear, from the experience of NAPEP, and other previous programmes of successive regimes that, in the Nigerian domestic fight against poverty, the challenges are enormous for all the ranges of stakeholders. A successful poverty alleviation/reduction programme ensures the dividend of democracy to the greatest number of citizens.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The Poverty alleviation programmes should be provided with adequate funds by government to ensure that its programmes of action get to the down-trodden, youths and women (tailoring, ICT training, soap-making, welding). Government should ensure sustainability of the commendable efforts of NAPEP e.g SOWESS, YES, RIDs and improvement of focus (Jega, 2007).

Other structural weaknesses identified (e.g politicization and stakeholders constructions) of poverty alleviation programmes should be amended, through expatriate repositioning. To counter the culture of poverty at earlier age, government must pump money into schools in low-income districts with the aim of raising educational standard. Since poverty is recognized globally as an aspect of inequality and merely a problem of the poor, the social structure of the society as a whole, should be restructured, because the prime obstacle to poverty elimination lies in the economic system which is selfishly dedicated to the maintenance and increase of wealth among the already affluent. Social security benefits should be put in place, so that the elderly people, widows, physically challenged and children just below the poverty level, would no longer technically be poor. In addition, income may be more adequately distributed through federal tax system to benefit the low and moderate income families.

There must be sincere attributes of accountability, transparency and participation in the exercise of power and daily administrative responsibility in managing the country's human and economic resources. The state and local governments should establish agricultural modern equipment of hiring and leasing scheme to aid agricultural mechanization, especially for the poor rural farmers. There should be a system of restructuring the Nigerian educational sector to place more emphasis on blue collar job as against white collar jobs. The individuals who are poor

should fight poverty by avoiding unwholesome and unfavourable acts, such as drunkenness, gambling, laziness, ethno-religious crisis, extravagancy, laxity and spend-thrift that exacerbate the problems of poverty. Wealthy Nigerians should embark on meaningful ventures that would economically empower the poor. Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Development Associations (DA) and Youth Movement (YM) have a crucial role, through social mobilization, against certain customs and traditional practices such as begging, idleness, hopelessness, painlessness and issues that impinge prosperity and penury (Attairu, 2007).

Government policies that have direct bearing on the people must be pursued on the basis of bottom-top approach. By doing this, the people feel inclusive and would ensure success of poverty alleviation programmes. This study shares the view of Ojo (2007) that the present democratic government needs to embark on social spending which successive military government ignored since their first take over in 1966. In a similar vein, Dike (2003) noted that the government needs to embark on social policies to gear up economic growth through the provision of basic education, health care and equitable distribution of resources. This will go a long way to reduce poverty to enhance sustainable democracy.

Education is a weapon from poverty, ignorance and disease. Nigerians therefore, should put in their best to attain the minimum education and make judicious use of the knowledge. The challenges of all stakeholders, in task of eradicating absolute poverty, are indeed enormous and may even seem daunting, but they are not insurmountable. For, as the saying goes, if there is the will, there is certainly a way. But Nigerians must use every available opportunity to condemn the reckless manner with which successive regimes in this country, have abused public trust by looting public funds at the expense of poor majority, using policy measures, such as SAP, to pauperize the people, and others such as privatization (social and political robbery of Obasanjo's eight years of democracy) to sell as well as buy off, the remaining public properties, that they have not already stolen.

There is perhaps no country in the world where this sort of reckless and shameless executive vandalism by a greedy band of elite is so brazenly demonstrated. In particular, there should be condemnation of any attempt to use privatization, commercialization or cost-sharing as the disguise to take away government's obligations and responsibility to its poor citizens. Nigeria has the human and material resources to provide the minimum cost to its citizens, if only our

national priorities could be set right, and the rapacious and greedy self-seeking elite could be curtailed.

Genuine, enlightened Nigerians and stakeholders must continue to exert pressure on the government and the democratically elected leaders and representatives to compel them to pay attention to using government resources properly in order to address the fundamental needs and aspirations, most importantly in waging war against poverty out of Nigeria.

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