

Nigeria's Raising Poverty Profile Amidst Poverty Alleviation Programmes: Interrogating The Paradox

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ABSTRACT

The rising profile of poverty in Nigeria is assuming an alarming and worrisome dimension. Nigeria, a Sub-Saharan African country has at least half of its population in abject poverty. It is incontrovertible fact that poverty has been massive, pervasive and engulfs large proportion of the Nigeria society which results in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, poor access to credit facilities and low life expectancy as well as a general level of human hopelessness. Nigeria presents a paradox because the country is rich but the people are poor. Thus, the daunting challenges over the years of nationhood is that of tacking poverty in the mist of abundance of resources that nature and divinity has endowed the country with; hence the proliferation of plethora of programmes to alleviate nay eradicate this hydra-headed monster without any significant evidence. The paper posits that; the poverty alleviation programmes in the country over the years have not impacted the target- beneficiaries- the poor hence NAPEP and so many other poverty alleviation/ reduction programmes mounted by successive government has not realised their objectives in our nation over the years. It is the recommendation of the paper among others; the need for a concerted effort to identify, articulate and highlight the existence, the causes and effects of poverty in Nigeria and pragmatically addressing them.

Keywords: Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Programmes, SDGs, Nigeria.

Introduction

Over the years, discourse on poverty has continued to engage the attention of scholars, development practitioners, politicians and international development agencies. The consensus however is that poverty is seen as a universal phenomenon that affects the socio- economic and political well being of its victims whether in a developed or underdeveloped countries. Nigeria a country once regarded as a model for African development and “Giant in the Sun” but is today a poor country in the midst of abundant resources. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human resources, good whether condition for agriculture, petroleum, gas, and large untapped mineral resources. But rather than recording remarkable progress in the national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the poorest countries fifty years after independence, whereas she was among the richest 50 in the early 1970's (Obadan, 2001:1). Generally, a number of socio-economic indicators are used to measure the standard of living or the general wellbeing of the people. These socio-economic indicators include food, health care, education, employment opportunities, and access to basic infrastructures among others. Poverty is

a plague afflicting people all over the world, it is considered as one of the symptoms or manifestations of underdevelopment. Poverty is a vicious cycle, which keeps the poor in a state of destitution. Often, the poor are known to have inadequate level of consumption (Aluko, 1975: 70).

The rising profile of poverty in Nigeria is assuming an alarming and worrisome dimension. Nigeria, a Sub-Saharan African country has at least half of its population in abject poverty (Ojo, 2008). Similarly, the publication of Federal Office of Statistics (1996) reveals that poverty has been massive, pervasive and engulfs large proportion of the Nigeria society. Abiola and Olaopa (2008) states that the scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact which results in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, poor access to credit facilities and low life expectancy as well as a general level of human hopelessness. Nwaobi (2003) asserts that Nigeria presents a paradox because the country is rich but the people are poor. However Okpe and Abu (2009: 205) perspicuously remark that Nigeria has witnessed a monumental increase in the level of poverty with the poverty at 74.2 percent in the year 2000.

One of the daunting challenges over the years of nationhood is that of tacking poverty in the mist of abundance of resources that nature and divinity has endowed the country with; hence the proliferation of plethora of programmes to alleviate nay eradicate this hydra-headed monster without any significant evidence.

Poverty: A Definition

An encompassing definition depicts poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructures, such as education, health, potable water, and sanitation; and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her capabilities. Basically, the poor are those who are unable to obtain an adequate income, find a stable job, own property or maintain healthy living conditions. They also lack an adequate level of education and cannot satisfy their basic health needs. As such the poor the poor are often illiterate, in poor health and have a short life span. They have no or limited access to basic necessities of life such as food and decent shelter. They are unable to meet social and economic obligations. They lack skills and gainful employment and they have few (if any) economic assets and sometimes lack self esteem. This characteristics is what causes the social conditions of extreme poverty to persist and to be transmitted from one generation to the next (Tokumbo and Oluwatoyim, 2003).

Nigeria is among the 20 countries in the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor. The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of zero represents perfect equality while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. Nigeria has one of the highest Gini index in the world. The Gini index for Nigeria is 50.6; this compares poorly with other countries such as India (37.8), Jamaica (37.3) and Rwanda (28.9) (Igbuzor, 2008:12).

While most of these manifestations of poverty is rife in Nigeria, there are also compelling evidence to show that the trends are on the rise, estimates have indicated that about 70% of Nigerians live in absolute poverty (about 84 million people). Similarly, Ogwumike and the World Bank 1999-2005 reports clearly shows a rising profile of Nigerian population living below poverty line from 43% in 1994; 66% in 1996 to over 70% in 2004 (Eze, 2009). According to Anger (2010:140) the severity of poverty in Nigeria is equally glaring when other indicators of services and development are considered. The Vision 2010 Committee Report reveals that:

- 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty line.
- Only about 40% have access to safe drinking water;
- About 85% of the urban population lives in single houses with more than 7 occupants on the average.

- Only about 62% of Nigerians have access to primary health care.
- Most Nigerians take less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamins (Anger, 2010:140).

In spite of the controversies surrounding its conceptualization, it is generally agreed that poverty has adverse effects on individuals and communities; it breeds social exclusion, isolation fear, distress and deprivations (Backwith, 2015). The poor tend to be powerless and voiceless; they live in sub-standard environments with low incomes, inadequate social amenities and opportunities for improved well-being. Poverty may lead to loss of self-confidence, self-actualization, self-fulfilment, lack of good orientation and abandonment of cultural values and heritage such that people are ashamed of their cultural and racial identity. It also manifests in ethics and morality where shallow intellectualism prevails, and people do everything to achieve their selfish goals. It makes people lack the capability to function and enjoy the core values of development and sustenance (Danaan, 2018).

There is a distinction between absolute and relative Poverty (Foster, 1998). Absolute or Subsistence Poverty refers to a household's inability to command sufficient income to meet its basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, transportation and education view absolute poverty as a situation of low income and consumption. Income and consumption levels are the parameters in deriving an imaginary Poverty Line (PL) often used as a yardstick for measuring the minimum standard of living. People are considered poor if their measured standard of living in terms of income and consumption falls below the PL (Anyanwu, 1997). The PL adopted by the World Bank for international comparison is \$1 per person, per day (Chen & Ravallion, 2007). Furthermore, individuals below the PL are grouped into two categories; the poor and the extremely poor giving rise to two PLs; the Upper PL (UPL) and the Lower PL (LPL). The poor are individuals whose incomes fall below the UPL but are above the LPL, while the extremely poor are those whose incomes fall below the LPL. Conceptualizing poverty in absolute terms is the most common practice even though it is problematic to determine what constitutes minimum standards of living given varied socio-economic conditions.

Relative poverty is a condition in which an individual or household's income falls short of the average income of the population in the society being considered. Individuals in relative poverty have their resources lower than those possessed by average individuals to the extent that they are excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. It is context-sensitive and reflects the changing perception of acceptable minimum standard of living. It is also dynamic as it is subject to the needs and demands of a changing society. Sometimes even within a given country, what is luxurious in one period may become essential in another. For instance a 'non poor' person in Chad may be among the extremely poor in Denmark, while electricity, indoor sanitations and pipe borne water are essential in developed countries, they are not perceived as such in poor countries. Lok-Dessallien (1999) explains that; Poverty measurement has traditionally been dominated by the objective approach. Only relatively recently has the international community as a whole taken a serious interest in measuring subjective poverty. This is mainly because of mounting recognition of the limitations associated with so-called objective indicators and the value of understanding the perspectives of the poor in shaping policies and programmes. As a result, participatory poverty assessment methodologies have been gaining ground. Subjective Poverty requires a country to define what is considered the minimum adequate standard of living for a given period. It depends on individuals' perceptions about their standard of living (Danaan, 2018).

The issue of poverty in Nigeria is a paradox. It is a case of poverty in the midst of plenty. On the average 45 – 50 percent of Sub – Saharan Africans live below the poverty line (World Bank, 1996). It has become an alarming problem and threat to human survival in Nigeria. Poverty is, in many respects, like a stigmatized disease (such as AIDS). Everybody dreads it and pray to avoid it, many want to pretend or ignore its existence, a few want to discuss it seriously while still

smaller fraction want to commit themselves to concrete actions that can address it beyond expression of pity or token philanthropic gestures. It afflicts its victims with such devastating human misery that it is tempting to look the other way in order to avoid the anguish of seeing fellow human being in that condition.

Poverty is indeed a global problem. To this end, the United Nations declared 1996 the International year of eradication of poverty and 1997 – 2006 a decade of poverty eradication. In pursuance of this target, government in both developed and developing countries became increasingly aware of the poverty problem and several development efforts to alleviate poverty embarked upon by shifting public expenditure towards poverty eradication including Nigeria.

Poverty eradication was seen as a means through which the government could revamp the battered economy and rebuild self – esteem in majority of Nigerians. Poverty alleviation programmes in an economy are aimed at improving the welfare of those who are categories as poor. However, what has remained unanswered is the extent to which these programme have impacted on the poor – the target population. Available statistics do not appear to be suggesting any remarkable improvement in the poverty situation in Nigeria. Recent studies on the subject poverty and its reduction agencies as well as programmes indicate that considerable gap exists between the target objective – alleviating or eradicating poverty – and achievement.

It seems that the efforts of various governments are ineffective and therefore not much has been done to actualise the benefits. For poverty reduction agencies, their results do not seem to justify the huge financial allocations to them. Poor people's perceptions of formal poverty reduction institutions are largely that of ineffectiveness and irrelevance in their lives as government poverty reduction activities contribute little in their struggles to survive and rarely help them to escape poverty.

More disturbing is the fact that despite the colossal amount of resources committed to these programmes, the poverty situation aggravates, and more and more people fall into the poverty region instead of significant improvement in the living standard of the people.

Causes of Poverty in Nigeria: An Overview

Various scholars have attempted to describe factors that have exacerbated the poverty situation in Nigeria. They include among other factors; Unstable political history, Lack of accountability, Mismanagement and corruption, Poor policy formation, implementation and evaluation, Lack of involvement of the poor, Dependence of the economy on oil, Poor economic policies and management, Poor revenue allocation and distribution and distribution, Ethnic and religious conflicts, Poor infrastructures etc.

The adoption of Structural Adjustment Programme (S.A.P) in 1986 was intended to cushion the effect of the adverse economic environment caused by the oil shocks and the world economic depression. The cardinal objectives of SAP included diversification of the productive base of the economy so as to curtail dependence on the oil sector and balance of payments viability over the medium term; laying a solid foundation for non – inflationary growth and lessening the importance of non – productive investments in the public sector efficiency intensifying the growth potentials of the private sector and attracting fresh foreign loans (Egwin, 1989). During the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme, it was realised that unintended negative effect of the programme such as accentuation of income inequality, unequal access to food, shelter, education, health and other necessities of life became more prominent in the Nigerian state with the poor being the most affected group (NPC, 1995).

It is the realisation of the adverse effect of SAP on the poor that prompted the introduction of policies and programmes to alleviate poverty and provide safety- nets for the poor in the economy (NPC, 1995). Consequently every successive government both military and civilian has come up with one programme or the other meant to reduce the level of poverty, give hope and succour to the poor and or move towards some sort of wealth creation. Some of these programmes include;

People Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Banks, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), The Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Primary Health Care (PHC), Federal Urban Mass Transit Scheme, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty eradication Programme (NAPEP). Despite all these, poverty still persists among the majority of the people.

Though most Nigerians are quick to attribute the causes of failures of policies and programmes to corruption and implementation bottlenecks as earlier alluded to, it is expected that the trickle down effects of these policies and programmes should have at least reduced poverty instead of the present situation where poverty seems to be worsening. The high incidence of poverty in Nigeria has become a concern to policy makers and indeed all well meaning Nigerians. In spite several efforts by government, non-governmental organisations, international donor agencies, and the nation's poverty situation have become worst judging by different indices. As long as majority of Nigerians remain poor, accompanied by limited social development, the nation's great natural wealth notwithstanding, it will be difficult for the country to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) according to the NPC, (2004). To underscore the international concern for this problem the United Nations declared 1996 "International Year for the Eradication of Poverty". Each year, October 17th has also been set aside as "International Day for the Eradication of poverty" worldwide. The decade 1997 – 2006 has also been declared "United Nations Decade for Eradication of Poverty". In Nigeria, both the government and civil societies have become increasingly aware of the poverty problem. Several development efforts which could alleviate poverty were made by the Nigerian governments with no significant impact in the lives of the masses over the years.

An Assessment of the Raising Poverty Profile in Nigeria

Igbuzor (2008), asserts that it is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of oil and at the same time host's the third largest number of poor people after China and India. Available statistics shows that the incidence of poverty using the rate of US \$1 per day increased from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent in 1996. In 1978 the World Bank ranked Nigeria among middle-income country with a per capita income of about 1,000 US Dollars per annum and an exchange rate of 2 US Dollars to the naira. However by 1990, the World Bank reveals that the per capita income had declined from 1,000 US Dollars to 290 US Dollars and the country slipped from a middle-income country to the 17th poorest country in terms of per capita income (Oladapo, 1998: 49). Today, about 83.9 percent of Nigerians live below two US Dollars a day. Garba (2006), equally remarks that the UN Human Poverty Index in 1999, placed Nigeria among the 25 poorest nations in the world. According to the UNDP (2010) report, the population in poverty is given as 68.7 million as at 2004. Today it estimated that two third of the country's 120 million people or 80 million are said to be poor. This is a very tragic situation when one considers the fact that Nigeria is the six largest exporter of crude oil has had over \$300 billion in oil and gas revenues since independence (Awa, 1983). However, in the late 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) also reported that about 112 million Nigerians (representing 67.1%) of the country's total population of 167 million are living below the poverty level (Vanguard, 2016).

The nation's pathetic poverty situation amidst rich resources endowment coupled with efforts to alleviate it has been summarized by Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke (2003:6) as follows:

all documentation, official or otherwise shows that poverty in Nigeria in all forms is rising at an increasingly fast pace. Nigeria's social statistics rank it among the worst in south Saharan Africa even though it possesses the greatest natural resources... Given that Nigeria is the seventh largest exporter of oil in the world, these revelations are distressing... The poverty profile of Nigeria does indeed present a very sombre picture of a rich nation in decline.

The challenges of poverty in Nigeria have attracted the attention of successive administrations. However, it remains a paradox-poverty in the midst of plenty and rising in periods of economic growth (Omoyibo, 2013). This may be true to the extent that Nigeria is endowed with human and natural resources and has had an increasing national income; yet, a larger section of her population languishes in poverty due uneven distribution and allocation of income and wealth (Aigbokhan, 1998; Alesina & Perotti, 1996; Lipton, 1980).

There are certain characteristics about incidence of poverty in Nigeria. First, statistics shows that majority of poor in Nigeria are located in the rural areas. Second, there are differences in the incidence of poverty across the geo-political zones in Nigeria with the incidence highest in the Northern part of the country. Third, there are disparities in poverty between males and females. (Igbuzor: 2008). Although the incidence of poverty is much higher in the rural areas than in the urban centres, the urban slum-dwellers form one of the more deprived groups in Nigeria.

Dauda (2017) notes that poverty in Nigeria differs with the pattern in many other countries given that even with the economic growth recorded, poverty is still on the increase with the North-West and North –East geopolitical zones leading in the poverty indices. This situation is at variance with the experiences of developing countries in Europe, America and Asia where economic growth results in poverty reduction. This lends credence to the long-standing assumption that the relationship between poverty, economic growth and development is not even. Many reasons have been given for the abysmal performance of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria- poor design and implementation, policy inconsistencies and discontinuity, poor funding and corruption (Aigbokhan, 2008; Arisi-Nwugballa et al., 2016; Dauda, 2017; Elumilade, Asaolu, & Adereti, 2006) . Arisi-Nwugballa et al. (2016) note that poverty alleviation initiatives tend to be geared towards providing financial credit and grants to drive the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) leading to job creation and capacity utilization. Some of these interventions enhanced the incomes of the target beneficiaries engaged in MSMEs but this could not be sustained due to obstacles such as the high cost of running businesses, infrastructural decay and competition caused by the proliferation of cheaper imported substitutes (Danaan, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Suffice it to say that various poverty alleviation programmes adopted in Nigeria were not rightly targeted at the poor and poverty alleviation programmes have not achieved its objectives due to faulty selection of beneficiaries. Thus, the poverty alleviation programmes in the country over the years have not impacted the target- beneficiaries- the poor hence NAPEP and so many other poverty alleviation/ reduction programmes mounted by successive government has not realised their objectives in our 100 years of nationhood.

Examination of strategies used in implementing poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria which have had little or no impact on the poverty situation in the country are expected be of significance to those that are saddled with the planning and implementation of ongoing and future poverty alleviation programmes. It is the intention of this paper to stimulate further investigations into the problem of persistent rise in poverty incidence in Nigeria with a view of eradicating poverty in the country amidst government poverty alleviation programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for a concerted effort to identify, articulate and highlight the existence, the causes and effects of poverty in Nigeria.
- The issue of corruption among other factors militating against the success of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria over the years must be seriously addressed.
- Thus, the issue of where the poor stands amidst plethora of poverty alleviation programmes is a major concern.

This is because policy makers and managers of these intervention programmes have always justified the continuous existence of such programmes with deceptively impressive figures of beneficiaries against the evidence on the ground. This no doubt calls for sober reflection.

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