



National Poverty Eradication Programmes in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is one of the forces militating against the social and economic development of Nigeria. The level of poverty in Nigeria is astronomically high and politically embarrassing considering the enormous human and mineral resources the country is endowed with and despite the huge resources successive government have committed to alleviate and or eradicate poverty, it seems no success has been achieved. This paper therefore examines the strategies that have been adopted by the various governments to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. These include, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme. The study reveals among others that, all the poverty alleviation programmes have not been successful due to inadequate funding, lack of proper coordination and commitments, poor design and evaluation of programmes etc. The paper recommends that government should ensure that programmes of poverty eradication are well designed, evaluated and coordinated before they are carried out, fraudulent officials should be prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others handling poverty eradication programmes and so on.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty over the years has been regarded as a residual phenomenon, which will be swallowed up by increases in growth rate of nations. According to Women's Feature Service (1992), this belief was based predominantly on the

trickle down theory of development; this theory assumed that as the standard of living of nations rose, the benefits would accrue to all.

According to World Development Report (1990), in the 1950's many saw growth as the primary means of reducing poverty and improving the quality of life. Countries concentrated on maneuvering the rate of growth of output in the economy such that between 1965 and 1985 consumption per capita in developing world according to the report went up by almost 70 percent. However, this economic growth made little or no difference to the lives of large numbers of the poverty members of the society.

According to Killick (1983), since the 2nd World War, evidence indicates that the less developed countries have grown more rapidly than they have ever done before and more rapidly than today's industrialized countries did at the equivalent stages of their development. There have been structural changes, modernization, and creation of new institutions and of greater infrastructural facilities. Yet what is now reflected is the casual assumption that all would benefit in reasonable measure from the fruit of economic development - the so-called trickle down theory of development.

History has shown that since the 1960's poor nations have witnessed growth in national incomes alongside with growth in unemployment, inflation, malnutrition, illiteracy, ill health and poverty. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Statistical Bulletin (1992) recorded a 4.6% increase in GDP in 1991 alongside 13% and 44% increases in domestic inflation in 1991 and 1992 respectively. The World Bank Development Report (1990) estimated that over 50 million people in Nigeria live in poverty. This condition poses a great risk to social harmony hence the primary task of economic development has been to eliminate poverty. This has necessitated the application of various poverty alleviation and or eradication strategies over the years by the Nigerian Governments. According to the World Development Report (1990), in the 1970's these strategies were focused on the provision of basic infrastructural facilities such as health, nutritional and educational services for the poor. In the 1980's emphasis was shifted to promoting the productive use of the Poor's most abundant asset- which is labour. It then called for policies that harnessed market incentive, social and political institutions, infrastructure and technology in addition to the provision of facilities of health care, family planning, nutrition and educational services. In spite of all these efforts and achievements, the issue of poverty still remains as an indelible canker worm entrenched in the root of the society.

According to World Development Report (1990) no task should command a higher priority for world's policy makers than that of reducing global poverty. World Development Report (1992) had declared that alleviating poverty is a moral imperative and prerequisite for environmental sustainability. According to the World Report, (1990) Nigeria is below the bread line of 370 US dollars per annum needed to cover basic food and other requirements. The failure of the trickle down theory of development has

proved that poverty alleviation and or eradication is not necessarily associated with increase in economic growth of a nation. In spite of increase in the country's GNP, implementation of various strategies for attacking poverty, the report still declare that many Nigerians - who live in resource poor regions still continue to experience severe deprivation.

Thus promoting the historical concept of successive Governments in Nigeria, which have formulated and implemented various social, economic and political programmes to alleviate poverty and improve the living standard of its citizens, each new programme is an improvement on the former programme both in scope and ideology but lack the needed commitment and incentive on the part of the initiators and implementers to make such programmes to alleviate or eradicate poverty a success.

Nigeria is a nation that is well endowed with human and material resources but statistics showed that the country still ranked low in development. Statistics revealed that Nigeria ranked 7th among the poorest nations in the world with all the known indices of underdevelopment to prove that. These are: High illiteracy rate, high mortality and morbidity rate, low per capita income, political, religious, social and economic instability, low infrastructural and technological development, corruption, violence and so on.

The effect of the above is low living standard and poverty. This situation has always been of great concern to all successive Governments in Nigeria, but the unfortunate thing is that all efforts to address these ills have yield no significant result.

Poverty in Nigeria

The word "poverty" suggests a standard of living below the minimum needed for the maintenance of life and health. It is a condition characterized by a scarcity rather than a lack of economic necessities. A poverty- stricken person is poor in comparison with a majority of others in his society but his level of living usually does not constitute an immediate threat to life and or health (David, L.S.1981). Poverty is seen as an essential condition in which an individual lacks the skills and the techno-material where with all to produce to sustain a living above poverty (Guardian, 1999). Thus, the pivot of NAPEP is to guarantee a sustainable level of technical assistance to millions of people to remain in productive employment. It is therefore, desired that the multi-prong approach to the epidemic is appropriate.

Hornby, (2001) sees the concept of poverty simply as a state of being poor or a state of social, economic and political inferiority. On his part, Miller (1977) defines poverty in terms of individual or family insufficiency of assets, income and public service. He went further to state that poverty is also lack of certain capabilities, such as being able to participate with dignity in society. The capabilities are absolute, but the commodities needed are relative. Mencher, (1977) says that poverty is a condition of having an income incompatible with a society's national objectives. It is a condition of having an income in the lowest fifth of the income distribution.

Altimir (1982), definition of poverty is influenced by his analysis of 10 Latin American Countries in the 1970s. His study was based on household survey and he followed the “absolute” approach of choosing a level of income consistent with “subsistence” and defining poverty as any income level below that amount.

Poverty is multi-facet. It is characterized by lack of purchasing power exposure to risk, insufficient access to social and economic services and few opportunities for income generation. (Guardian,1995). Edward (1992) said, over 200 million Africans today live in wrenching poverty and that if the present trend persist, this number could be more than double over the next twenty years and making sure that this does not happen is the over arching objective of the World Bank and the International Community in Africa.

The bulletin on the Guideline for the Implementation of the National Poverty Eradication Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, (2001) sees poverty as one of the most serious problems confronting Nigerians today. The statistics shows that by 1960, the poverty level in Nigeria cover about 15% of the population and by 1980, it grew to 28.0%. In 1985, the poverty level was below 46% and it dropped to 43% by 1992. By 1996, the Federal Office of Statistics estimated the poverty level in Nigeria at 55%. According to the United Nations Report (1999), Nigeria’s Human Development Index (HDI) was only 0.416, which places the country among the 25 poorest nations in the world. Furthermore, Nigeria’s life expectancy at birth was put at 51 years, literacy rate is 44% and 70% of the rural population does not have access to portable water, healthcare facilities and electricity.

Aghahowa and Atuanya (1995) noted that despite Nigeria’s varieties of resources (both human and material) the country is still sliding deeper into the pit of economic backwardness and poverty. For instance, Nigeria’s ranking in the global human development index remains low. It was placed 137 out of 162 countries in 1998. Solap (1992) definition of poverty focuses on the question of ‘who is poor’?. He stated that poverty assessment covers the issue of why are people poor and what should policy makers and the government do about it. He said to identify the poor, a poverty line should be established reflecting the level of income associated with a minimum acceptable level of nutrition and other necessities of every day life and a count of the people whose income fall below it. He further stated that gender, age and ethnic characteristics can identify the poor, where they live and how they fit into the consumption and production activities of the economy. He summarized the available social indicators of the poor as child mortality, nutritional status, female and male literacy, fertility, material, mortality etc) and income indicators (per capita income, unskilled wages etc, it indicates the poor’s ownership of assets including land, food security and other risks they face and special environmental issues. These issues are very much prevalent in Nigeria

United Nations Development Report on Nigeria shows that in 1985, 43% of the population lived below the poverty line, and the government spending in the social sector declined from 13.1% in 1985 to 9.3% in 1992. The report went further to state that over 20% of primary school age children as well as 80% of secondary-age children are not enrolled in schools. On the whole, most Nigerians felt poorer in 1995, than they were in 1992 with incidence of individual poverty increasing while the absolute poor increased from 35 million in 1992 to 44 million by 1995... 71% of Nigerians household are poor, half of them, very poor (living on below one US dollar a day). Also, in Nigeria, according to the report, more than 32% of all households obtain their drinking water from streams, ponds and unhygienic sources. Average caloric and protein intake per capita stood at 2,256 kilo-caloric in 1985 and only increased to 2,259 in 1995. Protein intake increased only from 60 grams per capita per day in 1985 to 67 grams in 1995. Even as at 1995, the average food nutrient intake in Nigeria was still below the acceptable minimum international standard (UNDP's HDR1996).

Be that as it may, because of the pervasive nature of poverty in Nigeria, most Governments have focused as a major objective, the reduction if not total eradication of poverty which is seen as a means for economic development. Thus, it is to be noted that eradication of poverty is not a pre-condition for economic growth; this is because reducing or eradicating poverty requires a broad based strategy that should address poverty both as economic and social phenomenon. It is in line with this statement that the collaborative strategy of both the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with other International Communities in the on-going Poverty Assessment and Alleviation Programme Development in Nigeria being coordinated by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC).

Contemporarily speaking, Nigeria is a poor nation. According to a recent classification by the World Bank and the United Nations, the country is one of the 13 least developed nations of the world, ranking first among the most corrupt nations in the world. The United Nations Report on Human Development in Nigeria states that it is estimated that by the end of 1997, nearly 79% Nigerians live below poverty level; life expectancy among Nigerian is just over 50 years, only 55% of adults are literate and 49% have access to safe water and health services, and just over 3% will survive to the age of 40, the population of the extreme poor has accelerated, even faster from 28% in 1985 to 40% in 1992 and 66% in 1997 of the total population of the poor, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria has fallen to 148th from 48th held by the country in 1977 (The Guardian, (1999).

In addition, about 67 million Nigerians live below the poverty level as at 1996. The percentage in poverty headcount at urban and rural sectors indicated that a higher percentage of the rural dwellers fell deeper into the core poverty level during the 15 years period ended in 1996. Between 1985-1990, the percentage of rural dwellers in the core poverty bracket rose from 6.5% to 14.8% against the 3% to 7.5% increase recorded in the urban areas

during the period. Those within the moderately poor category in the rural sector rose from 21.8% to 36.6% while at the urban sector figure rose from 14.2% in 1980 to 30.3% by 1996. For those in the non-poor bracket, the rural sector indicated that the percentage of people in the bracket was reduced from 71.7% in 1980 to 48.6% in 1985 while that of the urban dwellers dropped from 82.8% in 1980 to 62.2% in 1996 while the rural population in poverty had increased to 69.8% (The Guardian, (1999).

The alarming situation had been attributed to many causal factors, among which are economic mismanagement, poor leadership and huge external debt. Eradicating this situation should be the prime concern of all players in the areas of development, government, non-governmental organizations, international communities and citizens. However, Government should be the sole mover. As a result of the overall importance of the programme, President Olusegun Obasanjo, under the Poverty Eradication plan sought to open avenues for gainful employment for an estimated 2.5 million unemployed school leavers on the streets, rural electrification and water supply; to 50% from 30% level while reinvigorating small-scale enterprises (The Guardian, 2001).

In the words of President Obasanjo, "Eradicating poverty and the suffering of our people is the fundamental objective of our administration." It is the singular principles that centralize everything we have done and will do. It is worthy of note here that President Obasanjo could not have said less in the matter given the horrible picture by the 1998 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) about the nation.

General theories are tools which help to explain a subject of investigation. Theories of poverty seek to identify the forces, which explain the persistence of specific deprivation, which characterized the situation of the poor in any society. But for the purpose of study like this, the natural, circumstantial, necessity, the system, equilibrium, dependency, underdevelopment, power, exploitation or surplus value theories, each in its respect are suitable for the explanation of poverty. However, the theory of imperialism has been chosen for this study because of its capacity to incorporate elements of the theories mentioned above. The key element of the imperialistic theory is the tendency of a country to extend its influence far beyond its border for exploitative purpose. The British colonial empire is a clear example of imperialism (Deutsch, 1994).

Imperialism is an important dimension of Marxist economic theory. According to the Marxist theory of imperialism, capitalism, or the capitalist mode of production which is the driving force of imperialism has successfully created inequality among nations, namely: the developed countries of the North and the poor states of the global South. The rich North at the expense of the countries of the South controls the world markets for exports. For instance, the highly rich and developed nations of the global community determine the prices of their exports, and then the prices of

imports to the poor states. This inequality in international economic relations has created for the global North, super profits, at the same time, these inequalities are obstacle to the industrialization of the poor and under-developed countries of the South (Mandel, 1988). Not surprising, Brandt (1980) sees imperialism as posing great dangers to global development, growth, prosperity and stability because, the gap which segregates rich and poor countries of the world, is so wide that at the extremes people seem to live in different world. These disparities are the root of the poverty that has become a characteristic feature of poor nations, including, more specifically Nigeria.

The relevance of the theory of imperialism for the study of the eradication of poverty in Nigeria which is endemic can be traced to the impact of imperialism. A recent United Nations Human Development Index shows that some 71 percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line. In terms of life expectancy, adult literacy rate, total school enrolment, maternal mortality rate, infant mortality rate, population without access to health care service, and population without access to safe water, Nigeria is ranked 161, out of the 174 countries surveyed (UN, Human Development Report, 2000).

According to the report, Nigeria, in terms of poverty is ranked 27 out of the 50 African states surveyed. This unpleasant development has been traced to the British Colonial Imperialism. Thus, Nnoli's theory of the British colonial imperialism shows that colonial economic policies and their intensification in post-independence Nigeria have contributed immensely to poverty in the country, (Nnoli, 1981). Going by Nnoli's impression of imperialism, solution to poverty in Nigeria lies in the country's ability to break away from the colonial type of economic activities that emphasizes exports of raw materials, and importation of end products.

Blake and Walters (1985) theory of imperialism focuses on inequality in international economic relations and exchange between the rich countries of the North and the poor states of the global south. According to the theory, economic relations between the rich and poor countries are conducted against the background of inequalities and that the benefits resulting from the trade relations are distributed asymmetrically in favor of the rich countries. The theory states further that even if the poor nations formulates sound economic policies, yet the asymmetrical distribution of benefits in international economic relations will continue to condemn the poor states to perpetual poverty, and dependence on the rich states.

The implications of Blake and Walter's theory is that elimination of poverty which will not depend on sound poverty eradication policies, promoted by the government but on how well Nigeria can champion the call for the restructuring of the uneven, unjust and unequal global economic relations and exchange the world over.

Strategies For Poverty Eradication By Past Governments

Researches have shown that earlier policies and programmes directed at alleviating poverty by different regimes have not made much impact for several reasons. For instance, Gowon's Accelerated Food Production Programme (AFPP), Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Shagari's River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) and Green Revolution (GR) Babangida's Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructural (DFRRI) Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP) National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), Abacha's Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Obasanjo's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) etc. All failed not because of poor conception but on account of operationalization, haphazard, non focused, blurred, corrupt and selfish implementation process. Most often than not these programmes are hijacked by corrupt, selfish and self-centred individuals or groups within the domain of power. The resultant end is always epileptic, dismal implementation or performance of the programme. A good example is the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), a lot of enthusiasm, huge amount of money and human resource were committed to the programme but its impact in alleviating poverty is a disappointment because it was never felt.

More so, attempts by the Federal Government to use the Peoples Bank to alleviate poverty equally failed. The Micro-credit policy of the bank could not make the desired impact on the target group of urban poor and rural people. Infact, it became a veritable source of free money for the powerful or privileged few who carted away the millions of naira earmarked for the scheme and such monies were never paid back. The bank is at present in the process of bankrupted (dead) A cursory look at other countries poverty programmes, such as Venezuela, Bangladesh and Malaysia's huge success story of poverty alleviation programmes is predicated upon the effective implementation process and monitoring of programme execution. Non Governmental Organizations of these countries were saddled with the responsibility and infact acted as the main delivery conduit of the programme.

It is however, pertinent to state here that much have been said about concerted efforts to bring about the cost of adjustment and little about the benefits. Most countries that improved their policies and programme have returned to positive rate of GDP per capita growth. This positive turn around shows that, adjustment policies work when properly implemented.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (Napep)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) is a programme put in place to eradicate poverty by the Obasanjo's Administration in 2001. The

Programme was conceived as a result of the failure of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 1999-2000, it could not address the issue of poverty in Nigeria. NAPEP like every other programmes, is an improvement on the former both in scope and in structure. The document title National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) provides strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty and rationalization of existing poverty alleviation institutions and coordinated implementation and monitoring of relevant schemes and programmes at all levels of government.

In view of the fact that poverty in Nigeria is wide spread and multi-dimensional, the Federal Government seeks to ensure that all activities and programmes of the line Ministries and Agencies are effectively coordinated. In addition, government also seeks to ensure policy continuity, existence of appropriate institutional framework and sustainability of all the programmes. Accordingly, government established the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) to coordinate the poverty reduction related activities of all the relevant Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. NAPEC is mandated to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of continuity and sustainability are achieved.

Some of the poverty reduction relation activities of the relevant institutions are Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, production improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprise promotion and rural infrastructural development (RIDS) that was mandated to take care of energy and power supply.

Other activities includes Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) that deals with special education, primary health care services, establishment and maintenance of recreation centres, public awareness, facilities, youth and student hostels development, environmental protection facilities, food security, provision of agricultural inputs micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunication facilities, provision of mass transit and maintenance culture. More so, the National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) deals with the harnessing of the agricultural, water, solid mineral resources, conservation of land and space particularly for the convenient and effective utilization by small-scale operators and the immediate community.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that government over the years has been doing a lot to address the issue of poverty in Nigeria within its available resources but programmes to alleviate poverty in Nigeria have always suffered setbacks because of poor implementation process. The benefits never gets to the beneficiaries, they have always been hijacked by a powerful clique who thereafter share it among themselves, friends, relations and followers. For

example in 2001, the Federal Government came out to say that the Ten Billion Naira tax payers money allocated to the Poverty Alleviation Programme was a waste as the programme was a total failure. When a cooperative society or women groups are required for purpose of micro-credits, hijackers of the programmes quickly presents names of their families, friends and followers as members of such groups to replace of the main beneficiaries. Infact, the programme ends in monumental fraud.

In addition, some policies and strategies of government itself tends to fuel the increase of poverty incidence in the country such as improper management of the country's resource which are sufficient to propel the economy to greater height, large scale fraud and corruption by people in high places who were put in trust of the nation's wealth, inadequate funding, lack of proper coordination and commitments, poor design and evaluation of programmes and so on.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To avoid the pit falls which have hampered the success of past poverty eradication programmes by past administrations, the following recommendations are hereby proffered as a solution. In order to ensure the success of future programmes meant to alleviate and or eradicate poverty, government should ensure that programmes of poverty eradication are well designed, evaluated and coordinate before they are carried out, fraudulent officials should be prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others handling poverty eradication programmes, government should demonstrate the will to honestly and sincerely eradicate poverty from the country rather than show casing symbolic programmes that will not yield any result.

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