

**POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF GOVERNANCE
IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD FROM LEGION OF FAILED POLICIES.**

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ABSTRACT

The major challenge every responsive and responsible government must contend with is to make life better and more meaningful to the citizenry irrespective of whether such government is a democratic one or a military dictator if the regime is to have relevance and continue to enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the governed. Every successive government since independence has put up one strategy or the other aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the people and put smiles on the faces of the governed. The objectives of this paper amongst others are (i) to critically examine the various poverty alleviating programmes, reforms and strategies, which had been undertaken by successive Nigerian governments and the reasons behind the success/failure of these programmes. (ii). To articulate and profound useful strategies that if faithfully implemented would lead the nation out of the present dungeon of poverty and set the nation on

the right map of sustainable economic development and not just on economic growth which it has persistently witnessed over the years. Such programmes include Direct government participation to be tagged “The Youth Agricultural Revolution,” Dedication and Commitment on the part of successive governments to faithfully implement good policies; continuity of good government programmes such as Peoples’ Bank, DFRI and if Nigeria must bear good fruits, it must return to its source which is God; amongst others.

Key Words: Poverty, Alleviation, Strategies, Governance, Policies, Way- Forward, .

A. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps, the major problem facing African nations today, is the eradication of poverty which every government has built in as part of its developmental programmes(Abiola & Salami, 2011). In fact, the major challenge every responsive and responsible government must contend with in Africa today is to make life better and more meaningful to the citizenry irrespective of whether such a government is a democratic one or a military dictatorship if such a government is to continue to have relevance and enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the governed.

Successive government in Nigeria since independence has put up one strategy or the other aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the people and put continuous smiles on the faces of the governed. The paper has the following objectives to examine:

- (i) Meaning of poverty in the eyes of the rulers and the ruled
- (ii) To examine the cause of poverty in Nigeria generally
- (iii) To take cursory look at the different poverty alleviation strategies of successive governments and see whether those policies have succeeded or failed.

(iv) To fashion a way out for the nation which could serve as policy recommendation that would get Nigeria out of the present dungeon of failed poverty alleviation strategies and set the nation on the right path of sustainable economic development.

The prevalence of mass poverty reflects the poor management and performance of the nation's economy. The level of economic performance of any country depends primarily on two factors. These are the level of resources available relative to population, and the level of productivity. Nigeria belongs to the group of poor countries with a high level of resources but low level of productivity and mismanagement of the abundant God-given resources. Substantial amount of revenue from these God-given resources are allegedly stolen and stock in foreign accounts.

The meaning of poverty is very wide and elastic. It means different things to different people in different contexts and circumstances. The most basic meanings according to Ukwu (2002) are as follows:

- The quality or condition of being poor
- The condition of having little or no wealth or material possession, destitution or want (in various degrees)
- Deficiency, dearth, scarcity, smallest of amounts
- Deficiency in proper or desired quality
- Poor condition of leanness or feebleness resulting from insufficient nourishment, etc.
- In relation to people, the basic concept of poverty refers to a serious inadequacy of economic condition, a situation of individual, group or regional lack or deprivation of what are considered the necessities for acceptable living standards or not having access to a conducive environment and facilities and opportunities for decent living standards.

B. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Poverty as explained in this research work goes beyond the contemporary meaning of low-level income; rather, it is found to be multi-dimensional in nature. Thus, its definition and subsequent measurement cannot be pegged on a single criterion. It has political, social and economic dimensions; hence measurements that focus on the economic aspect only are bound to be inadequate. The World development Report (2000/2001) as summarized by Enahoro and Ikpefan (2005) emphasizes various dimensions of poverty. These include:

- Lack of opportunities -This is a low level of consumption and income, usually relative to a national poverty line. This is associated with the level and distribution of human capital and social and physical assets such as land and market opportunities that determine their returns to these assets.
- .Low Capabilities -Little or no improvements in health and education indicators among a particular socio-economic group in the area of:
 - i) Low Level Security -Exposure of risk and income shock that may arise at the Individual levels
 - ii) Empowerment -Capability of poor people to participate in exchange

Many statistics have shown that good governance and rapid economic development result in poverty reduction. Domestic national policies coupled with prudent macro-economic management, more open market and a stable and predictable environment are important effects on sustainable growth and development.

According to the World Bank Report (1999), poverty is hunger; lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to go to school, not knowing how to read; not being able to speak properly, not having a job; fear for the future, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water; powerlessness; lack of representation and freedom.

Two basic elements of poverty are usually recognized: absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a condition under which there is a serious deficiency or lack of access to the basic necessities of normal life such as food, clothing, housing, health and education services as explained by - African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF, 1998). Relative poverty relates to the condition of an individual, household, group or community when considered against some reference, standard or parameter such as the average for the group or region, a target standard or objective, or its ranking on given criteria. In the final analysis however, all concepts of poverty are relative. Thus even when we speak of absolute poverty, we refer to existence below a reference standard of living. (AMREF 1998; and UKWU 2002)

Aku et al. (1997) analyses poverty from five dimensions of deprivation:

- i) Personal and physical deprivation experienced as a result of health, nutritional, literacy and educational disability and lack of self confidence.
- ii) Economic deprivation drawn from the lack of access to property, income, assets, factors of production and finance.
- iii) Social deprivation as a result of denial from full participation in social, political and economic activities
- iv) Cultural deprivation in terms of lack of access to values, beliefs, knowledge, information and attitudes which deprives the people of control of their own destinies and;

- v) Political deprivation in terms of lack of political voice to participate in decision making that affects their lives.

The World Development Report (2002) estimates a large number of people who are struggling to survive on less than US \$370 a year -or a dollar a day. As at today, more than a one billion people in the developing world continue to live in poverty.

Poverty is highly visible in most African countries. On the dollar-a-day measure, about 210 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are in poverty, and their numbers continue to grow. In south Asia the share of the population in poverty is about 500 million people. (World Bank, 1995)

Foster et al. (1984) asserted that the most frequently used measurements are:

- i) The head count poverty index given by the percentage of the population that live in the household with a consumption per capita less than the poverty line.
- ii) The poverty gap index which reflects the depth of poverty by taking into account, how far the average poor person's income is from the poverty line.
- iii) The distributional sensitive measure of squared poverty gap which reflects the severity of poverty (Grootaert and Braithwaite, 1998; Ravallion, 1996; Ravallion and Sen, 1994 as cited in Ijaiya 2000).

Past studies by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) advocate the use of the Human Development Index (HDI) and Capability Poverty Measure (CPM). According to the UNDP (1997;1998), HDI combines three components in the measurement of poverty -life expectancy at birth; educational attainments; and improvement in standard of living determined by per capita income. The first relates to survival, i.e. vulnerability to death at a relatively early age. The second relates to knowledge, i.e.

being excluded from the world of reading and communication. The third relates to a decent living standard in terms of overall economic empowerment. CPM however, focuses on the average capabilities of the people by reflecting on the percentage of those who lack basic, essential human capabilities which, as end in themselves, are needed to rise from a position of income poverty to one of the sustained human development {Kankwanda et al., 2000}.

The World Bank as cited in Sanusi (2001) has called special attention to the causes of mass poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the most basic being lack of access to skills, facilities and opportunities. The reasons behind such lack of access relate to the patterns of social and economic inequality. In a situation of mass poverty such as we have in Nigeria, where poverty is the lot of the generality of the people rather than the misfortune of a few, the primary reason of poverty must be sought not in the circumstances of individuals but in the state of the nation and its management.

As observed by Ukwu (2000), the most developed countries in the world today include some countries very poor in physical resources while the poorest countries include some of the most richly endowed with physical resources like Nigeria.

Nemedia (2001), asserts that some of the problems militating against the effort of poverty reduction in the third world nations include: lack of employment especially for the school leavers at all levels, slow economic growth, inflation, lack of social services, instability of exchange rate, political instability etc. The world bank report (1990), cited in Okuneye (2001), identified four measures to increase income of the poor. These are: increasing the demand and therefore, the price for those factors of production that the poor own, transferring physical asset such as land to the poor, providing social service such as education of the poor and transfer of current income to the poor through cash or food subsidies. These measures can help in minimizing the incidence of poverty in Africa. Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001)

attributed the decline in living standard to structural causes or determinate of poverty which includes increase in crime and violence, environmental detraction, retrenchment of workers and changes in family structures.

Ijaiya (2000) in his empirical analysis of the poverty rate in Ilorin, Nigeria, using the p-alpha class of poverty measurement found that the rate of poverty in Ilorin is slightly high with 58% of the population falling below the poverty line. He attributed these to problem of urban development and can be rectified by a rise in incomes in both the organized formal and the informal sectors to bring about a reduction.

Poverty can involve not only lack of the necessities but also the denial of opportunities for living a tolerable life. Ibru (2000) stated three most critical criteria which UNDP uses for determining the existence of poverty are the individual's ability to lead along and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living.

Egwuato (2002) in his findings on the study of rural poverty in sub-Saharan with special emphasis on Cote d'voire, deduced that the standard of living of the population is strongly linked to the socio-economic group that the group belongs to.

The result of the regression model showed that the size of the household has a strong impact on the standard of living. The percentage of people employed in the household contributes significantly to increase the expenditure for head in the household.

Ukwu (2002) believes that corruption has affected previous poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria. This is also true of most African nations. The effect of corruption is both direct and indirect on the poverty increase. The indirect effect follows from the reduction or misapplication of resources, which penalizes growth rate and growth potentials. The small and medium enterprise sub-sector is characterized by large informal activities. It denotes economic activities related to the poor, otherwise unemployed unskilled labour in urban centers.

C. CAUSES OF POVERTY

It is evident that the causes of poverty are numerous. The question that arises in the minds of the people is why poverty is more rampant today in Africa than any other region of the world, even though, almost without exception, many of the newly independent African states had identified poverty reduction as a primary policy objective more than thirty years ago.

African Medical and Research Foundation - AMREF (1998) in a poverty survey in Kisumu district, Kenya, identified environmental, historical, political, demographic and personal factors as major causes of poverty in the district.

According to Obadan (1997) the main factor that cause poverty in sub-Saharan African include: Inadequate access to employment opportunities, inadequate physical assets, such as land and capital (the poor have minimal access to credit even on a small scale); inadequate access to the means of supporting rural development in poor regions; poor access to markets where goods and services can be sold; low endowment of human capital; degradation and reduced productivity; inadequate access to assistance for those living at the margin and the victims of transitory poverty; and finally failure to involve people in the design of development programmers that affect them.

Enahoro and Ikpefan (2005) identify causes of poverty as large family size; low level of human capital; lack of access to cultivable land; absence of or inadequate access to all weather roads and markets. Other factors are low farm productivity; poor health status of an individual; and culture and social values, which have unfavourable bearing on work ethic; drug and alcohol abuse and certain types of family structure (polygamy, single parent households).

The Economic policy Research centre (1997] identifies the main cause of poverty to be civil strife, economic crisis and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Yahie (1993) reiterates that the cause of poverty includes:

- (i) Structural causes that are more permanent and dependent on a host of (exogenous) factors such as limited resources, lack of skills, location disadvantage and other social and political factors. The disabled, orphans, landless farmers, households headed by females fall into these Categories.
- (ii) Transitional causes occasioned by structural adjustment reforms and changes in domestic economic policies that may result in price changes, unemployment and so on. Natural calamities such as wars, environmental degradation and so on also induce transitional poverty(Narayan, D. (2000); arayan, D; Patel, R; Schafft, K; Rademacher, A and Koch-Schulte S. (2000a))

Poverty can also be the result of the problem of urbanization. As observed by Ijaiya (2000). The factors that cause poverty in most urban cities can be linked to the inner urban decay caused by poor public facilities that have been allowed to get run down due to lack of maintenance and investment. Insufficient resources and poor maintenance skills are often accountable for this; In addition, the available amenities are frequently inadequate to meet the increasing demands placed on them. It has been observed that local authorities have, over the years, cut expenditure on infrastructure development and raised tax rates. These policies are counter-productive and constrain private firms to relocate to more favourable areas, thus reducing employment. Consequently, the burden of taxes falls disproportionately on the resident of the community who are less lively to move.

According to Ukwu (2002), causes of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa include.

- Inadequate access to employment opportunities.

- Inadequate physical assets, such as land and capital and minimal access by the poor to credit even on a small scale.
- Inadequate access to the means of supporting rural development in poor regions. Inadequate access to markets where the poor can sell goods and services.
- Low endowment of human capital.
- Distinction of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity.
- Inadequate access to assistance for those victimized by transitory poverty. .
- Lack of participation in poverty alleviation programs

D. PREVIOUS PROGRAMMES/POLICIES INSTITUTED TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN NIGERIA

To reduce poverty various schools of thought advocates a number of measures(Ijayi, Ijayi, Bello, & Ajayi, 2011). Nigeria gain her political independent on October 1, 1960 from the British government. With political independence, various successive government had taken different strategies aimed at alleviating poverty and thereby making Nigerians to be self-reliant economically. The following strategies amongst others have been undertaken by successive Nigerian governments.

- At independence, government first attempt was the farm settlement centre. This attempt was to develop the food-sub sector for both the cash crop and the food crop.

Few years later, the programme was short lived as it was described a failure by the Gowon Administration that came in 1967.

- The General Gowon Administration later introduced the agricultural Development project (ADP) in 1973. The ADP was then jointly financed by the World Bank and the Federal and State governments. The programme was then aimed at promoting integrated rural development.

- The Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 1976 introduced the defunct operation feed the nation (OFN). The major aim of the OFN programme was to raise the awareness of Nigerians towards self sufficiency in food production. With all the money pumped into OFN, the programme did not produce the expected appreciable positive result at increasing food production.
 - Again, the Obasanjo government promulgated a decree to ensure that land-tenure system was abolished that all land belongs to the government. The policy was aimed at ensuring that people were not hindered in their attempt to farm. It was believed that with more food production, there would be better standard of living for the citizenry .
 - During the second republic (1979 – 1983), former president Shehu Shagari introduced the "Green Revolution". Though Nigerian forest had been green before the green revolution, the programme again could not go far as there was no zeal and commitment by the operators of the programme.
- Again, during the second Republic, the government introduced "austerity measures". It was a policy aimed at ensuring that people spend wisely. The austerity measure came in as a result of the extravagance spending of the civilian government of the second republic both at state and at the federal levels.
- The Babangida regime in 1986 introduced "the structural Adjustment Programme" (SAP). It was a programme, which was aimed at making Nigeria reliance industrially. Though SAP in principle was a good programme, but the then government of the country was not committed to its faithful implementation.
 - Another major step aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria is the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) by the Babaginda Administration. The NDE's sole aim then was to reduce unemployment with greater emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurship. The programme was very laudable but it was not faithfully implemented.

- The Directorate of foods, roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was another laudable programme by the Babangida government (1985 - 1993) which was aimed at alleviating poverty.

The main aim of DFRRI was to open-up rural areas, construct feeder roads and bridges, water supply etc. Again, the officials in charge of DFRRI became corrupt and the programme lost focus.

- The Peoples Bank was another laudable programme by the Babangida Administration, which was aimed at giving small loans to small and medium scale enterprises. As laudable as the programme was, it suffered same fate of the "Nigerian factor" of corruption.
- The better life for rural women, was initiated by the wife of former president Babangida. The programme was aimed at raising the standard of living of rural women. Though the programme was good, it was hijacked by urban elite women. Nigeria then believed that the faces they were seeing on Better Life programme were not that of rural women but that of urban elite and affluent women.
- It must be noted that government created the family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1997, which was meant to be giving loans to Nigerians. Again, officials in charge of this programme turned it to a family project with Nepotism, being the order of the day.
- The Obasanjo Administration set up Nigerian Economic Policy in 1999-2003. The programme was to enable Nigerians to be better placed towards articulating ways of using its subsequent annual budget to realize the developmental goals stated in their policy statement.

The Olusegun Obasanjo administration since inception in 1999 put up a number of measures aimed at alleviating the suffering of Nigerian masses. Such policies include:

- The adoption of measures to stimulate production and broaden the supply base of the Nigerian economy.
- The government has also reformed the tariff policies on a number of times with the aim of promoting industrial diversification and economic sustenance.

- The deregulation of the nation's economy, which was aimed at returning many government businesses to private hands in order to promote efficiency. It is believed that with efficiency, there will be better and more production of goods and services which will improve the living standard of the people.
- The recent debt reduction/cancellation crusade is another bold step aimed at alleviating poverty. With debt reduction, managing the funds which had hitherto been used to service debts could now be judiciously spent internally to improve the living standard of Nigerians.

E. CONCLUSION

Today, the high rate of poverty in Africa is a major developmental challenge that requires urgent measures to deal effectively with it. Although various approaches have been tried to fight poverty, not much has been achieved as evidenced by the rising trends in poverty throughout the continent. For Nigeria to deal effectively with her poverty problems, it is crucial that sustainable long-term solutions are devised to salvage the current trend. Fighting poverty is a daunting challenge that requires a multifaceted approach in line with the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Nigeria should therefore borrow a leaf from what other countries have done. Similar thing particularly the East Asia countries, which suffered from similar levels of poverty with many African countries in the 1960s and 1970s.

It is now clear that for poverty reduction, economic growth is a necessity but not a sufficient condition. For growth to be an effective strategy, it has to be accompanied by a deliberate provision of enabling infrastructural environment that can sustain economic development. In addition, government must build an investment climate that facilitates the growth of the private sector and simultaneously empowers poor people to participate in that growth. Poverty eradication would be a mirage in Nigeria and in the entire black Africa if there is no good governance. To have democracy is not only the answer but good leaders

must implement people oriented programmes that would reduce the sufferings of the people and put a permanent smile on the faces of the governed. Providing a good investment climate extends beyond good policies. It includes the right institutions, good governance, stability and qualitative infrastructure.

F. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS/THE WAY FORWARD - (The Strategic Options)

No matter how diverse poverty is, the coping strategies cluster around some common themes. The most common is to supplement one's income through farming, casual labour, trading, and engaging in other petty business activities etc.

To this end, I make the bold call on all that, Nigeria's best poverty eradication programme is back to farm i.e. agriculture. A household that cannot feed itself will either go without food or result to begging. Nigerian government needs to take bold steps in resuscitating Nigerian agricultural programme. Government needs to be involved in a number of ways.

- i) Government needs to back up farmers with needed fertilizers and farming implements, insecticides, and high yielding crops, amongst others. Experience has shown that when physical cash is given to farmers in form of loans, such funds or cash is always diverted to other unproductive means or non-farming.
- ii) A more important strategy is “direct government intervention programme” - “The Youth Agricultural Revolution”

To this end, I call on Nigerian government to substitute the present NYSC programe with National Agriculture Programme to be tagged “**The Youth Agricultural Revolution**”. The programme will involve an initial huge take-off capital in terms of provision of infrastructures. Luckily Nigeria as a country has large fertile land that could be used to grow different kinds of crops.

The country will be divided into different zones of at least 10 zones. Each zone will be used for different kind of crop depending on suitability i.e. the Zone at Kwara/Oyo State could be used for crops such as cassava, guinea corn, maize etc. while the zone around Benue will be used for crop such as yam.

In each zone, there will be infrastructures such as hostels, Hospitals, Roads, vehicles for transportation to farms while the hostels and Hospitals will be built inside the farms. These hostels and Hospitals will serve as mini villages on their own. Government will also provide the needed mechanized equipments such as tractors, irrigation facilities, farming implements etc in these zones.

What would be the Effects of Direct Government participation in Agriculture? (i.e. “The Youth Agricultural Revolution”).

The present NYSC programme will then be transformed into Nigerian agricultural programme and the corpsers will be made to serve on these government farms annually. Each year, government could retain some of these corpsers especially those with Agricultural education/certificate to serve as supervisors on these farm. The programme will produce the following effects:

- It will help feed the Nigerian masses and when food is produced for Nigerians, poverty will be eradicated or reduced.
- The programme will also help produce enough food for the African continent, thus helping to eradicate poverty in the entire black Africa.
- It has the potential of increasing employment opportunities. As many of the corps members will be employed after their service years.
- It has the potential of increasing or improving the nation's developmental growth.
- It will serve as source of foreign exchange earners for the country as many of the food sold to other Africa countries would fetch the nation foreign exchange.

- It has the multiplier effect of producing most of the raw materials used for agro-allied industries such as flour making industries etc.

- iii) The next step is dedication and commitment on the part of successive government to implement this program. Each successive new government must have continuity of programmes of previous administration.

The role of social entrepreneurship must be highly promoted. Social entrepreneurs are individuals who are entrepreneurs and who are willing and ready to raise up, help or finance other less privilege individuals who have innovative ideas and entrepreneurial attitude. They could help these individuals in a number of ways such as

Provision of useful information that could help the growing entrepreneurs develops rapidly. Information, people say, is power. The information could be in terms of better high yielding crops, market opportunities, access to financial services etc. This again has the effect of reducing poverty in the lives of the citizenry.

- iv) The present war against corruption must not be fought by President Obasanjo alone. The war against corruption must permeate through all government circles and it must cut across the three tiers of government i.e. (Federal, State and Local Governments).
- v) Government needs to make more reforms that will make the economy more market oriented with the exception of Agriculture where we call for direct and full government participation. With forces of demand and supply in place, there will be competition and more goods and services will be in the market.
- vi) There should be provision of social infrastructures in the rural areas such as roads, water, light etc. With these social amenities, in place, this will make people to stay in rural areas where they could embark on farming.

- vii) More importantly is the fact that government needs to place mechanism in place that could help finance the small-scale industries which we all believe is the engine of development of any given nation.
- viii) The central Bank in conjunction with ministry of finance must create consistent monetary policies which will help reduce the dependence of the real sector on imported inputs.
- ix) There must be continuity of government good policies. Lack of continuity of good policies had led to the dearth of a number of good policies. Policies such as peoples' Bank, DFRRI, are good Programmes that if properly monitored would have helped to alleviate poverty and reduce the sufferings of the people.
- x) The leadership at the various tiers of government must be transparent and be seen to be dedicated by the followers.
- xi) Above all, Nigerians must be made to turn to God better than before. God is the source of all good things. If Nigeria must bear good fruits, then the country needs to re-connect to its roots/source, which is Almighty God, the creator of all things.

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