
POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME AS A BASIS FOR GRASSROOTS TRANSFORMATION: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

D.O. Okibe (FHNR)

***Department Of Public Administration
The Federal Polytechnic, Kaura-Namoda
E-mail:- dookvan@yahoo.com***

ABSTRACT

Poverty has always posed and still poses as a menace against the transformation of the grassroots. The wide spread of poverty have remain one of the most notable features that challenges the development processes in Nigeria especially at the grassroots in spite of all the efforts and resources which successive government in Nigeria have committed for many years in fighting poverty. The central theme of this paper is to highlight the efforts in term of policies and programmes that the Nigerian government has embarked upon for grassroots transformation. The paper began with the conceptual clarification of the word "poverty" and after which went further to illustrates the major factors that inhibit the attainment of grassroots transformation in the country. The paper also make use of poverty indicators such as literacy level, access to safe water, nutrition, infant and maternal mortality as well as Human Development Index (HDI) to establish the poverty status of Nigeria. The paper equally give some options of what should be done, such as improving the general welfare and provision of more social amenities to the rural populace for there to be a transformation at the grassroots.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of poverty and measures to eradicate poverty have been and always been at top of the government policies the world over for the passed fifty years. Specifically here in Nigeria, the various tiers of government have introduced different poverty alleviation programmes. Despite the effort of the government and the high economic growth of the country, poverty in Nigeria still remains significant. Poverty has a lot of detrimental effects and constitutes a threat to sustainable human developments. Empowering the poor is the key strategy to the eradication of poverty, which will in turn help to transform the grassroots. The poor themselves must be empowered to move the barriers keeping them in the poverty trap. It is believed that every citizen of Nigeria deserves to have a life of relative comfort, free of want and destitute. It is also recognize that it is only after when the citizens were able to meet their basic needs that they can contribute to the process of National Development. Poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria therefore intends to free all the citizens from these burdens through stimulating appropriate activities in all the states and local government areas in order to raise productivity and economic power of individuals especially as the country is endowed with human, agricultural, commercial, minerals and entrepreneur resources. Using poverty indicators such as literacy level, access to safe water, nutrition, infant and maternal mortality, Nigeria is found to rank among the 25poorest nations in the world below Kenya, Ghana and Zambia (World Bank, 2002). It is estimated that three quarters of country's inhabitants live on roughly \$1 per day. This is in spite of all the efforts and resources devoted for many years to fighting poverty by the successive governments in Nigeria, with the

support of richer nations and international development institutions. These unsatisfactory results call for a re-examination of policies and practices of poverty eradication in Nigeria. (Khalid, 2008).

POVERTY: A CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

There has been no universally accepted definition of the word poverty, but the most commonly, poverty is defined as "state of being in which we are unable to meet our needs" (Watt, 2002). According to the 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 political freedom and voice, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization. According to Olewe, (2001), the term poverty is derived from the Latin word "pauper" which means to be poor. The poor are those who cannot afford decent food, medical care, recreation decent shelter and cloth, meet family and community obligation and other necessities of life. Aluko, (1995), refers to poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs. There is an inadequate level of command such as rise to insufficient food, cloth and shelter. He notes that the conventional notion depicts poverty as a condition in which people are below a specific minimum income level and are unable to satisfy the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living. The explanation, however failed to provide the graphic picture of those who are poor, how to change their conditions and what to do.

Aluko went on further to state that the poor can be generally identified as follows: (a) those whose ability to contribute adequately to productive process to warrant an income that would raise them above the poverty line. (b) Those of which the economy has failed to provide jobs, which are those who are willing and capable of earning an adequate income if only jobs were available. (c) Those whose opportunities to participate in the inductive process are restricted by discrimination of various kinds, sex, age, race etc. In practice, it may be difficult to strictly satisfy the poor into these categories. However, they are providing a useful background for discussion of poverty alleviation practice. This however, means that people constitute the central subject in any poverty situation. The rich and poor people have co-inhabited the world from time immemorial. In fact, poverty is a living condition in which an entity if faced with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivation to which a person household, community or nation can be subject to. (Duru, 2008).The Economist view of the word "poverty" is always used for measuring poverty line. Poverty is defined as "a system of low income or low consumption". (Obadan, 1996).Shaffer, (2001), affirms that the concept of poverty has undergone four changes over the past decade. 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 right and social justice into the anti-poverty programmatic framework. Second, there has been renewed emphasis place on the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to poverty, third, the concept of inequality, and its relationship to poverty has re-emerged as a central concern. Fourth, the idea that poverty

should be conceptualized as the violation of basic human rights has been painstakingly argued by UN system agencies. While considering the changes, Brinkerhoff et al (2002), opined that meaningful onslaught against poverty must be focused these dimensions in order to be seen and complete. The UNDP summarized these conceptions and described the extent of poverty around the world as pervasive. Today, more than one billion people-one person in five live in abject poverty. (Choices: The Human Development Magazine, March, 2003).

NATURE AND CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria at the early stage as a country is caught in the cycle of poverty with squalor, ignorance, disease, hunger and want. As such, Nigeria at its inception was in a very sorry state. Its population which was made up of mainly rural dwellers where mostly farmers, operating at a very low scale thereby makes them economically weak. Poverty in Nigeria was first measured in 1980 by the federal office of statistics (FOS), when 27.2percent of the population or 18million people, were classified as poor. By 1985, the federal of statistics estimated that about 46percent of Nigerians live below poverty level, but it dropped to 43percent by 1992. This rate surged to 66percent in a 1996 survey and the total number of poor today stands at close to 70percent or 90million people. Perhaps 40percent of these people are the "core'poor", so impoverished that they cannot meet their basic food needs. The stunting rate for young Nigerian children, a measure of chronic nutritional deprivation and food insecurity, stands at 42percent. (NICEF, 2003). Poverty in Nigeria have manifested itself in several ways which include joblessness (unemployment), inability to provide the basic needs of life for self and family, high level of illiteracy and lack of tendency to live in dirty localities that put significant pressure on the environment, and this menace of poverty appears to be more concentrated in the rural than in the urban areas. A lot of things have been attributed to as the cause of poverty in Nigeria and all of which reinforce one another.

Among the main causes of poverty in Nigeria are unemployment, ignorance, poor governance, corruption, high inflation, environmental degradation and high population growth. Another source of poverty is the lack of basic services such as clean water, education and health care. Another is lack of assets, such as land, tools, credit and supportive networks of friends and family. A third is lack of income, including food, shelter, clothing and empowerment (political power, confidence, dignity). (Khalid,2008). Discrimination, race and poverty are closely related, they affect peoples ability to secure employment and earn a living. Clark (2005), identified two types of causes of poverty; (a) individual and (b) Aggregate. Under the individual cause of poverty, Poverty is explained by individual circumstances and/or characteristics of poor people. Some examples are: amounts of education, skill, experience, intelligence, health, handicaps, age, work orientation, time horizon, culture of poverty, discrimination, together with race, sex etc. Under the Aggregate type, there are two types of theories:- Case and Generic. (i) Case:- add up all poverty explained by individual theories, and that is equal to total or aggregate poverty. In other words, according to case theories of poverty, individual aggregate explanations are really the same. According to these theories, aggregate poverty is just the sum of individual poverty. (ii) Generic:- poverty is explained by general, economy wide problems such as inadequate non-poverty employment

opportunities, inadequate over the demand (macro problem, macro policy) low national income (less developed country). If generic theories are correct, poverty is caused by one set of forces (general, economy-wide problems) but distributed. It is also important to note that Globalization and the World Trade Organization (WTO) liberalization policy have been noted as modern day colonialism causing the poverty of the third world countries, some authors have suggested that Nigeria should boycott the WTO agreement, because the treaty leads to goods being dumped in the country, leading to closures of local industries. And some have argued that the quality of Nigerian goods (if Nigeria has anything other than petroleum) would not compete effectively in the global market (Vanguard, July 5, 2002, Guardian, April 2, 2002). This the nation's oil and import dependent economy lead to rising unemployment and poverty of the people.

Table 1: Poverty Profile in Nigeria

Indicator	1992	1996	2004	Target 2015
Percentage of population living in relative poverty	42.7	65.6	54.4	21.4
Percentage of population living in extreme poverty	-	-	43.9	-
Percentage of population living below \$1 per day (PPP)	-	-	51.3	-
Inequality level (Gini Coefficient)	-	-	0.488	-

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (2005): Poverty Profile for Nigeria, March 2005.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A BASIS OF MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

The effect of the Nigerian government and it's agencies to eradicate poverty in the country have always been a fruitless battle, analysis of poverty and human development in the country have always shown that all the resources which the government have committed into the fight against poverty is of no effect. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) score, a measure of well-being encompassing the longevity of life, knowledge and a decent standard of living, remain among the poorest nations on the planet earth (UNDP,2006). For Nigeria as a whole, the average HDI rose from 0.324 in 1975 through 0.430 in 1990 and then declined to 0.405 in 1996 before it rose to 0.466 in 2002. It declined to 0.453 in 2005 (UNDP, 2006). This suggests that the human development situation in Nigeria as a whole, as measured by the HDI, has declined.

Table 2: Trends in Human development for Nigeria, 1975-2005

Year	NDI	HPI-1	GDI
1975	0.324	-	-
1980	0.385	-	-
1985	0.401	-	-
1995	0.455	-	-

2000	-	-	-
2002	-	-	-
2002	0.466	35.1	0.458
2005	0.453	38.8	0.439

Source: UNDP 2006

POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Several successive administrations in Nigeria have tried to solve the problem of poverty by the means of different policies and programmes. This the federal government has always carried out through the activities of its ministries/agencies in collaboration with international agencies. The government always go further to establish agencies; what do this agencies established by the government seek to change? This should be the starting point of a meaningful grassroots transformation in Nigeria. A short answer is that such agencies seek to address a plethora of the daunting society caused by poverty, which includes:- (i) improving the living standard of the people through overall policy poverty reduction, (ii) provision of loan directly to people to start or improve their trades/businesses (iii) to mobilize individuals and groups for effective participation in identifying economically viable enterprises for income generation and provide financial support for their implementation, (iv) to provide loans to farmers for the purchase of equipments, improved seeds, pesticides, fertilizer and other farm inputs,(v) to prevent the menace of street begging and suffering of poor people through the provision of monthly allowances to the handicaps. (vi) to promote production and self development consciousness through aggressive information dissemination, mass mobilization and advisory services, (vii) to provide welfare support to the disabled and co-operate with NGOs and associations to attract more of their services and support to the disabled. These are the stylized facts and environment that the agencies should seek to change-transition from a pre-industrial, largely primitive economic structure to a transformed, modern and poverty-free society. Certainly, navigating the daunting challenges and building a transformed modern and poverty-free society, requires approaches that are not "business as usual". But reverse has always been the case of the government efforts for transformation. A survey of policies and intervention programmes which the government of Nigeria have embarked on before the present civilian regime of Goodluck Jonathan in 2011 are the following federal projects and programmes which all aimed at fighting against mass poverty:-

These include the following:-

1. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
2. Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN)
3. Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)
4. Nigerian Agricultural and Insurance Corporation (NAIC)
5. National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE)
6. National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA)
7. National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)
8. National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education

9. Federal Agricultural Coordinating Unit (FACU)
10. Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)
11. Agricultural Project Monitoring and Evaluation Unit (APMEU)
12. Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)
13. Industrial Development Centre (IDC)
14. Federal Department of Rural Development (FDRD)
15. Federal Ministries of Agricultural, Water Resources and Power and Steel
16. River Basin Development Authority (RBDAs)
17. Family Support Trust Fund (FSTF)
18. National Centre for Women Development (NCWD)
19. National Bank for Commerce and Industry (NBCI)
20. Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB)
21. Nigerian Export-Import Bank
22. National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND)
23. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)
24. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)
25. National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

The achievement of the various above mentioned agencies is rated poor and this is obvious due to the condition or poverty level of Nigeria today. The response of the various administration to the poverty problem appear to have been adhoc and uncoordinated, while none of these programmes was completely without merit, none of them had a significant, lasting or sustainable positive effect. The impact of the above mentioned policies and intervention programmes in the reduction of poverty in Nigeria have not been notable in the polity due to some factors hindering the success of such programmes. Some of the major factors hindering the success of government efforts to reduce the level of poverty were identified as:- (i) poor coordination (ii) the absence of a comprehensive policy framework; (iii) ineffective targeting of the poor leading to the leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries; (iv) overlapping of functions which led to institutional rivalry and conflict; (v) the absence of sustainability mechanisms in programmes and projects; (vi) lack of involvement of beneficiaries in project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Khalid, 2008).

POLICY OPTIONS

- That lasting solutions to the problem of poverty confronting Nigeria federation lies in the provision of generous and attractive incentives for private initiated programmes aimed at helping breaks or seed capital for starting new economic activities that aim at the poor.
- Also, it is imperative to tackle the major policy lapses head-on, which have deprived agriculture and agriculture business, the former prominence that these enjoyed in years past. This is because agriculture have always been the mainstream economic activities for poverty alleviation,
- There is the urgent need for loan, especially as it relates to loan funding. As it is, the federal government should be the major funder of the poverty alleviation programmes in the country for its commencement and continued existence. Though, the agency

(programme) can recommend appreciative packages to encourage the participation of commercial banks and other interested investors to sponsor micro credit programmes.

- It is also discovered that in the areas of security of loan, the traditional rulers should be involved in both in generating its loans to beneficiaries and in loan recovery. Ward head must identify and certify that each member of that trade which loan is required and people entitled for loan must be identified to be poor and scrutinize before loan is given out without favor or influence from the authorities.
- It is also imperative, that a mass awareness to educate beneficiaries on how to make effective use of the loan/equipment or machine given.
- The poor should be involved in the design and implementation of policies aimed at helping alleviate their poverty, while NGOs should work closely with the poor and is involved as watch dogs on donor-sponsored poverty alleviating programmes.
- On the political landscape, all elected officials must be made to account for their efforts to combat poverty. This should be done at annual town hall meetings held by the constituencies of the elected official's failure to produce results after being elected to offices should be grounds for a recall, or where there is evidence of corruption and self-enrichment prosecution and imprisonment.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it is clear that poverty is a man's enemy, and a problem to man as well. Nigeria is rich in mineral resources but whether these resources have been used to benefit the poor in the country is still not clear. This is because the paper has been able to point it out that poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria have not really actualized its intended objectives. This is because a large percentage of the Nigerian populace are still living below the poverty line. The paper equally analyzed the menace called poverty, evolved theoretical elucidation of poverty as well as dwelled extensively on the nature and causes of poverty in Nigeria and concluded that poverty eradication is best approached from the perspective of sustainable human development which entails raising people's capabilities, or enhancing freedom.

Premised on the analysis, it is deducible that empowerment helping people in poverty to acquire the tools they need to meet their needs-is the long-term solution to poverty. The intractable problems arising from the widely most notable and constant menace "poverty" in Nigeria need urgent correctible measures and if there is going to be any tangible transformation at the grassroots, the problem of poverty must be taken care of first, before such transformation could take place.

BIBIOGRAPHY

Aluko, S. (1995): "Poverty: It's Remedies in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria," The Nigerian Economic Society, Ibadan

Brinkerhoff, M. , Smith, C. , Teegen, H. (2002): UNDP Choices the Human Development Magazine. World Development Report 1998/1999

Clark, D. (2005): "Towards a Unified Framework for Understanding the Depth, Breadth

And Duration of Poverty," Working Paper 20, Global Poverty Research Group

Duru, A. (2008): "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty," Daily Independent, Lagos: April

Federal Office of Statistics (1997): Poverty Profile for Nigeria

Federal Office of Statistics (2005): Poverty Profile for Nigeria

Federal Office of Statistics (1999): The Political Economy of Poverty, Equity and Growth, Oxford: Oxford University, Press

Obadan, M. (1997): "Indexical Framework for Poverty Reduction," in a FEAP Publication of Role, Achievements and Challenges. Prepared by Fin Serve (1999)

Olewe, B. (2001): Development Administration, Aba Grace Ventures

Shaffer, P. (2001): New Thinking on Poverty Implementations for Globalization and Poverty Reduction Strategies. www.un.org.

The Guardian Online; "Nigeria and the IMF," April 2, 2002.

The Guardian Online; "Nigeria and the WTO," April 12, 2000.
www.guardiannewsngr.com

The Vanguard Online "Formula for Taming Domestic Conflicts and Insecurity," July 5, 2002. www.vanguardng.com

UNDP Human Development Report, (2003): UNDP Choices the Human Development Magazine. World Development Report 1998/1999

Watt, P. (2000): Social Investment and Economic Growth: Strategy to Eradicate Poverty, Oxford: Oxfam: GB.

Khalid, S. (2008): "Poverty Eradications and The Challenges of Development in Nigeria." In Readings in Public Administration Usman Danfodioyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria. (2008).

World Bank (2002): World Development Report, 2000/2001, Washington D.C

World Bank Report (2002): www.stwr.org/globalization