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Poverty Elevation Amidst Poverty Alleviation Programmes In Nigeria

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify key reasons for the persistence of extreme poverty in Nigeria and to provide potential solutions. This exploratory research employs a secondary research method, utilizing data from textbooks, online newspapers, journal articles, and organizational reports. The study reviews various poverty alleviation programs implemented by the Nigerian government and other organizations. The findings reveal that the persistence of poverty in Nigeria is due to several factors: the erratic nature of programs and policies, corruption and mismanagement, hypocrisy on the part of the World Bank and IMF, the imitation of other countries' policies without proper consideration of Nigeria's unique context, and political deception and interference. These factors have contributed to the continuous rise of poverty despite numerous alleviation programs. The study concludes that addressing these issues is crucial for the success of future poverty alleviation efforts. The insights provided will be valuable to Nigerian leaders and organizations committed to tackling poverty, as well as to students, lecturers, and future researchers in political science. This study serves as a foundation for further research on the challenges hindering the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria.

Keywords: Alleviation Programs, Corruption, Policy implementation, Economic Development, World Bank, Poverty persistence

1. Introduction

Poverty is a global issue, present in every country in the world, whether developed or underdeveloped. However, the magnitude of poverty in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, is both oppressive and shocking. A significant threat posed by high rates of poverty is the augmentation of crime. Poverty is frustrating and can drive individuals to commit actions that are morally, ethically, and socially wrong. This is no exaggeration, as poverty is one of the primary catalysts of crime in various human societies.

In response to this challenge, the Nigerian government, along with non-governmental organizations, has developed and implemented various policies and programs over the years aimed at eradicating poverty and its associated rise in crime. This effort is evident in the policies pursued by almost every regime in Nigeria over the decades, including Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) under General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Green Revolution under Shehu Shagari, and the Structural Adjustment Programme under General Ibrahim Babangida. Despite these efforts, many Nigerians still live below the poverty line, currently defined as \$1.90 per day. Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa (2012) and Taiwo and Agwu (2016) observe that “despite the vast resources committed to poverty alleviation by every successive administration, no obvious achievement has been accomplished in this direction.”

The failure of these programs to significantly reduce poverty is not due to a lack of human and capital resources in Nigeria, as the country possesses ample resources to alleviate poverty. Instead, several factors have hindered the success of these initiatives. This study will explore these obstacles after thoroughly examining the concepts of poverty and poverty alleviation, as well as reviewing the various programs aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of the impediments to poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria, providing fresh insights and potential strategies for more effective poverty reduction in the future.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Poverty

For any individual to assert that poverty has a frictionless or universally sole definition is to commit a blunder or display ignorance. This is because there is no sole or all-inclusive definition of poverty. However, poverty can be viewed as a condition of financial incapacitation that prevents one from providing for essential needs such as food, clean water, clothing, shelter, education, and healthcare. A clear example of poverty can be seen in a statement made by a poor man in Kenya in 1997:

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"Do not ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house. Look at the house and count the number of holes. Look at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty."

In Vietnam in 1999, another poor man depicted poverty with the following statement:

"In the evenings, eat sweet potatoes, sleep In the mornings, eat potatoes, work At lunch, go without" (see siteresources.worldbank.org, 2019).

The United Nations, in its 2004 publication titled "Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework," defined poverty, with respect to human rights, as "a denial or non-fulfilment of human rights." These rights include fundamental freedoms like "freedom from hunger, disease and illiteracy." The UN also viewed poverty as "low levels of capability (i.e., a person's freedom or opportunities to achieve well-being)" and "the failure of basic capabilities, as Sen puts it, to reach certain minimally acceptable levels" (pp. 5-6).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) noted that poverty could be defined in either relative or absolute terms. Absolute poverty "measures poverty in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter," while relative poverty pertains to "the economic status" of individuals. In relative terms, "people are poor if they fall below-prevailing standards of living in a given societal context" (Mohammed, 2018).

According to the World Bank (1999), poverty refers to "shortage of food, lack of shelter, being ill, and not being able to go to school, not being able to read, fear for the future, not having a job, not being able to speak correctly, losing a child due to illness brought about by dirty water, lack of representation, powerlessness, not being able to speak correctly and inadequate freedom." In 2011, the World Bank also defined poverty as "distinct deprivation in the living condition which comprises multiple dimensions; these include inability to have access to basic needs..." (Musa et al., 2016). The same financial institution considers poverty as living on less than \$1.90 a day (Vyas & Bhargava, 1995).

In the Nigerian context, the condition of being poor involves:

1. Households or individuals below the poverty line whose incomes are insufficient to provide for their basic needs.
2. Households or individuals lacking access to basic services, political contacts, and other forms of support.
3. People in isolated rural areas who lack essential infrastructures.
4. Female-headed households whose nutritional needs are not being adequately met.
5. Persons who have lost their jobs and are unable to find employment due to economic reforms.
6. Ethnic minorities are marginalized, deprived, and persecuted economically, socially, culturally, and politically (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

2.2. Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation, also known as poverty reduction, aims to save humanity from the reproach of poverty primarily through empowerment and education, enabling people to cater to their own personal and family basic needs. It seeks to "promote economic growth that will permanently lift as many people as possible over a poverty line" (Barder, 2009). Poverty alleviation focuses on technically lifting "people out of poverty" but does not address "voluntary poverty," which arises from religious and philosophical beliefs (Vyas & Bhargava, 1995). It can be achieved globally and locally through the sincere efforts of individuals, organizations, and governments to end poverty.

3. A Consideration Of Poverty Alleviation Programmes In Nigeria

Different financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the Nigerian government, in particular, have embarked on a series of poverty alleviation programs aimed at emancipating Nigerians from the bondage of poverty. These efforts focus on various initiatives, including "capacity building," "employment generation for the less privileged and tertiary institution graduates," "skills acquisition," and "income generation to boost agricultural output" among others (Musa et al., 2016). It is important to note that the desire to mitigate poverty in the country is not a recent development. Evidence of this can be seen in the 1960s poverty alleviation program called Farm Settlement Option, which aimed at agricultural improvement for the exportation of cash crops.

In 1972 and 1973, following the collapse of the program, the government introduced the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP) and the Agricultural Development Project (ADP), respectively. These programs aimed to "create an avenue for testing and adapting agricultural findings and making such available to farmers" nationwide, and "provide credit facilities for the development of agricultural projects to promote integrated rural development." To ensure the success of these programs, particularly the ADP, the World Bank partly financed and oversaw their execution (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

On May 20, 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo, three months after assuming power from the deceased General Muritala Mohammed, launched Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). The goals of OFN were: "to drastically boost local food production (thereby reducing imports)," "to diminish rural-urban migration due to the abandonment of

agriculture,” and to increase youth employment through the “return to farm” agenda (Mohammed, 2018). In 1977 and 1978, during the same regime, the Rural Banking Scheme aimed at bringing banking services closer to rural dwellers through the provision of credit facilities, and Austerity Measures, which prohibited the importation of certain commodities, were adopted (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

In April 1980, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, after becoming President of Nigeria in 1979, launched the Green Revolution program. The objective was to drive the country towards “self-sufficiency in farm produce and food surplusage,” thereby alleviating hunger and lack. Shagari’s government also introduced the Federal Housing Scheme, allocating N2.6 billion to provide affordable housing for low-income earners and the medium-income group. The government aimed to erect 40,000 housing units annually, with 2,000 units per state and the FCT (Irouke et al., 2017), thereby addressing the shelter needs of poor Nigerians.

Later, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was adopted in 1986 under General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime. This program aimed at achieving economic growth free of inflation. In 1987, the Better Life Programme (BLP) focused on skill acquisition, healthcare, and rural development. Prior to this, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) sought to employ Nigerian youths, and the Directorate for Foods, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) aimed at rural development. In 1994 and 1997, the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) were launched, respectively, to improve Nigerians’ lives through child welfare, youth development, and credit facilities for establishing cottage industries (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

Upon the return to democratic rule in 1999, the government recognized that about 70% of Nigerians were living in destitution and launched the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), providing 200,000 jobs for unemployed Nigerians. However, poverty levels did not decrease as expected, leading to the introduction of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001. The government allocated six billion nairas for poverty eradication and structured NAPEP into four schemes: Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (Hussaini, 2014).

In 2004, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was launched, and at the state and local levels, it was known as SEEDS and LEEDS, respectively. These initiatives aimed to fight corruption, ensure transparency, promote the rule of law, create jobs, and enhance education, health, and security, among others. In 2007, President Musa Yar’Adua introduced the Seven-Point Agenda, addressing erratic power supply, food security, and human capital development. In 2016, after President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office, he allocated 500 billion nairas for poverty eradication and launched the N-Power program to “empower Nigerian youths for prosperity” by providing large-scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development, fostering the growth of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans, and others (Mohammed, 2018).

4. Poverty Elevation In Nigeria

Despite the myriad of poverty alleviation programs mentioned above, poverty continues to rise in Nigeria. According to Okunmadewa et al. (2005) and Olotu, Salami, and Akeremale (2015), the poverty situation in Nigeria is quite disturbing; both quantitative and qualitative measurements indicate the accelerating incidence and depth of poverty in the country. The National Bureau of Statistics also states that since independence, the quality of life for Nigerians has deteriorated, resulting in a steady increase in the number of Nigerians living below the poverty line (Olotu et al., 2015). Amidst the poverty alleviation programs implemented between 1980 and 1996, poverty continued to accelerate in the country.

Table 1: Poverty Head Count by Year

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Est. Pop. (million)	Pop. in poverty (million)
1980	28.1	65	17.7
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2005

From the above, it could be seen that there was an acceleration of poverty incidence in the country all from 1980 to 1996 except in 1992 when it reduced by 3.6%. Meanwhile, Nigeria’s population in poverty never reduced all through the same period; rather it increased four-fold.

Table 2: The Poor and the Core Poor by Year

Year	None Poor (%)	Mod. Poor (%)	Core Poor (%)
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1980	72.8	21.0	6.2
1985	53..7	34.2	12.1
1992	57.3	28.9	13.9
1996	34.4	36.3	29.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2005

In Table 2, we can see how the percentage of non-poor Nigerians was decreasing except in 1992; the percentage of moderate poor accelerated all through also except in 1992, while the percentage of the core poor increased from 6.2% in 1980 to 29.3% in 1996.

Table 3: Poverty Trends by Sector

Year	Urban (%) (%)	Rural
1980	17.2	28.3
1985	37.8	51.4
1992	37.5	46.0
1996	58.2	69.8

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2005

Between 1980 and 1996, the percentage of poverty by sector in both urban and rural areas, as shown in Table 3 above, increased continuously except in 1992.

Lastly, and heartbreakingly, Nigeria, despite all its poverty reduction programs, scored 0.391 in the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1998, ranking 142 out of the 174 countries surveyed. In 2000, Nigeria's HDI score was 0.439, with a rank of 151 out of 174 countries. In 2002, the HDI score was 0.466, with the position of 151 out of the 177 countries surveyed (Olotu et al., 2015). In terms of living standards, Nigeria ranked 152 out of 188 countries considered in 2016 (UN report). According to the same report, the unemployment rate reached 42%, with 80 million Nigerians living on \$1.25 a day, meaning they live below the poverty line (Olotu et al., 2015).

5. Reasons For The Acceleration Of Poverty In Nigeria Despite The Poverty Alleviation Programmes

History shows that every government in Nigeria has aimed to end poverty among Nigerians. Nevertheless, as the UN reported, 80 million Nigerians, roughly half of Nigeria's population, still live in extreme poverty. The following are some pivotal reasons why poverty has persisted in Nigeria despite the frequent launching of poverty alleviation programs:

- **Erraticness of Programs:** Launching poverty alleviation programs has become a ritual for the Nigerian government. As soon as one government leaves and a new one comes in, the programs and policies of the old regime are immediately abandoned, regardless of their potential success. This inconsistency makes it difficult to alleviate poverty effectively.
- **Corruption and Mismanagement:** Corruption in Nigeria is rampant. For example, the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) created under Abacha's regime and headed by General Muhammadu Buhari witnessed massive misappropriation. Reno (1999) notes,

"At the end of the PTF experiment, Nigeria's poverty and underdevelopment level remained the same, if not worse, before the establishment of the PTF. Dr Haroun Adamu's interim report on the activities of PTF shows that N135 billion out of the N146 billion was squandered, possibly through over-invoicing, over supplies, supplying expired materials, wrong project priorities, settling perceived troubles spots, like the army and the police, and blatant thievery".

Having all this in mind (i.e. the hyper-corrupt state of Nigeria) Chinua Achebe reacted by writing:

Nigeria is not a great country; it is one of the most disorderly nations in the world; it is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun; it is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that give the least value for money; it is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar...it is among the most unpleasant places on earth (Reno, 1999).

With the heartbreaking fund that has been set aside for the issue of poverty eradication in Nigeria (e.g. 2.6 billion nairas during Shagari's regime, and 500 billion nairas under Buhari's civilian regime), poverty should have been reduced to history in the country a long time ago. However, corruption and its corollary mismanagement/misappropriation of funds by politicians mostly did not (and will not) allow that.

- **Hypocrisy on the Part of the World Bank and IMF:** The adoption of SAP by Gen. Babangida, initiated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was intended to free Nigeria from poverty and dependency. However, SAP led to increased poverty, inflation, and dependency. During the SAP years, the naira

depreciated by up to 80% against the US dollar, and inflation rates fluctuated wildly, exacerbating poverty (Jaja et al., 2015).

- **Unnecessary Imitation:** Some poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria were copied from other countries without proper consideration of the Nigerian environment. For example, the establishment of the People's Bank under Babangida was copied from the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh without the necessary adjustments. Consequently, programs like the Better Life Programme (BLP), DFERRI, and People's Bank, despite significant investment, ended in failure and embarrassment (Jaja et al., 2015).

Other reasons for the failure of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria include a lack of clearly defined policy frameworks with proper guidelines, political interference, policy and macroeconomic dislocation, and political deception (Hussaini, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Based on what is presented in this paper, it becomes clear that there has been a long journey towards poverty eradication in Nigeria. The government and various internal and external organizations have made efforts to redeem Nigeria's vast population from the ignominious poverty they were (and are still) enduring. However, despite these efforts, as seen in the numerous poverty alleviation programs pursued in the country, poverty remains pervasive due to several issues that have consciously and unconsciously been caused by the implementers and the Nigerian society at large.

7. Recommendations

To mitigate poverty in Nigeria, the following recommendations, if examined and implemented, would be beneficial: Firstly, as the government disburses funds for poverty eradication, it should ensure frequent inquiries into how these funds are being utilized by those in charge of the programs to prevent looting and ensure proper utilization of resources. This should be done at least every three months. Secondly, the practice of abandoning programs and policies by each new regime should be halted or significantly reduced, as continuity is essential for success. Thirdly, there should be thorough examination and scrutiny of any policy or program aimed at poverty alleviation before its adoption in Nigeria, regardless of its success elsewhere, because each country has its unique circumstances. Additionally, there should be vigorous efforts towards the development of local industries and infrastructure, which would reduce dependency, unemployment, and, consequently, poverty. Furthermore, the government, along with non-governmental organizations and benevolent individuals, should strive to support able-bodied and skilled individuals in developing their talents and skills for the overall betterment of Nigeria. Skill acquisition programs should be taught with seriousness and dedication from the secondary school level to directly and indirectly reduce the unemployment rate, which is a significant cause of poverty. Lastly, providing basic education to all genders and tribes should be pursued with vigor to eradicate illiteracy in all its forms across every corner of the country.

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