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Policy Discontinuity and Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract

Incidence of poverty is a global phenomenon, as it affects many nations of the world. However, its magnitude and scope varies from one country to another. In Nigeria, the inability to effectively tackle widespread poverty despite successive governments' policies aimed at eradicating or alleviating the menace is a cause for concern. This paper therefore examined the policies and programmes of government aimed at reducing the phenomenon of widespread poverty in Nigeria including the reason de 'tar for their failure which this paper attributes to policy discontinuity. Materials for this paper were obtained from secondary sources. The paper posited that policy discontinuity more than any factor, was and remains a major impediment to poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Other factors include high rate of corruption and mismanagement of resources as well as lack of community-based poverty alleviation policies and programmes involving practically the poor people in Nigeria, among others contributed to the policy failure. The paper offered recommendations including, among others the need for the continuity of policies and programmes that are result oriented and the discontinuity of the ones not anchored on community-based poverty eradication/alleviation strategies. Thus, there is need for the involvement of the intended beneficiaries, especially at the formulation and implementation processes to effectively and efficiently stem the tide of the incidence of poverty in Nigerian society.

Keywords: *Corruption, Discontinuity, Government policies, Mismanagement, Widespread Poverty*

Introduction

Poverty is a global phenomenon, however its magnitude and scope varies from one person or country to another (Haruna & Osaghae 2019). In many parts of the world, poverty tends to breed other social problems. The phenomenon of poverty promotes disorder and amplifies violence and other local problems including child labour, petty theft and ethno-religious violence (Haruna & Osaghae, 2019; Miller, Schreck & Tewksbury, 2008). It limits human propensity to consumption, housing, security, health, education, rights, dignity and decent job. The incidence of poverty may be the basis for division of the world into developed (rich) and developing or underdeveloped (poor) countries. For example, majority of the poor people live in developing or underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and 200 million of them live in countries of Africa including Nigeria (Nwogbo, 2015). Poverty creates pervasive, widespread inequality and exposes persons and states to danger in the form of increased criminal behaviour, deprivation, denial and strain (Mohammad, 2012).

In Nigeria, the prevalence of poverty has assumed a worrisome proportion. Abiola and Olaopa (2008) argue that the menace 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. These have been a cause for government's concern. Thus, several policies and programmes aimed at reducing or eradicating the rising incidence of poverty in the country have been initiated and implemented depending on the government in power since the era of independence in 1960. While these policies and programmes were loadable, they have been to a significant extent unable to achieve the designed aims and objectives. This could be due to certain factors that have impeded the performance of the policies and programmes. Thus, poverty has become pervasive in Nigeria despite governments' effort in the formulation of the policies and programmes to alleviate the menace, as majority of Nigerians (more than 80%) are still wallowing in poverty hitherto (Haruna & Osaghae, 2019; Oshewolo, 2010; Omotola, 2008). Mohammad (2012) argues that poverty alleviation policies, rather than become avenues for equitable distribution of income degenerated into avenues for political compensation.

It is against this background that this paper evaluates the effect of policy discontinuity government's policies and programmes on poverty in Nigeria. Thus, the paper is divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction and research methods, and the second contains the conceptual and theoretical framework. The third part entails policies and programmes of governments on poverty in Nigeria including the reason de 'tar of their failures, while the final part is the conclusion and recommendations.

Materials and Methods

The paper is a review work. The materials used were basically obtained from secondary sources. These include materials obtained from published works, such as textbooks, journals articles, government official gazettes and the internet sources. The materials generated were thematically analyzed based on the subject matter of the paper.

Conceptual Framework

According to Haruna and Osaghae (2019), poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon and as such could be explained in absolute dimension, on one hand and relative dimension, on the other. Thus the phenomenon of absolute poverty occurs when the basic necessities for life including quality food, shelter and clothing are lacking or inadequate, while poverty in its relative dimension is a living condition below the general standard of living that prevails in a particular society (Giddens, 2001). However, since the living condition may differ from one person, place or geographical location to another, poverty is a situation in which the basic resources to maintain an average standard of living within a specific geographical area are lacking (Bartol & Bartol, 2005). Thus, to be poor means to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, being sick and not cared for, not educated, to be deprived access to common resources, among others (Aliyu, 2008). Mohammad (2012:243) asserts that "poverty is the condition or quality of being poor and the condition of having little or no wealth. It is the deficiency or inadequate supply, meaning that there exists lack in the face of need." The World Bank (2001) describes poverty in terms of its manifestations which can be linked to inadequate income and assets to attain basic needs of life. These include food, shelter, clothing, and accessible quality health care services and education.

Theoretical Framework

Poverty is a multifaceted social problem that can be theorized in different dimensions. Enahoro and Ikpefan (2005) posit two main dimensions of poverty. These include:

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

Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus (1997) analyzed poverty from five dimensions of deprivation that include the following:

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

Ukwu (2002) posits that corruption has affected previous poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria. The effect of corruption is both direct and indirect on the poverty increase. The indirect effect follows from the reduction or misapplication of resources, which penalizes growth rate and growth potentials. The small and medium enterprise sub-sector is

characterized by large informal activities. It denotes economic activities related to the poor, otherwise unemployed unskilled labour in urban centers.

Corruption worsen widespread poverty when the legitimate policies and programmes aimed at curtailing poverty leading to a meaningful life in Nigerian society are being blocked as result of mismanagement of economic resources and lack of community initiatives in the formulation and implementation of governmental policies and programmes. Thus, most of the succeeding government's policies and programmes may have failed as a result of fraud and looting.

Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001) attributed the decline in living standard to structural causes or determinants of poverty which includes increase in crime and violence, environmental detraction, retrenchment of workers and changes in family structures. The impeding factors associating with attempts by governments to stem the general tide of poverty in Nigeria include policies discontinuity by succeeding government and political instability, among others (Ajakaiye, 2002).

Appraisal of Policies and Programmes of Governments on Poverty in Nigeria

There are many governments' policies and programmes aimed at stemming the general tide of the incidence of poverty in Nigeria after the country's independence in 1960. These policies include the National Food Production Programme (NAFPP) of 1972, Nigeria Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB) of 1972, Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) of 1977, Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of 1986, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1986, Better Life Programme (BLP) of 1987, People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) of 1989, and Community Bank (CB) of 1990 (Umar, 2010). According to Okoye & Onyeukwu (2007) and Adoba (2005) the policies include National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) of 1993, Family Support Programme (FSP) of 1994, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) of 1997 and Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP) of 1999. Others include Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of 2000, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) of 2003, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy

(NEEDS) of 2004, the 7th Point Agenda of 2007, SURE-P of 2010, YOUWIN of 2011, N-POWER of 2015, among others (Haruna & Iyaji, 2019; Ikoh&Ukpong, 2017; Agbi, 2012). These policies and programmes are briefly discussed below:

National Food Production Programme of (NAFPP): The NAFPP was introduced in 1972 by General Yakubu Gowon with the aim of educating farmers on well-conceived and guided programme for rural development, especially in the area of food production. The programme failed due to lack of supervision, poor financing, inadequate training and the self-serving interest of the officials that operated the programme.

Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB): Like NAFPP, the NACB was introduced in 1972 by General Yakubu Gowon for financing of famers and agricultural. Its hitches were poor institutional capacity (Computer replacing manual operations), poor loan recovery and managerial problems as there were no board of directors and substantive managing directors.

Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE): The FCPE was introduce by General Yakubu Gowon in 1977 to reduce mass illiteracy at the grassroots level. However, the FCPE could not be sustained because of political will and commitment.

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP): SAP was World Bank/IMF policy introduced by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) in1986 amidst public criticism. It aims rapid departure from the government's previous reform movements by emphasizing reliance on the private sector rather than the state in solving the fundamental problems of the economy. SAP period proceeded with severe economic crisis that worsened Nigerians' quality of life, especially the poor people.

Directorate of Food, Road and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI): Like SAP, the DFRRI was introduced by IBB in 1986 with the objectives for provision of basic needs, such as food, shelter, potable water, road construction etc. However, DFRRI could not achieve many of its objectives because of over ambitious in scope, steeped in corruption and lack of standards for project harmonization.

Better Life Programme (BLP): BLP was founded by late former first Lady, Maryam Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in 1986. According to Adoba (2005), the programme was designed for rural women to improve their quality of life and status by creating awareness in women and encourage them to realize, utilize and develop their potentials for a more fulfilling life. It was a widely accepted project that touched on women from all spheres of life. The programme served as the benchmark for national development programmes, and a bonafide component of governance at the highest level in Nigeria, leading to the establishment of the National Commission for Women, which was later upgraded to the Ministry of Women Affairs. The project writhed over dominance of urban women and power play by elitist women, and was short lived with the exit of IBB from power.

National Directorate of Employment (NDE): NDE established towards end of year 1986. Its objectives were to combat mass-unemployment and articulate policies aimed at promoting skill acquisition, self-employment and labour intensive potentials. The NDE suffered from poor funding and as such could not cope with the needs of the ever increasing number of job applicants in Nigeria.

People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) and Community Banks (CB): There were established in 1989/1990 by IBB administration to encourage savings and provide credit facilities for the poor people in rural area, especially those that could not ordinarily access such loans from the orthodox banking system (Umar 2010). The two banking schemes had some successes in terms of disbursement. However, both schemes had a high degree of problems of huge loss of over 80% due to corruption and mismanagement.

Family Support Programme (FSP): The FSP was introduced in 1994 by the then First Lady Maryam Abacha to provide health care delivery, child welfare, youth development and improved nutritional status to families in rural areas. However, FSP was constrain with malpractices including the non-supervision and monitoring of loans and projects.

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP): This was created by Late President General San Abacha in 1997 to provide credit for agricultural production and processing and small-scale industries through cooperative societies in rural and urban areas. However, FEAP was designed to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers, but it lacks continuity

because of corruption, poor loan recovery leading to the weakening of the entire scheme, and the death of General Sani Abacha went with the good intend of the project.

National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA): NALDA was set up in 1993 to provide strategic public support for land development, promote and support optimum utilization of rural land resources and encourage the evolution of economic size rural settlements. It had impacted positively on the agricultural sector but was unable to eradicate poverty because of its inability to acquire suitable land in various parts of Nigeria for the purpose of development.

National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS): This was initiated in 2004 by former President Olusegun Obasanjo to promote investment in various sectors, including telecommunication, electricity and tourism which will in turn help to generate employment and reduce poverty. NEEDS was confronted by institutional corruption believed to be constraining its progress.

Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP): PAP was set up by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 to urgently create jobs for the increasing unemployed youth in Nigeria through direct labour activities, such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along high-ways, maintenance of public building and environmental sanitation. PAP was not successful due to inadequate funding, lack of proper coordination and commitments, poor design, monitoring and evaluation.

National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP): This was also established by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001. NAPEP aimed at eradicating absolute poverty in Nigeria through four schemes, such Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS) and the National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (Okoye & Onyukwu, 2007). NAPEP plays the role of monitoring and evaluation, but was marred by inattention on the poor, inconsistency, poor implementation or severe budgetary and governance problems as well as corruption, etc.

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN): SMEDAN was established by the SMEDAN Act of 2003 to promote the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises [MSME] sector of the Nigeria Economy which statistically constitute more than 75% of all enterprises in Nigeria (Umar, 2010). Its objectives were to address poverty, rooted out of lack of access to income earning opportunities and lack of capacity to take advantage of the opportunities in the country. However, issues raised to the set back of SMEDAN are land as collateral for loan, access to credit, urban orientation or outlook, poor state of infrastructure, weak access to production inputs (especially finance), corruption, low access to information, low synergy between various tiers of government, inappropriate/crude technology, dearth of business information/databank, lack of knowledge, skills and attitude, for basic business capacity (Umar, 2010).

The 7th Point Agenda (7PG): This was the programme set up in 2007 by late President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua. The agenda focuses on power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security and qualitative and functional education (Agbi, 2012). The 7PG was based on our common future, which energizes development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It was a laudable programme, but cut short with the demise of the president and as such could not achieve much to reduce poverty.

SUREP-P: This scheme and its subsequent YOUWIN were introduced by former President Goodluck Jonathan in 2010 and 2011 through the public works, youths and women employment components of the (subsidy re-investment and empowerment programme) to establish the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) to reduce unemployment among graduates and stimulate economic growth and opportunities, towards the attainment of vision 2020. The scheme is meant to engage unemployed graduates for one year in firms and institutions to acquire skills, experience, and enhance their employability. The scheme did not target the real poor as it looks elitist and not holistic thereby targets a small portion of the population. The programme lacks continuity, as President Jonathan did not win his second term bid.

N-Power: This Scheme was introduced by the current President Mohammadu Buhari government with the aim of empowering the unemployed youths. It has three components that include, agriculture, health and teaching. The scheme is meant to engage unemployed graduates in agricultural economy, health and teaching in schools with a monthly pay of thirty thousand (N30, 000:00K) naira only. This scheme is still on-going, but like the preceding ones did not targeted the real poor and has been accused of corruption.

However, it is pertinent to note that all the government's policies and programmes on poverty reduction or eradication in Nigeria since independence have yielded far below their expectations. All the policies suffered continuity as all succeeding administrations be they military or civilian came up with their own policies. As a result, as laudable as some of the policies were, they were truncated prematurely as all the administrations wanted policies and programmes that would be traceable to them rather than administrations before them. Aside this, most of the policies lacked clearly defined policy frameworks with proper guidelines to effectively tackle poverty for sustainability, as such they suffered from political instability, interference, policy, and macroeconomic dislocations; they lacked continuity, and they are riddled with corruption, political deception and fraud as well as looting of national resources with impunity (Garba, 2006). According to Okoye and Onyukwu (2007), many of the programmes including NAPEP failed due to the programme inconsistency, poor implementation or severe budgetary and governance problems, corruption including project substitution, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources, conversion of public funds to private uses, etc.

According to Haruna and Osaghae (2019), most of the above poverty alleviation policies and programmes in Nigeria were not clearly community-based, involving practically the poor in the society making a significant number of them to either go into extinction or unable to drastically achieve their aims and objectives. Aluko (2003) asserts that the efforts of Nigerian governments aimed at reducing or eradicating the incidence of poverty in the country have not succeeded in curbing the menace due to many factors that have continuously contributed to the failure of the policies and programmes which Obadan (2001) succinctly captured as follow:

1. Gross mismanagement and lack of accountability and transparency due to systemic corruption thereby making the policies and programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources. Most of the resources met for poverty alleviation have been siphoned out of the country in hard currency coupled with poor execution of government policies and programmes, especially those aimed at the provision of social welfare services and economic infrastructure.
2. Lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and the fact that most of the policies and programmes do not focus directly on the poor. Thus, the beneficiaries were not involved in the policy formulation process.
3. Political and policy instability have resulted in frequent change of policies and their subsequent inconsistent implementation which in turn have impeded their sustainable progress.
4. Inadequate coordination of the various policies and programmes has resulted in each institution carrying out its own activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. Overlapping functions ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts.
5. Severe budgetary, management and governance problems have afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in facilities being completed broken down and abandoned, unstaffed and equipped.
6. Overextended scope of activities of most institution, resulting in resources being spread too thinly on too many activities. Examples are DFRRI and Better Life Programmes which covered almost every sector and overlapped with many other existing programmes.
7. Inappropriate policy and programme design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the policy formulation and implementation stages which subsequently demotivated the beneficiaries to identify with successful implementation of such policy and programme.
8. Absence of target setting for ministries, agencies and programmes.
9. Absence of effective collaboration and complementation among the tiers of government.

10. Absence of agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all concerned: Federal, State and Local Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other International Donor Agencies or Community.
11. Most of the policies and programmes were constraint due to absent of inbuilt sustainable mechanism which limited their success.

Mohammad (2012) argues that the impediments of most of the policies on poverty alleviation or eradication were corruption and inadequate funding. According to him, under NDE programme for instance, the problem of mass unemployment was addressed though the achievements appear to be short-lived since the people that actually got trained were excluded from credit facilities. Mohammad (2012:249) further posits the following factors have led to the inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the government policies and programmes aimed at arresting widespread poverty in Nigeria:

poor conception that is poor policy formulation and coordination, lack of involvement of the stakeholders who are the poor themselves, inadequate implementation strategies, policy discontinuity, and lack of sustainability, absence of policy framework, absence of target setting for ministries and agencies, duplication of functions among institutions and agencies. Embarking on projects that have no relevance to the poor, abandonment of projects, unhealthy competition between institutions and agencies, existence of barriers in the form of bureaucratic hurdles, incomprehensible rules and regulations and difficulty in accessing information and lack of supervision (Mohammad, 2012:249).

Danaan (2018) and Omoyibo (2013) assert that misplacement of priorities by governments at all levels manifesting in wasteful expenditure rather than investment in critical sectors that have direct bearing on the standard of living, has aggravated poverty in Nigeria. Thus, government policies exacerbate poverty in Nigeria. The policies may be adopted in pursuit of good intentions, but poor implementation could impoverish the citizenry. The SAP and its various fallouts in the form of massive devaluation of the Naira, high inflation, factory closures, privatization, commercialization, appropriate pricing of petroleum products and unlimited free market contributed to the poverty situation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Incidence of poverty in Nigeria is on the rise. The inability of government to effectively tackle the prevalence of poverty despite successively government's policies and programmes portends a serious threat on sustainable national development. Sustainable poverty eradication/alleviation policies in Nigeria should be anchored on community-based poverty eradication/alleviation strategies and corrupt-free implementation process. Thus, the following recommendations are offered:

1. There is need for the discontinuity of policies and programmes that are not anchored on community-based poverty eradication/alleviation strategies. Thus, there is need for the involvement of the intended beneficiaries, especially at the formulation and implementation processes to effectively and efficiently stem the tide of the incidence of poverty in Nigerian society.
2. Government should encourage local initiatives in the formulation and implementation of poverty alleviation policies and programmes from inception to harness their capacity.
3. Systemic corruption and mismanagement of resources should be vigorously tackled. Thus, individuals and groups found guilty of corrupt practice by a competent court should be made to face the laws without fear or favour and the stolen funds or property should be returned to government. The corrupt individuals found guilty should be jailed to deter others intending to engage in such act.
4. Government at all levels should invest in greater proportion on human capital development. Evidence shows that investment in human capital, especially in planned education, shelter, and social services, increase the productivity of the poor and make the state less vulnerable to lack of security.

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