

Sustainability Syndrome of Public Policy on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

¹Anthony Onwuegbuchulam Ngonadi and ²Anastecia O. Ezenwajiaku

¹Department of Political Science, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, Nigeria

²Division of General Studies, NTA Television College, Jos, (Affiliated to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria), Plateau State, Nigeria

Email: Mantony47@yahoo.com, ezehann@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the issues and challenges that bedevil the sustainability of public policies on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Poverty has been a menace threatening the corporate existence and sustainable development of Nigeria and most third world countries. Several governments in Nigeria have embarked on different policies geared towards the eradication of this challenge but most of these policies are botched midstream by successive governments. The result is that despite the massive resources allotted over the years to poverty alleviation, the UN report of 5th Sept 2016 ranks Nigeria as the 3rd poorest country in the world as over 80 million (64%) of her population are living below poverty line. The increasing retrogression in the country's socio-economic development is staggering judging from her enormous human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and solid mineral resources. This paper therefore assesses the various government policies targeted at poverty alleviation in Nigeria and X-rays their weaknesses. It concludes that rural poverty is complex and endemic, requiring that a pragmatic and holistic approach be embraced for sustainable public policy programmes that will alleviate the suffering of the masses and meet their yearnings and aspirations. The paper recommends inter alia that a National Poverty Alleviation Commission (NPAC) be established to execute poverty alleviation-related programmes in the country to forestall the outright abandonment of helpful programmes by successive governments and enable their sustainability. There is also the need for strong political commitment to the poverty reduction goal, as well as a de-politicisation of poverty alleviation programmes and projects.

Keywords: Syndrome, Poverty, Issues, challenges, Alleviation and Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a worldwide anathema but the level of the problem in developing countries has reached an alarming proportion. Globally, about 1.2 billion people are living in extreme poverty of less than one dollar per day (Ajulor, 2013)[1]. Owing to the high prevalence of poverty, curbing this menace has been of grave concern to many countries in the past few decades especially developing nations.

Although there have been a lot of improvements in the developed world, such cannot be said of developing ones especially in the Sub-Sahara Africa where poverty is prevalent due to many factors namely: poor governance and political instability, poor economic management, mismanagement of resources, poor programme implementation, corruption and lack of purposive leadership[2].

Nigeria is a typical example of this situation. As a result of this lacuna, the government of Nigeria has embarked on different actions to eradicate or curb to the barest minimum this persistent challenge. Official statistics shows that in 1980 the national (average) poverty incidence was 28.1 percent of the population. The distribution of the incidence across the states of the federation showed a maximum of 49.5 per cent recorded for Plateau (and Nassarawa which was excised from Plateau). This meant that every state had a poverty incidence below 50 per cent. By 1985, the national (average) poverty incidence had risen to 46.3 per cent, with the maximum of 68.9 per cent recorded in Bauchi (and Gombe which was carved out of Bauchi). The stability of a fledgling democracy depends to a very large extent on the ability of the governing elite to eradicate poverty. Democracy cannot thrive in an impoverished country where people live below \$1 per day, and where stresses of diseases, famine, and climatic shock are pervasive[4].

The stated course of action embarked upon by the government is tough to compromise because the poverty level is not commensurate with the country's immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously blessed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources. Rather than recording remarkable progress in socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries in the world (Ekpe, 2011)[5]. Poverty is more predominantly found among rural dwellers in Nigeria because the people are laidback and underdeveloped judging by minimum human standard of living. In the rural habitat, the roads are bad; women and children walk barefooted, trekking long distance to get water and firewood; pupils study

under dilapidated classrooms with no roof or windows. There are unequipped health centres, lack of facilities and opportunities, natural disasters and economic upheaval as well as crime and violence. This is due to neglect and inconsistency in the poverty reduction policies and programmes of successive governments since 1960 in Nigeria[3].

The need to stifle this perennial challenge called poverty in Nigeria resulted in the establishment of different Public policies that can help arrest this ever growing challenge in the country. In a bid to overcome poverty in Nigeria, government has initiated different policies and structural programmes between 1977 till date. These programmes include: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Better Life Programme (BLP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), People' Bank of Nigeria (PBN); Community Bank (CB), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP), and National Poverty Eradication. The most recent policy created by the government to eradicate poverty is the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in the year 2001. In spite of the enormous resources devoted to NAPEP, human sabotage, corruption, and poor implementation which undermined past efforts still make poverty eradication in Nigeria a dream that is yet to be realized.

Besides NAPEP, the Nigerian government has also made some other policies on agriculture and crime which include National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) which was an agricultural extension programme initiated in 1972 by the Federal Department of Agriculture during General Yakubu Gowon's regime. The programme focused on bringing about a significant increase in the production of maize, cassava, rice, and wheat in the northern states through subsistent production within a short period. Another policy on agriculture and national development is the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). NEEDS was initiated by Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. The key

elements of this development strategy included poverty eradication, employment generation, wealth creation, and value reorientation. NEEDS provided help to agriculture, industry, small and medium scale enterprises and oil and gas. It set up a series of performance targets that government wanted to achieve by 2007.

Apart from the poverty and agriculture policies, crime is a universal menace but only differs in degree among the nations of the world. The Nigerian government till today still struggles with the prospect of formulating some policies that can successfully confront the menace called crime. Crime problem is multidimensional and is capable of destabilizing the nation's corporate existence as well as efforts towards sustainable development. The Nigeria corporate existence can be undermined by a number of factors among which is an escalating and uncontrolled crime problem (Tanimu, 2006)[6]. Crime is a huge threat to public safety. It has been observed in recent times that the government is not really keen in formulating crime policies in developing countries owing to the belief that poverty and hunger are the immediate causes of crimes. Crime causes great personal suffering, vast material damage, and places enormous burden on the urban social network. Globally, every five years, 60% of city inhabitants have been victims of one type of crime or another while over half of these crimes have involved personal crime (arson, fraudulence, cheating, 419 syndromes, forgery, etc).

It has been noted that Nigerian cities are conducive areas for criminal activities because they provide the anonymity needed for personal crime as well as environment for a specialized and organized underworld activities. Theft, fraudulence, arson, forgery, and other criminal activities become a means of survival. However, governments of developing countries believe that if appropriate policies that will tackle poverty and hunger are made, people will desist from crime and that crime rate in these countries will reduce drastically. The objective of this study therefore is to assess the various government policies

targeted towards poverty alleviation in Nigeria and come up with a policy recommendation for effective implementation.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Public is anything that has to do with the entire masses of any given geographical area while policy is the stated course of action embarked upon by the government. Therefore, Public policy is the principled guide to action taken by the administrative executive branches of the state with regard to a class of issues in a manner consistent with law and institutional customs for or debate against the interest of the masses/citizens. The foundation of public policy is composed of national constitutional laws and regulations. It can also be seen as the means by which a government maintains order or addresses the needs of its citizens, through actions defined by its constitution. Public policy is generally not a tangible thing but rather is a term used to describe a collection of laws, mandates, or regulations established through a political process.

Central to the quest for policies and programmes that can reduce poverty is the issue of the conceptualization. Conceptually, three dominant views are identified as to the meaning of poverty. The first view sees poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. Here, poverty is a material deprivation and this can be assessed in monetary terms. While this conceptualization of poverty makes the quantitative analysis of poverty straightforward and permits comparisons over time and between countries, it fails to recognize non-material forms of deprivation such as illiteracy and social discrimination among others [7].

The second perspective defines poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possession of skills to participate in economic and social life, permission to take part in community activities, etc. This conceptualization forms the basis for the belief that 'poverty is multi- dimensional'. Although, the capabilities' framework offers many advantages over the income/consumption conceptualization, yet it is

argued that it requires a greater variety of data and that no consensus exists on how capability deprivation at the household level is to be computed[8].

The third conceptualization of poverty came into limelight in the 1990s and has a fundamentally different approach to the understanding of poverty: subjective poverty assessments. The core of this view of poverty is that poverty must be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in. According to Aliyu (2002)[7], the view came out of the work on participatory appraisal of rural projects and has direct relationship with a publication known as 'Voices of the Poor series'. This subjective view of poverty posits that poverty has both physical and psychological dimensions. Poor people themselves strongly emphasize violence and crime, discrimination, insecurity and political repression, biased or brutal policing, victimization by rule, and neglectful or corrupt public agencies [9].

Meier's (1983)[10] definition of the concept conceived poverty from two different perspectives: 'Moneylessness'- means both as an insufficiency of cash and chronic inadequacy of resources of all types to satisfy basic human needs such as nutrition, rest, warmth and body care, and 'Powerlessness'- meaning those who lack the opportunities and choices open to them and whose lives seem to be governed by forces and persons outside their control (i.e. people in positions of authority, or by perceived 'evil forces or 'hard luck').

Poverty has no universally accepted definition but, put simply, it refers to the inability of an individual to attain the minimum standard of living. It can also be defined as a social condition characterized by inadequate access to basic human needs (food and non-food) to the sustenance of socially acceptable minimum standard of living in a given society. Some of these basic determinants of well-being include adequate food, shelter, potable water, health care, education and employment opportunities[2].

Policy implementation is the action side of the government. It provides the operational area of function in carrying out public policy declared by competent authority. Mbieli (2006)[11] explains that, in the execution of public policy, the combination of human, material, machine and money are highly necessary. He argues further that the agencies involved in the implementation exercise are classified into two broad categories namely: the government and the non-governmental agencies. These agencies are responsible for providing the required goods and services and developing the people. According to Maduabum (2008)[12], implementation is critical to the success of any policy since it constitutes the epicentre of the policy process. It involves the identification of policy plans, programmes, projects and activities; a clear definition of the distinct roles of implementation organizations or agencies; details of strategies and necessary linkages and coordinating mechanisms; as well as resources (human, financial, material, technology, information acquisition and utilization). Efficient and effective policy implementation would require inputs of sound managerial and administrative capabilities in terms of proper activity scheduling, resource mobilization and rationalization, network analysis, budgeting, supervision, problem-solving, decision-making and cost/benefit analysis.

Asobie (2007)[13] in Ajulor (2013)[1] adds that performance standards must be set along with policy targets, guidelines, plans, and time frame in order to avoid implementation gap. He describes implementation gap as the difference between well-stated and articulated policy objectives or expected outcomes and the actual outcome which is a consequence of inefficient or poor policy implementation. However, the key activity in policy formulation and implementation process is goal setting. Sambo (2008)[14] explains that policy-makers in developing countries engage in the elaborate exercise of goal setting by creating structures for planning. Policy-makers make a fetish of planning as basis for development but often create lag between the expectations and realization of policy makers in developing countries. Egonmwan (1991)[15] notes that the

problem of implementation gap arises when policy emanates from government rather than from the target groups. By this, it means that planning is top-down, and by implication, the target beneficiaries are not allowed to contribute to the formulation of the policies that affect their lives.

OVERVIEW OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION ANTECEDENTS IN NIGERIA: PRE - DEMOCRATIZATION EXPERIENCE

In Nigeria, the earliest poverty alleviation programme was in 1972 during the General Yakubu Gowon's Administration named National Accelerated Food Production Programme - NAFPP and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank - NACB. These programmes were entirely devoted to funding agriculture. Successive governments have tried to address some of these issues (poverty related) through the enunciation of poverty related programmes. Whether these programmes have succeeded in either alleviating poverty or not is a moot point. Suffice it to say that after these first two, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was introduced in 1979 by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. Similarly, OFN expended more money and efforts in getting ill-prepared University graduates to go to the rural areas to teach the peasant farmers how to farm. The irony of the programme is that theoretical, graduate farmers were teaching seasoned farmers, who make their living on farming, how to farm. Interestingly, the scheme's only success was in creating awareness of food shortages and the need to tackle the problem.

The programme had the specific focus of increasing food production on the premise that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and ultimately lead to national growth and development. OFN lasted until Shehu Shagari's government took over in 1979. It must be stated though that lack of continuity and shift in approach trailed poverty alleviation programmes since the ousting of Shagari from power in 1983. Each subsequent military administration came with a different idea or no idea at all. Poverty reduction programmes

became more 'regime specific' because there was hardly any continuity with those initiated by previous governments.

The military regime of Gen. Muhammad Buhari/Brig. Tunde Idiagbon (1983-1985) did not have a specific poverty alleviation programme as it was clearly focused on fighting indiscipline and corruption. This initiative, popularly known as **WAI (War against Indiscipline)**, sought to inculcate a military-style regimen of discipline such as queuing for public services, observing road signs, memorizing the national anthem and generally sprucing up the national psyche on the distinctions of right and wrong, handling of public property, etc. Some analysts argue that the fight against indiscipline and corruption was equal to a poverty alleviation programme in the sense that the two were partly the reason why many Nigerians are poor. The regime was also noted for "go back to the land" programme, which was a poverty alleviation strategy.

Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) is known to be one Head of State that introduced a welter of poverty alleviation programmes. These include the **Peoples Bank**, which sought to provide loans to prospective entrepreneurs on soft terms and without stringent requirements of collaterals. It also regulated to an extent the activities of community banks that also sprouted as adjuncts of the Peoples Bank and as sources of cheap funds for communities and their members.

Another of his numerous programmes was the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) which sought to open up rural areas via construction of feeder roads and provision of basic amenities that would turn them into production centres for the national economy. On the other hand, DFRRI assumed that if the hinterland was linked by road, farmers would transport their products to the markets easily and at cheaper rates, thereby reducing the cost of food production as a way out of poverty. Many Nigerians are however agreed that this, like other programmes by the regime, was good but its impacts on the populace and poverty were minimal because of shortcomings in its

implementation. Another programme that tried to head-off the scourge of poverty by targeting the agricultural sector was the Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA).

The Authority was intended to reduce the prevalence of subsistence agriculture in the country and in its place infuse large scale commercial farming by assisting farmers with inputs and developing land for them to the point of planting, at subsidized rates. While all these programmes collapsed at one point or the other, nonetheless, at least one of these programmes enunciated by the Babangida regime -the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) - has had some years of staying power up till date. By its mandate, NDE was to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour-intensive potential. From its programmes and its staying power, this was a scheme that could be adjudged as the most successful of Babangida's poverty alleviation policies. Babangida saw unemployment as one of the key issues challenging the agenda of government since it posed a potential danger to the sociopolitical and economic system of the nation. Until the 1980s, unemployment was not a serious problem in Nigeria. Global economic recession however took its toll on the country, because as that decade progressed, inherent weaknesses were noticed in the nation's economy. The need for the creation of NDE is also traced to the drastic reduction in oil prices and the resultant economic policies at the time. The situation led to low capacity utilization in the nation's industries and the outright closure of some. Subsequent lay-offs due to closure and rationalization informed on the need to introduce a system that would accommodate such people so that the already bloated job market will not suffer more congestion. It is on record that hundreds of thousands of youths have benefited from the NDE scheme through its four-pronged approach that includes Vocational Acquisition Training (673,000), Entrepreneurial (Business) training (373,366), Training for Rural Employment and Training for Labour-Based works programme.

In 2000 alone, NDE reported that 21,708 youths received training in vocational skills in 36 states of the federation and Abuja, while 5,075 graduated in different trades. The scheme, which has a special arrangement for women, said that several of them had been trained on how to process, preserve and package food. However, the drawback on NDE's schemes was seen in that there was no follow-up programme for beneficiaries. Many of them who did not utilize the skills acquired and others did not properly invest the loans they received, thus, found themselves in a worse state. While the directorate asserts that it disbursed N526,901,313.11 since inception, for its various programmes, only 24.4% of this total or N129,048,757.63 was recovered from beneficiaries. Similarly, the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), and the Strategic Grains Reserves Programme (SGRP) have equally influenced the health sector too. The Primary Health Care Scheme and the Guinea worm Eradication Programme have a far-reaching effect on alleviating the suffering of the poor masses, who could probably not afford paid health care services.

The regime of Late Gen. Sani Abacha (1993 - 1998) was known as the midwife of the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in Nigeria's quest for a way out of debilitating poverty, as this was the period that marked Nigeria's relapse into the global bracket of 25 poorest nations. Significantly, FEAP existed for about two years (1998 - 2000) during which it received funding to the tune of N7 billion out of which about N3.3 billion was disbursed as loans to about 21,000 cooperative societies nationwide that were production oriented. Such projects targeted for assistance included poultry production, garri making, soap making and animal husbandry.

As a rider to all poverty alleviation programmes enunciated over the years in the country, it must be recalled that spouses of Heads of State also joined in the fray with novel programmes that not only elevated the status of these First ladies but also focused on issues of poverty, using State funds. Most noticeable

were the Better Life for Rural Women heralded by the late Mrs. Mariam Babangida and the late Mrs. Mariam Sani Abacha's Family Support Programme (FSP) (the two Mariams of our time). These programmes also tried to introduce a gender element into anti-poverty programmes, acting on the assumption that women needed special treatment in the light of their immense contributions to the national economy, both as small-scale entrepreneurs and home keepers. Nonetheless, most of these poverty alleviation programmes suffered the same fate as various government assessments showed.

POST- DEMOCRATIZATION ERA

Shehu Shagari who ruled from 1979-1983 shared almost the same poverty reduction idea with his predecessor (Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo). He came up with his own pet project named the Green Revolution, which also emphasized food production. The objectives of the green revolution programme were: reduction in food importation, and virile boosting of crops and fibre production in the country. Besides, the overall objective was mechanized farming. Meanwhile, various manipulations for selfish gain, particularly with respect to land acquisition, characterized this programme, most especially by top civil service employees. At the end of the programme, by 1983, a colossal amount of money was considered wasted.

This is the only government embarking on eradication; a shift from the traditional concept of alleviation. Such schemes already identified include: **Youth** Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructures Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) and Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). On the whole, these schemes were designed to spearhead government's ambitious programme of eradicating absolute poverty - a condition where a person or group of persons are unable to satisfy their most basic requirements for survival in terms of food, clothing, shelter, health, transport, education and recreation - amongst Nigerians.

With a take-off grant of N6 billion approved for it in 2001, NAPEP has established structures at all levels nationwide. Under its Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), it trained 100,000 unemployed youths just as 5,000 others who received training as tailors and fashion designers, were resettled. A total of 50,000 unemployed graduates have also benefited from NAPEP's Mandatory Attachment Programme, which is also an aspect of CAP (NAPEP claimed). The programme has also established a data-bank of all unemployed youths in all the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). About 1.1 million youths have so far been registered. Such data could be used in targeting groups in any future poverty alleviation effort. The difference between NAPEP and past poverty reduction agencies is that it is not a sector project implementation agency but a coordination facility that ensures that the core poverty eradication Ministries were effective. It would only intervene when necessary, under its secondary mandate which gives it the right to provide complementary assistance to the implementing ministries and parastatals nationwide.

Duplication of functions by a myriad of agencies involved in anti-poverty schemes and programmes in the past had been blamed for their ineffectiveness and outright failure. Having subscribed to the UN-inspired Millennium goals of halving global poverty by 2015, Nigeria has embraced the process of outlining its own Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP) which will eventually bring its anti-poverty efforts into the mainstream of the new global thinking that fighting poverty needed to be driven by some acceptable principles.

A REVIEW OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

The damaging consequence of the effect of poverty on the economic and political development aspirations of most nations often gives their leaders a relentless concern and effort towards mitigating the social malaise. Prior to the country's journey to the current democratic dispensation in May 1999, various regimes both military and civil rules have put in place different programmes in an attempt to

fight against poverty. Among such programmes according to Ijaiya and Mobolaji (2004) include the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), the Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution (GR) the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), the Directorate of Foods, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Family Support Programme(FSP) and the Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP). The democratic era under Obasonjo's regime witnessed the introduction of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) designed to provide employment to 200,000 unemployed youths all over the country. It was also aimed at inculcating and improving better attitudes toward a maintenance culture in urban and rural roads and public buildings. By 2001 PAP was phased out as a result of structural inefficiency and fused into the newly created National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) consists of four schemes namely:

- Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS)
- Special Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS)
- Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)

For the first time in the history of Nigeria's democratic rule, rural areas were accorded special consideration through the creation of Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme in an effort to ameliorate the deteriorating and devastating conditions of life in Nigerian rural areas. The RIDS was designed to deal with rural energy and power supply, portable water, irrigation scheme to boost rural agricultural production, rural transportation and communication. The main programmes for implementation were: Rural Electrification, Rural Water Development and Supply, Rural Transportation, Development and Rural Communication Development.

The question to ask is whether this policy designed under the National Poverty Eradication Programme to accord attention to rural areas was successful. A critical assessment of the performance of NAPEP in the rural areas leaves much to be desired. Available evidence shows that rural population still remained polarized and impoverished under the civil democratic rule in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. According to British Broadcasting Corporation World News programme on 10 years of democracy in Nigeria, (01 May, 2009), the level of poverty which stood at 34 million population in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule has risen to an alarming and astonishing rate of 74 million population within ten years of democratic rule. The ruling People's Democratic Party used the programme for Political patronage.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme funds were used to buy PDP officials at all levels to dispense favour to party loyalists. PDP leaders up to the state and local executives are known to have forwarded the list of party faithful, cronies and family relations for inclusion in the Poverty Alleviation Programme. In addition to the above, the management of Poverty Eradication Programme was worsened by the adoption of a top-bottom approach in the implementation of the policy. The target groups, who are the poor in the society who are predominantly in the countryside, were hardly reached due to the fact that the programme existed at the state and local government headquarters, but failed to have linkage with the traditional and community leaders for effective penetration of the grassroots (Eze, 2003).

Obadan (2001)[16] argued that all efforts at poverty alleviation in Nigeria were essentially ad-hoc until the inauguration of a poverty alleviation programme development by the government in 1994. Poverty alleviation programmes and strategies were not integrated into the nation's overall development objectives. A closer look at the various National Development plans from 1962-1985, and

National Rolling Plans from 1990 indicates that they provided much of the framework for the pursuit of development objectives since the attainment of political Independence in 1960 (Obadan, 2001)[16]. However within the framework of the National Development a positive relationship is presumed to exist between growth in the GDP and increased welfare for the general citizenry. In the opinion of Obadan (2001)[16] the approach to poverty alleviation as expressed in the fundamental objectives of the development plans did not involve policies and programmes which directly targeted the poor. As a result of this development, the poor were worse off even though the economy has continued to witness increase in growth rate. Obadan (2001)[16] notes in particular that the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in 1986 aggravated the incidence of poverty among many vulnerable groups in the society. As a result of this, the poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC) was formed in 1994. The primary objective of PAPDC was to advise the government on the design, co-ordination and implementation of poverty alleviation programme. This was followed with the establishment of community Action Programme for poverty Alleviation CAPP in 1996. CAPP attempts to ensure that the poor are not only carried along in the design and implementation of poverty projects that affects them but are also involved in the formulation and management of the poverty projects.

Echoing a similar view, Ijaiya and Mobolaji (2004)[17] were of the view that the management of poverty eradication programme was worsened by the adoption of a top down approach in the implementation of the policy. Due to the past failures of poverty eradication programme in Nigeria the National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy NEEDS was conceived at the National Level, SEEDS at the state level and LEEDS at the local Government levels. This is to ensure a holistic approach to addressing a wide range of socio-economic and political issues in the country most especially in the rural areas by reforming

government institutions, developing the private sectors, implementation of social charters and value orientation.

The late Yar'Adua administration came up with an economic reform programme christened "The Seven Point Agenda". The areas of priority of the agenda are: security of life and property; wealth creation; development of human capital, in particular education; land reform transportation; power and energy and food security. Laudable as this programme appears, it fails to address the problem of poverty in the country. The fragile health of the president added to the failure of the late Yar'Adua administration. The administration retained some of the old programmes of its predecessor such as NDE, NAPEP, NEEDS among others without any clear vision of a different and much better future for Nigerians.

Concerned about the rising spate of poverty in the country, former President Goodluck Jonathan came up with the Transformation Agenda. The Transformation Agenda is a road map between 2011 and 2015 which is the duration of the present administration and it is necessitated by the need to correct the flaws in the country's drive for development characterized by long term perspective and lack of continuity, consistency and commitment (3cs) to agreed policies. The absence of the 3cs, it is argued has resulted in the overall welfare of Nigerian citizens (Usigbe, 2011)[18]. It is further argued that the disregard for these 3cs have resulted in rising unemployment, inequality and poverty. The Transformation Agenda is therefore seen as a holistic strategy that gives cognizance to these 3cs. The transformation agenda draws its inspiration from the vision 2020 and the first National implementation plan (NIP). The agenda is based on a set of priority policy and programme which, when implemented, would transform the Nigerian economy to meet the reform needs of the people. A growth rate of GDP of 11.7 percent is envisaged during the time frame of the programme expected to translate to N73.2 trillion at the end of year 2015. A total

investment sum of N40.75 trillion with public sector was expected to contribute 60 percent, while the remaining 40% was expected from the private sector.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, we have been able to provide a brief background to the poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. The programmes, target audience and the nature of intervention have been summarised. Without doubt, we can see that attempts were made by each programme to identify its target group. These attempts notwithstanding, there is overlap of target and intervention strategies. In view of this, harmonization of programmes is inevitable[19].

Going by the Nigerian experience, we suggest that the federal government should establish an agency called - Poverty Alleviation Commission for Nigerians (PACFN). The objective of such commission will be to execute poverty alleviation related programmes in the country. This would guarantee that successive government do not discard their predecessor's programme, but rather input their own suggestion (still under the same umbrella) and all programmes would run concurrently to ensure that all target audiences are reached.

In terms of structure, the commission should house all the poverty alleviation programmes. Units/sections should be created to monitor each of the programmes according to their peculiarity. By so doing, programmes will be able to stand on the premise of the housing agency and as such, might not necessarily fizzle out with the government of the day. Even when a programme is having conflicting objectives, it can easily be harmonized, since they are all premised on the same foundation.

For a concise administrative purpose, the commission should be self accounting and responsible to the presidency. Such commission/agency should be given provisions in the budget and should align with international agencies of relevant purposes. This arrangement has some advantages to poverty alleviation

policies of government. In the first instance it will secure the existence of an agency and secondly ensure continuity of future programmes. Similarly, the activities of the programmes can be adequately monitored, assessed and evaluated. Also, it will give room for accountability in terms of financing and performance. These manners of agencies management will allow for optimum agency management and ensure transparency in the operations and implementation of the desired objective of each programme[20].

Furthermore, there is a need for institutional strategy for checking the influence of elite and bureaucratic officials in the implementation of laudable government programmes on poverty alleviation. This is necessary because most times the benefits and objectives of these programmes are either hijacked or truncated by these social forces.

Government should promote appropriate technological innovations and partnership among the people to enhance sustainability through the people's ownership of productive resources.

There is also the need for strong political commitment to the poverty reduction goal, as well as a de-politicisation of poverty alleviation programmes and projects. It is crucial for poverty reduction programmes and measures to be implemented within the framework of rapid broad-based economic growth with equity, controlled population growth, sound economic management and good governance, among others.

Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skills that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. The education system should inculcate the skills profile required by the labour market to enhance employability of young people after graduation. Skills acquisition and business ideas should be integrated in school curriculum to encourage young people to start their own business. Policy actions in this regard

would include the provision of adequate financing for vocational/technical training for poverty reduction agencies.

Finally, the government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and intellectuals should embark on research to generate data or create information system on the magnitude of rural poverty and target remedial measures.

CONCLUSION

This work posits that rural poverty is complex and endemic and therefore a pragmatic and holistic approach is required for sustainable public policy programmes that will alleviate the suffering of the masses as well as meet their yearnings and aspirations. Whatever programme is initiated to transform rural life must be vigorously, honestly and patriotically pursued to ensure the success of such programme.

Owing to the socio-cultural diversity inherent in Nigeria, public policies that are unique and indigenous to the respective states should be vigorously pursued, while the youths themselves should be involved in drafting, implementation, and monitoring of the poverty reduction policies that concern them, instead of the top-bottom approach that is prevalent at the moment. Government should encourage private sector's participation in the delivery of Technical Vocational Education and Training.

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