

# An Assessment of Poverty Reduction Programmes in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The aim of the study is to evaluate the poverty reduction programme in Nigeria. Poverty is a multidimensional matter which cannot be only focusing on one sector of the economy, while poverty reduction programme should also be multidimensional in all sectors which can serve as emancipation of the poor. The study discovered that most of the programme implemented has not impact positively on the targeted poor people in Nigeria. However, policy inconsistent and mismanagement caused the programme not to become complete success, which has put 80% of citizens in absolute poverty. This study recommends that there is a need for effective monitoring mechanism of the programme and creation of enabling environment that can lead to creation of wealth and employment in the country.*

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**Keywords:** Poverty, Poverty Reduction Programmes, Nigeria

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## Introduction

Poverty reduction has been the concern of government all over the world. ‘Poverty anywhere constitutes a threat to prosperity’ (Nwachukwu & Onwubiko, 2008). Most developing countries have been ravaged by acute poverty of monumental proportion. The African continent generally and Nigeria in particular, have been devastated by misrule by some of her leaders, most of whom spearheaded the struggle for independence. As the emerging governments lacked capacity and resources to deal with the problems of development and international relations, their political leaders became overwhelmed by the severity of hunger disease illiteracy and poverty afflicting the citizens of countries of West African sub-region. In Nigeria, corruption, unemployment, unfavorable business environment, wrong implementation of privatization programs, wrong patterns of education, political instability, poor macroeconomic policies, incessant cases of inflation, harsh economic reforms leading to retrenchments, among others, are some of the main causes of poverty (Obadan, 1996)

Poverty has always been a problem because the concept of poverty means different things to different people or different of people. According to UN (1998), poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

Nigerian had been hit by the problem of poverty and poverty reduction programmes. This may be attributed to a number of factors, such as mismanagement of human and material resources, indiscipline, lack of political will by the government of the country, from the beginning to present day. Rather than tackle development and poverty reduction programme in the society, our policy makers and politicians have appeared to have converted leadership positions and public offices into avenues of squander mania, embezzlement, corruption, money laundering abroad, to the neglect of the suffering people and development. Due to result of these, underdevelopment and poverty in the land, the country has woken up to witness anti-social activities and vices like armed robbery, cultism, drug trafficking, prostitution, child labour and trafficking, ritual killings, political thuggery and assassinations, etc. This phenomenon has left the country highly underdeveloped socially, economically and technologically. This has created a situation of mass graduate unemployment and other social vices articulated from the foregoing. Highly skilled trained manpower and infrastructure facilities are either under-utilized or non-existent. The various government programmes aimed at reducing poverty have not stood the test of time, as they have not actually impacted positively on the people.

There are some many questions asked by many Nigerians on how the various poverty reduction programmes have impacted on the people. The study focus on the assessment of poverty reduction programme put in place by successive governments and how it have impacted positively or negatively on the people of Nigeria. To actualize this, the researcher concentrate on poverty reduction programmes on the basis of rural people which have over 70% of Nigeria population and prescribe realistic poverty reduction programmes that would lift the people out of the poverty scourge. The various poverty reduction programmes measures have been examined as models of development.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

According to Nwachukwu and Onwubiko (2008) scholars have come to categorize the definition of poverty into two: absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a situation where an individual lacks resources necessary to sustain him or herself. Such an individual lacks the basic human needs of food, shelter, and clothing. This definition of poverty in terms of subsistence is predominantly used by scholars in the analysis of poverty in Africa and in the developing countries in general. On the other hand, relative poverty refers to a situation where an individual lacks the necessary resources when compared with other members of the society such that this limits or prevents him from partaking in the normal and desirable activities of life that exists in such a society. It has been argued that poverty takes many forms. According to UN

(1995), Overall poverty takes various forms, this including “lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life. It occurs in all countries: as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets (UN, 1995). A direct effect of poverty can be seen in the virtual paucity of basic infrastructure and social amenities such as roads, health, educational institutions, water supply and other social services. Overt poverty shows up among the under nourished population, particularly the vulnerable groups, most of them children and women (Agena, 2008).

Danaan (2018) explores the theoretical nature of poverty in Nigeria. The study argues that poverty is complex and multidimensional phenomena because the factors that affect it cut across the social, psychological, economic and cultural spheres of existence. The study suggests the knowledge of these factors that causes poverty in creating pro-poor strategies and a hydra-headed method of addressing its effect increasingly and excellently. The paper argues that empowering people to develop resilience to manage and overcome it within the range of their resources and capabilities is a means of reducing poverty.

Fosu (2017) examined the role of income inequality in the transformation of economic growth to poverty reduction using data for both country specific and regional developing countries from the early 1990s. Poverty headcount ratios of 1.25 USD and 2.50 USD per day were used. The study found that the major factor driving increase and decline in poverty is the average income growth. Also, evidence showed that in states where the major driver of poverty reduction has been growth there is an opinion that more progress can be achieved when there is even distribution of income.

Okonkwo (2015) examined the impact of government poverty alleviation programmes in the south east zone of Nigeria. The study employed primary data which was collected using questionnaire of the alternative response form. The researcher employed chi-square statistic to analyze data generated in the survey. The study revealed that poverty alleviation programmes of government have no significant impact in the south east zone. Hence, the study concludes among others that, the government poverty alleviation programmes did not have significant impact on the poverty needs of the south-east zone. The study recommended among others that sustainable poverty reduction strategy should not focus narrowly on social welfare measures, rather assets redistribution and creation of incentive structures that can enhance the rate and pattern of economic growth should be seen as essential component.

Omemma and Okafor (2014). The evaluation of the implementation of national poverty reduction programme in Enugu State of Nigeria. Using cross-sectional and exploratory methods of data collection and analysis, the study discovered that, compared to most states in other parts of the country, Enugu State has a low poverty profile owing to the relative positive impact of the

implementation of poverty alleviation programme. Nevertheless, policy inconsistency and mismanagement deny the programme from becoming a total success; hence the existence of a larger number of citizens that are in absolute poverty. It is therefore suggested that the way out of the ineffective poverty reduction programme in Enugu State is the effective monitoring mechanism and creation of an enabling environment for wealth creation and employment generation.

Kolawole (2021). Examine poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. The demand derived approach perspective. The review showed that the poverty alleviation measures implemented so far have focused more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches. Most of the poverty alleviation strategies adopted in Nigeria were well focused on rural areas and agricultural sector. It was observed that most of these programmes before and during Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) were supply driven which could not meet the needs of the poor and so they had little effect in alleviating poverty. After SAP, some programmes implemented used demand driven approach to meet the target poor. Although, poverty reduced due to this approach but the very poor (vulnerable) were not targeted in some of these programmes. This paper recommended that there should be prevention of elite capture through proper targeting in any project.

Taiwo and Agwu (2016). Examine the problems and prospects of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. Several poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, initiated by both the Government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), aimed at combating and alleviating poverty, have been found not to be successful. Instead of reducing the incidence of poverty, which is their sole aim, these programmes tend to serve as means for draining the national resources due to the pursuit of parochial interests, as a result fostering corruption and dishonesty. For a successful implementation of these programmes, the government and the implementation agencies must take a more proactive approach and specifically look into the area of poor management and poor accountability, among staff. Also poverty is a multidimensional issue, hence cannot be fought focusing only on one sector of the economy, strategies for poverty reduction must also be multidimensional, focusing on all sectors, as well as, on the emancipation of the poor. Strengthen the existing poverty alleviation strategies and ensuring good management could be one major way towards the effective performance of existing poverty alleviation programmes.

## **2.1 Approaches to Poverty Reduction Programme**

The four approaches to poverty reduction programme which include Economic Growth Approach, Basic Needs Approach, Rural Development Approach and Target Approach (Edralin, Tibon and Tugas, 2015).

**(a) Economic Growth Approach:** This approach focuses on capital formation as it relates to capital stock and human capital. Human capital formation has to do with education, health, nutrition and housing needs of labour. This is obvious from the fact that investments in these sources of human capital improve the quality of labour and thus its productivity (Misana, 1995; Sazama and Young, 2006; Edralin, et.al., 2015). Hence, to ensure growth that takes care of poverty, the share of human capital as a source of growth in output has to be accorded the rightful place.

**(b) Basic Needs Approach:** This has to do with provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care, basic education, transportation etc. unless there is proper targeting, this approach may not directly impact on the poor because of their inherent disadvantage in terms of political power and the ability to influence the choice and location of government programmes and projects (Ogwumike, 2002).

**(c) Rural Development Approach:** This approach sees the rural sector as a unique sector in terms of poverty reduction. This is because majority of the poor in developing countries live in this sector. In addition, the level of paid employment in this sector is very minimal. Hence, traditional measures of alleviating poverty may not easily work in the rural sector without radical changes in the assets ownership structure, credit structure, etc. Emphasis in this approach to development has focused on the integrated approach to rural development. This approach recognizes that poverty is multi-dimensional and therefore, requires a multi-pronged approach. The approach aims at the provision of basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, safe drinking water, education, health care, employment and income generating opportunities to the rural dwellers in general and the poor in particular. One basic problem with this approach to poverty reduction is that it is difficult to focus attention on the real poor given that poverty in the rural area is pervasive. In other words it makes targeting of poverty reduction programmes very difficult (Kolawole, 2021).

**(d) Target Approach:** This approach favours the directing of poverty alleviation programmes to specific groups within the country. This approach includes such programmes as Social Safety Nets, Micro Credits, and School Meal programme (Oladimeji and Abiola, 1998). This approach requires proper identification of the target group so as to minimize leakages. Globally, in recent times the concern over increasing income inequality and poverty levels especially in the developing countries and the need for its alleviation as a means of improving the standard of living of the people has led to shifting from Supply Driven Approach to Demand Driven approach through the conceptualization and implementation of various Community Driven Development (CDD) programmes. Since targeting the poor has been one of the challenges of development and emergency response programmes (Farrington and Salter, 2006), it is argued that using CDDs could improve targeting since the CDDs use better local knowledge to define and identify the targeted groups (Mansuri and Rao, 2004).

### 2.3 Poverty Reduction Programmes in Nigeria

Successive Federal Governments of Nigeria had initiated several programmes, which were aimed at reducing and alleviating rural poverty. Some of these programmes as noted since the 70s include the OFN, Green Revolution, DFRRI, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support (FSP), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Millennium Development Goal, Sustainable Development Goal, Seven Points Agenda, SURE P, and Npower among others. In view of this, these programme had minimal impact on the people. These programmes had not succeed as a result of the following challenges; Poor coordination of activities; dwindling resources flow; failure to build in sustainability mechanisms; Lack of complementary efforts from beneficiaries; poor coordination leading to low accountability and avoidable disharmonisation of policies; lack of well articulated policy for poverty eradication; lack of sustainability of programme and projects; absence of achievable target setting; absence of



monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment; absence of effective coordination and collaboration between the agencies of government and among the three tiers of government and duplication of functions resulting in unnecessary rivalry among institutions (Orji, 2005).

## **2.4 The Analysis of Poverty in Nigeria**

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the seventh world-wide with an estimated population of over 200 million in 2020 (Population Reference Bureau, 2017; Worldometer, 2020) and 8<sup>th</sup> as the largest exporter of crude oil in the world with many other resources. Nigeria as at 2018 ranks low on human development index, 158<sup>th</sup> out of 189<sup>th</sup> countries and 39.1% of her population living below income poverty line of US\$1.90 a day despite enormous resources, far below other sub-Saharan African countries like Rwanda 60%, Zambia 64.4% and Mozambique 68.7% (UNDP, 2018; UNDP, 2016). The June report of 2018 World Poverty Clock (2018) indicated that 86.9 million people in Nigeria spend less than 1.90 USD per day and while as at February 2019, there was an addition of over 3 million people that slipped into poverty making over 91 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty. Compared to some other African countries, Nigeria has the largest proportion of people living in extreme poverty (86.9) million while Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia have about 19.9 million, 14.7 million, 13.8 million and 9.5 million people respectively living in extreme poverty (Worldwide Poverty Clock, 2018).

According to Brookings Institution annual report (2018), Nigeria categorized as one of the poorest countries in the world above India. Prior to independence in Nigeria (1960), the level of poverty was really low. However, 60 years after gaining independence, Nigeria rose from a low poverty level to become one of the countries with the highest incidence of poverty in the world today. Nigeria did not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) poverty targets by 2015 in spite of the measures initiated by successive administration to reduce poverty since 1980. No matter how hard successive governments both military and democratic have tried to reduce poverty, it has been to no avail. Thus, poverty is a major impediment to Nigeria's socio-economic development and has been persevered despite various interventions (Danaan, 2018).

## **3.0 Research Methodology**

Data collected (through interviews, review documents and observations) was analyzed qualitatively by means of content analysis. The large volume of data was coded and classified in order to relate it to the research question, i.e. how has the government poverty reduction programmes impacted on livelihoods in the society. Through this process of categorization and indexing, important features of the programmes were identified and their impact on livelihoods explored. The justification for the use of qualitative method is the research focus on evaluating impact and relevance of the programme. However, this method is the paper's focus on evaluating impact and relevance of the programme. Hence, this method offers more diversity in responses and conveys a richness and intensity of detail in a way that quantitative research cannot. It also allows for a much more detailed investigation of the major issues involved in the programmes and answers questions of meaning, such as, who are the beneficiaries of the programme, how and why are they successful. Finally, the qualitative methods sheds light on what factors are involved and how individuals react or respond differently to each other in Nigeria.

#### 4.0 Findings

The Failure of government poverty reduction programmes can be traced to the combined effects of inadequate mobilization of the target group, lack of commitment on the part of government agencies, outright mismanagement and embezzlement of funds, inconsistency as well as politicization of the programmes meant for poverty reduction. As government fund programmes, it does not emphasize on monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the officers operating the system than pumping money into it. In essence, government only showed concern for poverty reduction indirectly. However, the programmes could not be sustained because of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of the poor people in those programmes. The programmes created opportunities for the ruling class to appropriate national funds. They were appointed Board members as well as given fat contracts in the process.

#### 5.0 Conclusion & Recommendation

Poverty has weighty consequences on the poor, the family and on the society. Once poverty is not broken, it breeds vicious poverty at higher level. The study attempted to examine poverty reduction programme in Nigeria. Poverty reduction programme is to benefit the poor by reducing their poverty but due to approach employed by government in the implementation of these programmes majority of them failed to address poverty. Most beneficiaries were not motivated to identify themselves sufficiently with the successful implementation of the programmes. As government fund programmes, it does not emphasize on monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the officers operating the system than pumping money into it. Therefore, there is a need for proper monitoring and supervising of these programmes. Also, government needs to fight corruption at all level.

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