

ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIES OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

Emmanuel N. Iheanacho
Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract

Poverty has been pervasive and widespread among developing countries. It has been a serious challenge to various levels of government in Nigeria. Despite measures taken by successive governments in Nigeria to arrest the menace of poverty, the incidence of poverty is still ravaging the country. The objective of the paper was to identify factors that undermine their performance. The paper relies on secondary data as its source of information. The study reveals that neglect of agriculture, basic infrastructure, education and excessive corruption, among others are contributory factors to the poor functioning of these programmes in Nigeria. The paper recommends the provision of infrastructural facilities, development of human resources, adequate and sustained funding for poverty alleviation programmes and involving the beneficiaries in the preparation and execution of poverty alleviation programmes would help to reduce the incidence of poverty in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty, Alleviation, successive, incidence, strategies

Introduction

Poverty is a global phenomenon, but its prevalence in developing countries has reached a high proportion. It is estimated that 1.2 billion people live in abject poverty, less than one dollar per day. The Nigerian situation has deteriorated since 1990's. According to Nnamani (2003:60) "poverty in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and had been rising steadily". It is worrisome that although the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas and large untapped mineral resources, there is very low rate of improvement in socio-economic development. Despite numerous efforts by the successive governments from Independence to date, the rate of poverty has been increasing. According to Ekpe (2011), Nigeria has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. The 2010 poverty index has indicated that 60.9% Nigerians now live in absolute poverty (Baba Ahmed, 2012). The poverty level by zones in Nigeria as at 2008 shows that South-South has 35.1%, South East 26.7%, South West 43.0%, North Central 67.0%, North East 72.2%, North West 71.2% as well (Soludo 2008).

Poverty is pervasive among the rural dwellers because the people are backward and underdeveloped and cannot afford minimum standard of living. In the rural areas, the roads are bad, women and children working barefooted and trekking a long distances to get water and firewood, pupil studying under trees, dilapidated and ill equipped health centres, poor education, lack of facilities and opportunities, natural disasters and economic upheavals as well as crime and violence (Omoiniyi, 2013:238). This is attributed to the neglect and inconsistencies in various poverty alleviation programmes since independence. In order to address the menace of poverty in Nigeria, successive governments have introduced various policies to arrest its prevalence in the country. It is disturbing that despite these measures, the incidence of poverty is still very high.

Therefore, the basic thrust of this paper is to examine various poverty alleviation programmes adopted by Nigerian government and identify the reasons for their poor performance. The paper also suggests suitable strategies to address persistence increase in poverty in Nigeria. The study is based on qualitative analysis which relies on secondary data as its source of information. These include: books, newspapers, journals among others.

Conceptual Clarification

Poverty

There is no universally accepted definition of poverty. According to Tersoo (2013:28-29) poverty is a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. He is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lack of gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation and consequently has limited chance of advancing his or her capabilities:

In the opinion of Sen cited in Onah (2010:70), poverty is “the lack of certain capabilities such as being able to participate with dignity in society”. Poverty is defined as state of deprivation, in terms of both economic and social indicators, health care, access to food, social status, self-esteem and self-actualization (Okoh 1997). Okoh also observes that poverty is said to exist when income or disposable resources are inadequate to support a minimum standard of living. Chambers (1993) defined poverty “as the lack of physical necessities, assets and income. It includes but is more than income”. The World Bank (1990) sees poverty as 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, having fear for the future, loosing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. Aluko (1995) refers to poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs. There is an inadequate level of consumption such as rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter. According to United Nations (1995) the various manifestations of poverty include: lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood, hunger and malnutrition and other basic services, homelessness and unsafe degraded environment among others. Ogunleye (2006) observes that “indicators of poverty include: illiteracy, health status, access to housing, water satisfaction etc. Poverty therefore is “the inability to attend to or meet up with the basic necessities of life as a result of lack of wherewithal’s to do so”.

Poverty Alleviation

All formal measures channeled towards reducing the prevalence and role of poverty in the country. Poverty alleviation programmes aim at increasing people’s income and enhancing the “the power of low-power group so that it nearly equates that of the high-power group”.

Theoretical Framework

In analyzing poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria, we have adopted two theories viz., system theory and elite theory.

The concept of system theory can be traced back to the writings of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. He invented this concept for the study of biology. David Easton in 1953 adopted the same theory to explain what happens in a political system but later elaborated his conception in 1965 in his two works: *A Framework Work for Political Analysis and A System Analysis of Political Life*. Proper understanding of system theory as developed by David Easton may demand the following steps:

1. Changes in the social or physical environment surrounding a political system produce “demands” and supports for action or status quo directed as “inputs” towards the political system through political behaviour.
2. These demands and supporting groups stimulate competition in the political system, leading to decisions or “outputs” directed at some aspect of the surrounding social or physical environment.
3. After a decision or output is made (e.g., specific policy), it interacts with its environment and if it produces change in the environment, there is “outcomes”.
4. When a new policy interacts with its environment, “outcomes” may generate new demands or supports and groups in support or against the policy (feedback”) or a new policy on some related matter.
5. Feedback leads back to step 1, forming a never-ending cycle.

Accordingly, if the system functions as described, then we have a “stable political system”. If the system breaks down, then we have a “dysfunctional political system”. (System Theory in Political Science, 2016).

In applying this theory, the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, necessitate the demands and supports on the political system to arrest its menace. In order to address this problem, the political system formulate policies “outputs” (poverty alleviation programmes). And, the inability of the political system (through its government) to address this demands leads to instability in the whole system. Therefore, the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria did not achieve the expected objectives because there is persistent increase in poverty. This facilitates new demands and supports on the political system to tackle the problem of poverty in Nigeria.

This study also adopts elite theory to assess the strategies of poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The important advocates of this theory: Vildredo Pareto, Geatna Mosca, Robert Michels, James Burnaham, Raymond Aron among others. The elite theory of poverty stipulates that “the structure of political power in a societies determines the extent and distribution of poverty among the population”. Therefore, the ruling elite constituted by the few, establishes and legitimizes an exploitative property system, through which it determines the allocation of opportunities, income and wealth relying on the use of elite power, including the use of oppressive state agents such as police and armed forces (Alfa, et al, 2014:5). Poverty is a “socio-economic phenomenon” in which the values which are available to the entire society are utilized to satisfy the interest of the few people, while the majority of the masses do not have that basic needs. Therefore, the prevalence of poverty among the people is due to certain “political, economic and social structures” which have been imposed on them to be poor not necessarily that they are lazy or choose to be poor.

The analysis of various strategies of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria has revealed that they have not achieved the desired objectives. The policy makers (ruling elites) do not involve the representatives of the poor communities or the beneficiaries in the preparation, design and implementation of programmes that affect them. In most cases, the policy makers undertake the programmes and policies that are more relevant to their “felt needs and “aspirations”, ignoring the interest of the target group i.e. the poor people. This has resulted in the prevalence poverty in Nigeria. Hence, the strategies of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria are yet to achieve the expected results.

Dimension of Poverty in Nigeria

Although Nigeria is blessed with mineral resources, it is worrisome that despite her numerous mineral resources, Nigeria is the worst (in terms of poverty) in the sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP Report (2001:65) shows that the inescapable picture of Nigeria as one of the poorest countries in the world is not in doubt.... She is the worst off today than the 1980's. World Bank report (1996) holds that greater percentages of Nigerians are living below the universal poverty line of US\$1 per day. Available statistics have shown that poverty has been a serious challenge to Nigerian nation since independence. Nigeria instead of advancing, has recently degenerated into one of the poorest countries of the world. It is beyond doubt that people are getting poorer on daily basis. In 1960, the poverty level in the country was about 15% and by 1980 it reached to 28.1%, in 1985 the poverty was about 43.3% (Ugoh and Ukpere 2009). In 1999 and 2000 UN Development Report, Nigeria had degenerated further as 87% percent of the population were below poverty line and rated 154 on the world's marginal poverty index out of 172 countries (Ekpu, 2004). According to Amugo (2003:1) "the official statistics released by the Federal Office of Statistics shows that the National Poverty Rate is projected at 70% amounting to 80 million people as poor in Nigeria. This is very bad for the country as two-thirds of the population is poor and is detrimental to Nigerian socio-economic and political development. The alarming rate of environmental degradation and its effect on employment and food production is also traceable to poverty in Nigeria (Kirwan, cited in Onah, 2010:68). The high unemployment rate, unaffordable basic education, inequality, insecurity, depreciation of fundamental human rights, freedom, liberties and basic needs of human survival and crisis arising from constant agitation for the resource control are evidence of poverty in Nigeria (UND 1995:3).

Poverty Alleviation Measures in Nigeria

In order to address the poverty crisis in Nigeria, different interventionist programmes have been adopted by successive governments. The measures already taken to combat the menace of poverty and promote socio-economic development of the country started since attainment of independence. The Nigerian government, as far back as 1971, had identified poverty as the bane of rural development in the country. In order to tackle this obstacle to rural development, government in line with the recommendation of the World Bank and based on agricultural survey of Nigeria, embarked on the implementation of three pilot integrated **Agricultural and Rural Development Projects** in Funtua, Gusau and Combe (Forac & Benedict, 2011:300). The Agricultural and Rural Development Projects (ADPs) later spread to all the states in Nigeria. The primary objective of these projects was to facilitate increased food production and increase the income of the rural people.

In addition to ADPs, General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1979 introduced **Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)** The basic thrust of the programme was to increase food production on the belief that availability of cheap food "will mean higher nutrition level and invariably lead to national growth and development" OFN lasted until Shagari took over the government in 1979. Shagari like his predecessor shared almost the same poverty alleviation programme. He also introduced his own pet project named the **Green Revolution** which also focused on food production. It must be observed that lack of continuity and shift in approach bedeviled poverty alleviation programmes since Shagari was forced out of power in 1983.

The over dependence on oil by Nigeria for meeting huge international commitments and exceeding domestic economic programmes made the economy to be "caught in the throes of a depression". To revitalize the economy, **Structural Adjustment Programme was introduced** in 1986. The most important of the various policies under the programme was

the restructuring of the production as well as the export base of the economy with a view to restructuring the ailing economy and breaking the mono-product nature of her export sector (Foree & Benedict 2001:300). The programme was plagued by a lot of contradictions and distortions that inhibited its full implementation and was subsequently abandoned after six years (Forae 2000). Babangida also introduced other poverty alleviation programmes such as **Peoples Bank**, Its objectives was to provide loans to promising entrepreneurs on soft terms without strict requirements of collaterals. It also regulated the activities of Community Banks that “Sprouted as adjuncts of peoples Bank and sources of cheap funds for communities and their members”.

Another important strategy for alleviating poverty was the **Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)** which aimed to develop rural areas through construction of feeder roads and provision of necessary infrastructural facilities that would facilitate them to be production centres for the national economy. The primary objective of DFRRI was not only opening rural areas but also encouraging rapid development in the hinterland where the accessibility is very difficult. The programme also focused on provision of rural employment by ensuring that basic infrastructure such as electricity was available in the villages. This would encourage some rural dwellers such as welders to operate from their respective villages instead of rushing to the cities. Again, DFRRI was formed on the assumption that if the hinterland was accessible by road, farmers would find it very easy to transport their products to market at cheaper rates. This would eventually reduce the cost of food production as a way out of poverty. It is observed that DFRRI like other programmes introduced by Babangida’s regime were good but because of its poor implementation, its impacts on the populace and poverty were minimal.

Another programme initiated to reduce poverty level in Nigeria which focused on agricultural sector was the **Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)**. The basic thrust of NALDA was to “reduce the prevalence of subsistence agriculture in the county 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 (Arogundade (201:44).

It is worthy to note all the programmes initiated by Babangida’s regime collapsed at the point of the other, nevertheless one the programmes that is still existing till date is the **National Directorate of Employment (NDE)**. Its primary objective was to develop and execute the programmes that would address mass unemployment in the country and “articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials”. Babangida has identified unemployment as key factor that has a potential threat to his government agenda and socio-economic development of the country and therefore emphasized the need for creating employment opportunities. It is on record that hundred of thousand of youths have benefited from the NDE scheme through its four –programmed approach that include: Vocational Acquisition Training (673,000). Entrepreneurial (Business) Training (372,366). Training for Rural Employment and Training for Labour Based Works Programme. (Arogundade et al 2011). The NDE Scheme was beset with serious problems. There was no follow-up of the beneficiaries of the programme. Many of the beneficiaries of NDE scheme did not make use of the skills acquired while others failed to invest the loans they received thus making mockery of the entire exercise.

The regime of late General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) was known as the midwife of the **Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)** in Nigeria’s quest for way out of

debilitating poverty, as this was the period that marked Nigeria's relapse into the global bracket of 25 poorest countries (Oke & Oluwaleye, 2015:16). Under FEAP, micro credit or soft loan was provided to rural people for the establishment of cottage industries and improved storage facilities. The micro-credit scheme was to serve as investment promotion and poverty alleviation that will stimulate growth and development of the less privileged in Nigeria (Forae 2011:301).

The government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo set up **Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2000** with the purpose of creating jobs for the unemployed in view of rising youth restiveness. The participants in the programme were expected to stimulate economic activities and improve environment. The participants engaged in labour activities such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along high-ways, maintenance of public building and environmental sanitation (Oyemoni 2003).

The implementation of PAP was severely criticized and was accused of shoddiness and corruption. Subsequently the government had to set up a panel committee headed by Prof. Ango Abbdulahi to review the programme. Problems identified with the programme included over centralization, over politicization, irregular payment, uncoordinated management as well as high level corruption (Oyemoni, 2003). Based on the recommendations of the Committee Poverty Alleviation Programme was changed to **National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)**: NAPEP involved all the stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria namely the federal, state and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women groups and concerned individuals (Okoye and Onyukwu 2007). The basic objective of NAPEP was to tackle absolute poverty and to eradicate them. In efforts to eradicate poverty, the government arranged NAPEP into four schemes. These are: Youth Empowerments Scheme (Yes), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS and the National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NPDCS). (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009).

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) which was introduced in 2004 aims to address the menace of poverty in the country. As a member of the United Nations, Nigeria keyed into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently produced a policy document called the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs) to further see to the achievement of millennium development goals (Abur, et al:2015) NEEDs aims to achieve the following goals. Wealth creation, Employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation. The NEEDs as a national policy focused on meeting some of the objectives of the MDGs, especially poverty alleviation.

Challenges of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

It is disturbing that despite the measures taken by successive governments in Nigeria to arrest the incidence of poverty in the country, the level of poverty is still very high. The persistence increase in poverty which has also undermined the performance of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria is attributed to the following reasons:

1. Inadequate involvement of the beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes has eroded its effectiveness. In most cases, the programmes are implemented top-down. The opinions of the target groups (representatives of the poor communities) are not sought. The policy makers do not care to know the nature of their problems and how they wish the problems to be solved.

This may lead to overestimation and underestimation of the problems and misplaced priorities.

2. Lack of awareness of poverty alleviation programmes in the rural areas is another obstacle to its performance. Information about such programmes terminates in the cities while the illiterate poor in the villages do not know what is happening (Adawo, 2010:16).
3. The excessive corruption in Nigeria is another serious challenge to poverty alleviation programmes. In Nigeria, public funds which are meant for execution of welfare schemes for poor are diverted into private pockets, thus creating untold hardships for the poor. Many poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria could not achieve their desired objectives because of institutionalization of corruption in the system. Commenting on corruption in poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, Adawo (1999) observes “there is a problem of benefit capture syndrome, the intended benefits are captured by politicians and rent-seeking bureaucrats”.
4. Lack of infrastructural facilities is a major obstacles to poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. No country can tackle poverty without adequate infrastructural facilities such as safe drinking water, constant power supply and good road network. These facilities determine productivity level of artisans and organized private sector. Since the level of infrastructural development in Nigeria is very poor, this results in low level of production and excessive poverty. The Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) which was created to provide basic infrastructure in the rural areas failed to realize the expected results. Rural areas in Nigeria are witnessing infrastructural decay.
5. Neglect of agriculture militates against poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. Before the emergence of oil in Nigeria’s economy, mostly our foreign exchange earnings came from agriculture. Since early 1970’s the attitude of the government and individuals towards agriculture has dwindled to the extent that oil is the only source of generating revenue. The poverty alleviation programmes such as *Operation Feed the Nation*. (OFN) and *Green Revolution* which aimed to boost food production in Nigeria suffered lack of continuity and shift in approach, (Arogundade et al., 2011:43). This has contributed to rising level of poverty in the country.
6. Poverty alleviation programmes cannot achieve positive results where many people do not have basic education. In Nigeria, adult literacy rate remain at 56.1 percent (Aluko, 2003:261). Poverty is pronounced among the people who did not acquire basic education. The majority of poor people are those who are not educated. Education qualifies an individual to secure a job in both government and private establishments. Therefore, basic education provides good opportunities to escape from the clutches of poverty.
7. The performance of poverty alleviation programmes is also hindered by high population growth rate. Based on the data obtained from past census, the country’s population increased sharply from fifty four (54) million in 1963 to eighty eight (88) million in 1991. At present, the country’s population has reached one hundred and forty-four (144) million according to the 2006 population and housing census (Ogunleye, 2010:295). With the annual population growth rate of 2.9 percent which is nearly the same with the annual GDP growth rate (3.5 percent) Nigeria’s population would double in the next twenty five years. (Ogunleye, 2010). Unless Nigeria manages to bring down population growth rate, it will further aggravate poverty with majority people “unemployed, uneducated, ill clad and disease ridden”.

Suggested Strategies of Poverty Alleviation

The following strategies would help to alleviate poverty in Nigeria:

1. The first important strategy to reduce poverty in Nigeria is the provision of infrastructural facilities such as good road network, stable power supply and safe drinking water. No poverty alleviation programme can achieve the desired objective without the provision of basic infrastructure for the masses. With stable power supply, the urban artisans would easily enhance their income. Similarly in the rural areas of the country investment in the infrastructure would enable the farmers to increase their income easily. Lack of infrastructural facilities such as good roads prevent farmers from transporting their commodities to the towns and cities where they are in high demand. Again, provision of adequate infrastructure would facilitate establishment of small and medium industries in the rural areas, which would create employment opportunities for the rural dwellers. Therefore, provision basic infrastructure is an important strategy for poverty reduction.
2. Another strategy for poverty alleviation in Nigeria is the development of human resources. Learning from the experience of others, the remarkable growth of the economies of the so-called Tigers of the Rim was largely due to the heavy investments made by these countries in the development of human resources (Aluko 2003:260). All these countries have achieved N100 percent literate level in contrast to Nigeria which is only 55.6 percent. It is worrisome that despite her abundance natural resources, Nigeria have failed to make adequate investment in development of human resources. The World Bank Report for 1996 shows that per capita expenditure in Nigeria on health and education is one of the poorest in Africa (Aluko, 2003:261). Ghana spends twice as much as Nigeria while Togo and Benin spend three times as much as Nigeria (Aluko, 2003:261). Therefore, it is imperative that provision of basic education is an essential strategy for poverty alleviation. It is established fact that those who are educated can be gainfully employed and hence escape from the clutches of poverty. Those who are not educated are poorly paid since there is no opportunity for advancement in their places of work and therefore remain perpetually poor. In this context, in order to alleviate poverty in Nigeria, it is imperative to invest more on human resources.
3. Agricultural development is an important means of addressing the menace of poverty in Nigeria. Since massive reduction in oil revenue the government has started paying attention to development of agriculture but the tempo is very slow. It is necessary to invest in agricultural technology in order to boost food production. The governments should encourage farmers to procure modern farming equipments instead of traditional hoes and cutlasses which most Nigerian farmers are still using. Efforts should also be made to provide storage facilities for farmers to take care of their excess products. The primary objective of the government is to mechanize Nigeria's agriculture which will lead to massive food production, thereby reducing acute poverty in Nigeria.
4. The poverty alleviation programmes would achieve good results if the beneficiaries are involved in the "discussion, preparation, design and implementation of the programmes that affect them (Aluko, 2003:259). This would enable the policy makers to address the basic felt needs of the people.
5. For the successful implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, leaders at all level of governance must be credible, accountable and transparent. Most of the poverty alleviation programmes have failed to achieve the expected results because of excessive corruption in the country.
6. The government should endeavour to introduce those policies that will checkmate high population growth rate. Some countries like India and China have succeeded to reduce

poverty level in their countries, through appropriate policies to control population growth.

7. Poverty alleviation programmes must be provided with adequate and sustained funding to facilitate enabling environment for its effective implementation. The annual budgetary allocation for poverty alleviation programmes “must be specified as a percentage of national budget” and no government that comes to power should interfere with it.

Conclusion

Poverty is widespread and persistent in Nigeria. We have examined various strategies of poverty alleviation in Nigeria and identifies the challenges that militate against their effective performance. These challenges are: inadequate involvement of the beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, excessive corruption, lack of basic infrastructure and education, neglect of agriculture and high population growth rate. It is hoped that sustainable poverty alleviation programmes is feasible by involving the representatives of the poor communities in the design and implementation of these programmes, investing on basic infrastructure, human resources and agriculture. The success of these programmes can also be achieved if leaders at all level of governance are accountable and transparent. It is imperative that government should introduce those policies that will control high population growth rate. The implementation of the suggested measures has strong potential to reduce the incidence of poverty in the country.

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