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REVIEW OF POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES IN NIGERIA: MYTH AND REALITY

Anumudu, Charles Nnamdi ✉

National Institute for Legislative Studies, National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.

anumudu2010@yahoo.com

Umar, Aminu

National Institute for Legislative Studies, National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.

aminconsult1@gmail.com

Madu, Magnus Emeka

National Institute for Legislative Studies, National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.

tobechi3@yahoo.com

Abstract

Poverty humiliates and dehumanizes its victims. The high level of prevalence of poverty in Nigeria which has attained an endemic nature is becoming worrisome. Poverty has made the country to attain an enviable status such that no government can survive effectively without introducing one kind of poverty reduction effort or the other. This study therefore examines these poverty reduction policies as it relates to development in Nigeria for the past 50years. The paper recommends a more integrated strategy through a pragmatic and proactive measure followed by implications for the policy makers.

Keywords: Poverty, Policies, Development, Programme, Poor

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a global phenomenon which affects continents, nations and people differently. It affects people in various depths and levels at different times and phases of existence. There is no nation that is absolutely free from poverty. Nigeria ranked among the 20th poorest countries, started its independence nationhood with poverty level of barely 15% of its population in 1960 and is today struggling to bring it down from about 71% of its current teeming population of about 162million people (World Bank, 2012). Of, the number of the poverty stricken people, about 73% is concentrated in the rural areas, where illiteracy prevalence is high. Portable water and health facilities are rarely available, road and electricity infrastructures are either unavailable or ill-managed.

At independence in 1960 and for the best part of the 1960s, poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria centered on education which was seen as the key to economic, technological and intellectual development of the nation. Show the light and the people will find the way was at the time, an often quoted mantra by Nigeria's first president, the late Nnamdi Azikwe. Thus education programmes were implemented alongside agricultural extension services which encouraged increased food production. From 1960 to 2012, the federal government of Nigeria has at different times instituted different poverty reduction prorammes. But in spite of the country's much orchestrated demonstration of its commitment to poverty reduction, evidence on ground points to the fact that the poverty 'virus' is getting more entrenched and spreading wider among the citizen. If, in spite of the huge financial and physical resources committed by government into poverty reduction programmes, nothing tangible appears to have been achieved, then there is justification for a critical appraisal of the policies/strategies.

However, what has remained unanswered is the extent to which these programmes have impacted on the poor – the target population. For poverty reduction agencies, their results do not seem to justify the huge financial allocations to them. As Nnamani (2003:60) puts it, poverty in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and has been rising steadily not exponentially. Nigeria is a country with about 162million people (World Bank, 2012), therefore the dimension of mass poverty in Nigeria is both dreadful and shocking. For example, the situation has increased since the late 1990s and can best be described as inflammable (NBS, 2012). Some believe that bad governance, corruption, low productivity, unemployment, dept-burden and conflicts are associated to failure of poverty reduction. Others attributed the high level of poverty to macro-economic distortion, globalization, high population growth rate and poor human resources development. Why is poverty on the increase? Are there better ways or strategies of implementing poverty reduction programmes to make them more effective? What are the various policy measures adopted by the past governments in Nigeria that were directed to poverty reduction and how have they impacted in the provision of social service? What are the likely problems that hindered the actualization of these policies? It is generally believed that acute poverty can be reduced or eradicated through effective policy measure and that is the target of this paper.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

There is no universally accepted definition of poverty. I.e. poverty is a relative concept. At same time, there is always the difficulty in deciding where to draw the line between the "poor" and the "non poor". According to World Bank Report (2002), poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report constructed some indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of poverty. These include lack of access to resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of political freedom and voice, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization. Similarly, the United Nations Human Development (UNHD) has introduced the use of such other indices such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrolment ratio and number of persons per physician to measure poverty in a country (UNDP, 2002). CBN (1999) views poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing or shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skill, assets, and self esteem, and has limited access to socio-economic infrastructure such as education, health, water, and sanitation and chances of advancing his or her welfare.

According to Shaffer (2001), the concept of poverty has undergone four changes over the past decades. First, there has been a shift from a physiological model of deprivation to a social model of deprivation. The social model is about incorporating issues of political and economic rights and social justice into the anti-poverty policy framework. Secondly, the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to poverty, Thirdly, the concept of inequality and its relationship to poverty, Finally, the idea that poverty should be conceptualized as a violation of basic human rights. Similarly, Brinkerhoff and Crossby (2002), believed that meaningful onslaught against poverty must be focused on these dimensions in order to be seen and complete. Efforts and resources needed to attempt to address the physiological needs of citizens alone is prodigious enough, not to talk of waging an all-inclusive campaign against poverty, which shows that the socio-economic problems that policies address cannot be solved by governments acting on their own, nor are they exclusive domain of one sector.

Many poverty analyses describe the condition of being poor, rather than considering how or why the condition exists. These descriptions typically focus on individual attributes (e.g. a lack of assets, of education or of health, etc.). However, these attributes are the outcomes of social processes and need to be understood within the context of social institutions and systems. To understand, anticipate or attempt to alter these outcomes, it is necessary to understand the structures and processes that underlie these deprivations (Suich, 2012).

A distinction can be made between absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the inability to meet what are thought to represent the absolute minimum requirements for human survival. The poverty status of any individual or household is considered completely independently of the conditions of other individuals or households. Those considered to be absolutely poor are often identified with reference to poverty lines – those households or individuals that fall below the poverty line (however set). While the $US1.25 per day is perhaps the most well-known poverty line, absolute poverty can also be measured against non-income aspects of deprivation (e.g. food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care, etc.) (Suich, 2012).

Zupi (2007) went on to analyze the fact that poverty has been seen as a dynamic process rather than a static phenomenon, one that captures the various forms of deprivation in well- being. It implies an observable disadvantage in relation to the local community or the wider society or nation to which a deprived individual, family, household or group belongs. The concept of poverty is also linked to distribution in terms of economic distance that is inequality. However, he argues that distribution alone cannot identify the ability to achieve a decent level of living. Distribution must be regarded as an important correlated but different concept to poverty. As a general rule, a better distribution will be more pro-poor but opposed the view that poverty and inequality are correlated. Castel (1996) defines poverty as a static or dynamic concept. The definition of poverty as a cycle projects its dynamic nature and its linkage to marginalization and social exclusion.

After decades of social policies based on the inclusion of the poor, poverty is again being treated as a problem of marginalization. As Procacci (2007) puts it, marginalization puts poverty further apart from the whole of society. As far as poverty is concerned, the fundamental right to a minimum of resources for not starving is not enough for organizing a social response to its increase. Social exclusion confirms a dual society and appears more as a symptom of a social fracture than as a solution against it. Thus, under the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs), today's development strategies try to put under question the reverse link between growth and inequality by tackling poverty under multiple dimensions. This inevitably demands that not only extreme poverty is neither targeted, nor individual trajectories, but rather that multiple processes producing poverty within society are also tackled.

Globally, infrastructure gap is currently huge. Evidence shows that more than 1 billion people have no access to roads, 1.2 billion do not have safe drinking water, 2.3 billion lack reliable energy, 2.4 billion have no sanitation facilities and 4 billion without modern communication services (Arogundade et al, 2011). In the absence of accessible transport, energy and water, the poor pay heavily in time, money and health. In many developing countries notably in Sub-Saharan Africa, growth has been low and so provided few benefits for the poor to reap. The governments of these countries are currently unable to create sufficient formal jobs to absorb the increase in the non-agricultural workforce. As a result, hundreds of millions of poor people earn their livelihoods informally. It is estimated that 72% of the non-agricultural workforce in Africa earn its livelihood informally representing one of the most important policy issues for private sector development (Manning, 2007).

MAGNITUDE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

The poverty situation in Nigeria is alarming and indeed has assumed a crisis dimension. Nigeria is blessed with mineral resources and rich in crude oil. Ironically, the citizens are hungry and poor in the abundance of plenty. The UNDP has classified the country as 141 poorest nations on human development index. In its report, Nigeria is considered one of the 20th poorest countries in the world with 70% of the population classified as poor and 54.4% living in absolute poverty (UNDP-HDI, 2006; Ekugo, 2006). Nigeria instead of advancing has lately degenerated into one of the poorest countries of the world. In fact, more and more people are becoming poorer every day. In 1960, the poverty level in the country was about 15% and by 1980 it reached to 28.1%. In 1985, the poverty level was 46.3 but dropped to 42.7% in 1992. Nonetheless, with the termination of the democratic processes by the military government, the poverty level was 43.6% in 1995. A year after, about 65% of the population was below poverty line, that is, about 67.1 million Nigerians. In the 1999 and 2000 UN Development Report, Nigeria had degenerated further as 87% of the populations were below poverty line and rated 154 on the world's marginal poverty index out of 172 countries (Ekpu, 2004).

As observed, poverty in Nigeria has geographical perspective. According to the Nigeria's Draft Report on Millennium Development Goals, the Northern part of the country accounted for the higher incidence of poverty which largely predominated in the rural area. Specifically, the report showed that the rate of poverty was as high as 84% in states like Zamfara, Sokoto, Gombe and Bauchi during the period 1980 – 2004. In the Southern part, poverty had increased from 1980 – 1996, but dropped in 2004, apart from the South-South zone that dropped in 1992. In fact, all states except Bayelsa had more than half of their population in poverty circle (Akintunde and Amaefule, 2005). Comparatively, while poverty showed as high as 72.2% in the North-east, it has the lowest in the South-east with 26.7%. This confirmed the findings by the World Bank study in Nigeria which showed that there were differences between the North and South with more concentration of the poor in the Northern zone (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005). During the period from 1980 – 2004, the incidence of urban poverty also has been on the increase, an indication that poverty is not only seen in the rural areas but also co-existed in urban cities of the country. In 1980, poverty rose from 28.3 to 51.4% in 1985 but declined to 46.0% before it rose again to 69.3% in 1996 and fell to 63.3% in 2004 and increase to 71% in 2010 (NBS, 2012).

Comparatively, there is improvement, yet Nigeria has failed to live up to nationhood aspirations at independence. A few African countries like Botswana and Mauritius have achieved a high growth. These countries belonged to those that were poorer than Nigeria at independence. With the much vaunted status parity in 2004, Nigeria's GDP per capita stood at paltry $1000 as against South Africa's %11,000, Kenya's $1,100, Angola's $2,100 and Cuba's $3000 (Idowu, 2005). Presently, Nigeria is a shadow of its promise in 1960 when it ranked higher than a number of today's leading nations in all major development indices. A situation attributed to the social, political and economic environment in the country. The table below depicts the level of poverty in Nigeria.

Table 1: Relative Poverty – Non Poor – Moderate Poor and the Extremely Poor (%)

Year	Non-poor	Moderately poor	Extremely poor
1980	72.8	21.0	6.2
1985	53.7	34.2	12.1
1992	57.3	28.9	13.9
1996	34.4	36.3	29.3
2004	43.3	32.4	22.0
2010	31.0	30.3	38.7

Source: National Bureau for Statistics (NBS) Harmonized Nigerian Living Standard Survey 2010

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

Successive governmental efforts at eradicating the endemic poverty in Nigeria date back to pre-independence era. During the period, the colonial administration drew up programmes and strategies and laid out resources for the first two 10 year development plan 1946 – 1955. The policies were targeted at local processing of raw produce such as groundnuts, palm oil, hides and skin. At independence, the periods between 1962 -1968, 1970 – 1974 (National Accelerated Food Production Programme-NAFPP), 1975 – 1980 and 1981- 1985 were designed by various governments to provide basic infrastructure, diversify the economy, reduce the level of unemployment, achieve dynamic self-sustaining growth and raise the living standard of people (Orji, 2009).

Amongst the policies introduced to alleviate poverty reduction in Nigeria are; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1977, Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) in 1977, Green Revolution in 1980, etc. the OFN and Green Revolution were established to boost agricultural production and efficiency in the general performance of the agricultural sector. FCPE was set up to reduce mass illiteracy at the grassroots level. Most of these programmes made some laudable impacts by enhancing the quality of life of many people but were not anti-poverty measures. However, the programmes could not be sustained because of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of the poor people in these programmes (CBN Enugu Zone, 1998). Below is an overview of some of the policies in relation to their output and outcome in Nigeria.

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)

The IMF-sanctioned Structural Adjustment Program in Nigeria was adopted in 1986 called for a rapid departure from the government's previous reform movements and echoed Clausen's emphasis on relying on the private sector rather than the state in solving the fundamental problems of the economy. The World Bank supported the program and contributed over US$450 million to aid international trade (NCEMA, 2010). The Structural Adjustment Program called for the:

- Restructuring and diversification of the economy, so as to reduce Nigeria's dependency on its oil industry and imports.
- Implementation of fiscal and balance payments viability.
- Promotion of non-inflationary economic growth (NCEMA, 2010).

The SAP period proceeded with severe economic crisis that worsened the quality of life in Nigeria. The government through the assistance of the World Bank/IMF introduced SAP to check the crisis. However, the implementation of the programme further worsened the living standard of many Nigerians especially the poor people. In quick reaction to tackle the crisis, the government designed and implemented many poverty alleviation programmes between 1986 and 1993 under the guided deregulation of the economy. Example, establishment of the Directorate of food, Road and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was not only a departure from the previous programmes but complementarily associated basic needs such as food, shelter, potable water, road construction etc. however, DFRRI could not achieve many of its objectives, reasons of which are; over ambitious in scope, steeped in corruption, lack of standards for project harmonization and effective mechanisms for coordination among the three tiers of government (CBN Enugu Zone 1998). The SAP induced inflation which resulted to adverse income redistribution, leading to increased personal insecurity and lessened personal satisfaction which heighten interpersonal and institutional tensions and deterring investment and inhibiting consumer spending. Other costs include the depletion of external reserves, a worsening balance of payment positions, the diversion of managerial talent from managing production, maintaining efficiency and innovation.

Better Life Programme

Founded by Late Dr (Mrs) Maryam Babangida, in 1986, Former First Lady and Founder of the Better Life Programme for Rural Women, she sought to improve the quality of life and status of the rural women by creating awareness in women and encourage them to realize, utilize and develop their potentials for a more fulfilling life (Adoba, 2005). It was a widely accepted project that touched on women from all spheres of life. The programme served as the benchmark for national development programmes, and a bonafide component of governance at the highest level in Nigeria, leading to the establishment of the National Commission for Women, which was later upgraded to the Ministry of Women Affairs. It was vision to redress the continuous rural-urban migration and the impoverishment of those who decide to stay back in the rural areas. The project suffered over dominance of urban women and power play by elitist women. This, leading to the diversion of attention to who is who in the society, especially at women meets. It short lived with the exit of Late Mrs Babangida husband from power.

National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The NDE established on October 19, 1986 was meant to combat mass-unemployment and articulate policies aimed at promoting skill acquisition, self-employment and labour intensive potentials. The objectives of the Directorate are to; design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment; Articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potential; Obtain and maintain a data bank on employment and vacancies in the country with a view to acting as a clearing house to link job seekers with vacancies in collaboration with other government agencies; and implement any other policy as may be laid down, from time to time, by the Board. Under the partnership with the National Directorate of Employment, successful graduates from training courses in the Institute under programmes such as the National Employment Training Scheme (NETS) are employed in the Oil and Gas, Telecommunications and Banking sectors of the economy. No doubt, NDE has trained more than two million unemployed and provided business training for not less than 400,000 Nigerians (Oyemoni, 2003). The NDE could not pass the acid test of implementation and lacked the funding to carry it. Gaps between the objectives and outcomes are also likely reasons for the failure of NDE (Observer, 2012)

People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)

The PBN was established in 1990 to encourage savings and provide credit facilities for the poor-people who could not ordinarily access such loans from the orthodox banking system. In a similar manner, Community Banks (CB) was set up to provide banking facilities for rural people and to support micro-enterprises in urban areas. The two banking schemes had some successes. Example, PBN disbursed up to N1.7 billion as in-house loans from funds derived from the Federal Government and N0.9 billion as loans from funds provided by the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). However, both the banking schemes had a high degree of problems. Their external audits recorded a huge loss of over 80 percent due to corruption and mismanagement. The audit reports also showed that some funds were trapped in distressed and liquidated banks (Oyemoni, 2003). A lot of violation and disregard for rules was carried out by the banks executives. What happened in the bank was a betrayal of public trust. It was abuse of trust that people would put their money and because some people were privilege to know some directors, they would take money without due process and without paying back. Corrupt people were shield in the society, as their names were not announced leading to deep suspicion that government was not sincere in promoting the pro-poor bank.

Family Support Programme (FSP) & Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

The two programmes were created during the military government of General san abatcha, while the then president introduced 'FEAP'; his wife introduced the 'FSP'. The FSP was established to provide health care delivery, child welfare, youth development and improved nutritional status to families in rural areas. In a similar objective, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was set up to provide credit for agricultural production and processing and small-scale industries through cooperative societies in rural and urban areas. These programmes were further designed to create employment opportunities at ward levels, encourage the design and manufacture of plants, machinery and equipment as well as provide opportunities for the training of village-based business operators. Although, both FSP and FEAP were designed to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers, they were bedeviled by several malpractices including the non supervision and monitoring of loans and projects by the participating banks. Also fabricators in connivance with the beneficiaries inflate cost of equipment and provision of substandard equipment as well as poor loan recovery, leading to the weakening of the entire scheme. But, the death of General Abacha went with the good intend of the project.

National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)

NALDA was set up in 1993 to provide strategic public support for land development, promote and support optimum utilization of rural land resources and encourage the evolution of economic size rural settlements. Other programmes connected to this like the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) and the strategic Gains Reserves Programmes (SGRP) had in one way or the other impacted positively on the agricultural sector and by implication reduced poverty. These programmes were able to acquire suitable land in various parts of Nigeria for the purpose of development. They parceled out land into economic-size farm plots and distinguished them to farmers and advised them on all aspects of land conservation and land degradation control. These programmes, however, were faced with some problems which includes taking more than their statutes allowed and that over-burdened them and rendered them ineffective. In a nutshell, they were spending more than their incomes.

Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)

PAP was set up in 2000 to urgently create jobs for the unemployed in the face of increasing youth restiveness. The projects participants were to stimulate economic activities and improve the environment. The participants engaged in direct labour activities such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along high-ways, maintenance of public building and environmental sanitation (Oyemoni, 2003).

The poverty alleviation programme has not been successful due to inadequate funding, lack of proper coordination and commitments, poor design, monitoring and evaluation. The implementation of PAP generated public outcry and was accused of shoddiness and corruption. Subsequently, the government set up a panel committee headed by Prof. Ango Abdullahi to review the programme. Problems identified with the programme included over centralization, over politicization, irregular payment, uncoordinated management as well as high-level corruption (Oyemoni, 2003). Thereafter, the committee came up with the blueprint recommending National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

NAPEP was established in 2001 and involved all stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria namely the federal, state and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women groups and concerned individuals (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007. NAPEP aimed to address the aspects of absolute poverty and to eradicate them. The stakeholders recognized that certain fundamental reasons were responsible for the inadequacy of anti-poverty measures over the years and they include the absence of a policy framework, inadequate involvement of stakeholders, poor implementation arrangements and lack of proper co-ordination. All of these seem to have received attention in designing NAPEP and to make it different from all past efforts. The mandate is to monitor and coordinate all poverty eradication efforts in order to harmonize and ensure better delivery, maximum impact and effective utilization of available resources. Effort to eradicate poverty, the government arranged NAPEP into four schemes. These are Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), rural Infrastructure Development (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS) and the National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007).

NAPEP plays the role of monitoring and that of evaluation. In terms of monitoring, it monitors all the relevant initiatives periodically to confirm project location, project implementation, project delivery, functionality of faculties provided, assess impacts on livelihood of communities, ensure equitable distribution and review the actual poverty status of communities in Nigeria. Indices of monitoring are evaluated from broad performance blocks such as quality, project objectives and target achievement, scheduled completion and financial. The program is seen as an improvement of the previous Nigerian government poverty reduction programmes. Analysis shows that the program has been able to train 130, 000 youths and engage 216, 000 persons, but most of the beneficiaries were non-poor prudence (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). In summary, the programme failed to focus on the poor, programme inconsistency, poor implementation or severe budgetary and governance problems, corruption, etc. Among these are project substitution, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources, conversion of public funds to private uses, etc (Okoye and Onyukwu). The commendable feature of NAPEP is the involvement of beneficiaries in the identification of projects and programmes. Ironically, it is a situation where though the beneficiaries had their capacity enhanced; they were not sufficiently empowered to become masters of their own through lucrative engagements.

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)

SMEDAN was established by the SMEDAN Act of 2003 to promote the development of micro, small and medium enterprises [MSME] sector of the Nigeria Economy. Statistically, MSMEs constitute more than 75% of all enterprises in Nigeria (Umar, 2010). This is mainly due to ease in terms of set up capital and human resource required to establish an MSME. The agency's role is to address poverty, rooted out of lack of access to income earning opportunities and lack of capacity to take advantage of the opportunities in the country (Umar, 2010). Its principal role is: Employment generation, supply of potential entrepreneurs, ensuring sound competition, mobilization of local resources. Initiating and articulating policy ideas for micro, small and medium enterprises growth and development, promoting and facilitating development programme, instruments and support services to accelerate the development and modernization of MSME operation. Among the issues raised to the set back of SMEDAN are land as collateral for loan, access to credit, urban orientation or outlook, Poor state of infrastructure, weak access to production inputs (especially finance), corruption, low access to information, low synergy between various tiers of government, inappropriate/crude technology, dearth of business information/databank, lack of basic business capacity (knowledge, skills & attitude), (Umar, 2010). The major problem with their activities and that of other Nigerian government agencies tasked with SME development is that they are yet to come to terms with the fact that in the 21st century, factories are more in the mind than physical. SMEDAN still believes you need to provide 'land' before you qualify for loan. I.e. people with skills or knowledge for creativity are sidelined.

NEEDS Programme

The NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS programme was launched in 2004 by the federal government of Nigeria supposed gained high feet by liquidating the 43.6billion dollars external debt creating real GDP growth of 7% while inflation dipped below the set target level of 9.5% in 2006. However, the trickle down effects of such economic acceleration were a sharp decline in National electric power supply, refined petroleum products sold at steeply rising prices, transport systems in states of total collapse with rural and urban trunks road not motor able, the real productive sectors becoming comatose and uncompetitive, the health and education sector languishing and high levels of unemployment questions the aforementioned rosy economic picture of LEEDS and whether the results are merely signpost tailored to fit the programme projections? The Nigeria's trajectory of institutional development in support of NEEDS programme depends on genuine political buy-in. the absence of which negatively impacts in food security and sustainable development. In other words, a coordinated pro-poor economic growth with a human face and not just growth alone. While the key tool for distributing the gains of economic growth and addressing poverty remains the creation of decent jobs which enables the poor to generate and earn income, it should not be seen as a chance by product of economic growth.

The 7th Point Agenda

The seven point agenda accommodates power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security and qualitative and functional education. They were defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from our common future, which energizes development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts that Nigeria may simply need to catalyze her development. The concept of the agenda, in particular the essential needs of the Nigeria's poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and the idea of limitations imposed by the Nigeria's state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. The idea died with the demise of the president and could not achieve much to reduce poverty.

SURE-P

The federal government recently introduced SURE P through the public works, youths and women employment components of the (subsidy re-investment and empowerment programme) to establish the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) to reduce unemployment among graduates and stimulate economic growth and opportunities, towards the attainment of vision 2020. The scheme intends to engage unemployed graduates for one year in firms and institutions to acquire skills, experience, and enhance their employability. This is expected to equip the graduates meet the demands of employers in the current labor market according to their area of specialization. Likewise, projects being executed by the programme can comfortably be done by relevant agencies of the government.

While it may be too early to assess the program as a viable poverty reducing strategy, the government opts to have known that the vast majority of poor Nigerians cannot fit under this scheme for obvious reasons. The most affected of the poor are those in need of knowledge and skills, not those who desire the sharpening of their skills to meet up market requirements. Such groups range from market women, artisans, shop keepers, farmers, to mention but a few. Thus, the strategy looks elitist in nature and may likely not have the greatest impact on poverty reduction in Nigeria.

As a summary of assessment in this study, we advocate a clear identification of the poor and policies /strategies directed towards addressing poverty in Nigeria. The Failure of government programmes can be traced to the combined effects of inadequate mobilization of the target group, lack of commitment on the part of government agencies, outright mismanagement and embezzlement of funds, inconsistency as well as politicization of the programmes meant for poverty reduction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The below are some strategies to re-dress poverty in Nigeria;

1. Government at all levels should provide welfare programmes and leverage for those who have a tough time getting on their own.
2. There are millions of jobless youths out there. Public works, textile industries and the development of agriculture among others have the capacity to provide jobs for these teeming youths, hence there is need to fund, monitor and evaluate government spending in each of these industries than pumping money into economic ‘elitist’ bail out or waivers that don’t reflect on direct job creation.
3. The educational system is in a state of collapse due to poor funding and management, hence, government should invest in public schools. The proliferation of private schools in Nigeria is a consequence of improper funding/management of public schools which trained most Nigerian leaders. The high level of illiteracy in the country is enough for government to intensify efforts to ensure that every citizen get the best education, especially the girl

child (as poverty has push many young girls in Nigeria into prostitution or are being traffic for sex exploitation to other countries of the world (especially Europe) in order to reduce poverty The children of the poor must not be left to the mercy of poorly funded public schools.

4. Governments should build affordable houses for low income earners, alongside socio-economic infrastructure.
5. Government should create parenting and literacy programmes for parents and illiterates respectively (the National Orientation Agency should play a lead role in this regard through values re-orientation i.e. instilling the desired attitude, entrepreneurship education, passion for work and learning, result based coaching and activities, spirit of tolerance or respect to diversity).
6. It is high time Nigerian government stopped the promotion of ‘okada’ (motorcycle) riding and the procurement of three-wheeler motorcycles as a way of reducing poverty, because they hardly make people rise above poverty; rather, they lead to the loss of many lives and create another vicious cycle of poverty (It is not a career opportunity, nor a skilful job).
7. Finally, there is urgent need to align our poverty reduction policies/strategies with the MDG goals, so as to pursue common cause at home and beyond or alongside global poverty reduction aspirations, for poverty is a global issue, it does not respect race, color, ethnic group or a nation.

CONCLUSION

Poverty has weighty consequences on the poor, the family and on the society. Once poverty is not broken, it breeds vicious poverty at higher level. Social menace, correlated with poverty calls for unreserved reasonableness to seek all practical means to reduce poverty. Poverty causes lack of regard for constituted authority. It breeds hunger, social rejection and dejection, and at the extreme, armed robbery, kidnapping, predatory diseases, youths restiveness, ethnic and religious tension/crisis, political thugs, prostitution, ritual killing, bribery, etc. The era of lip service in the country is almost over going by the level of insecurity in the land, the executive and legislative arm of government should uphold the struggle to stem out poverty from Nigeria devoid of political compensation in whatever programmes that characterize the polity.

Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not in any way represent the views or thinking of the National Institute for Legislative Studies (NILS) – National Assembly – Abuja, Nigeria.

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