THE CHALLENGES OF ENDING RURAL POVERTY: AN APPRAISAL OF NATIONAL POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMME (NAPEP)

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Abstract
One of the fundamental problem facing our country today is how to alleviate poverty at the grassroot level where over 70% of Nigerians live. Though Nigeria is a country blessed with abundant mineral and human resources many Nigerians still find it difficult to live above poverty level. This has led to children of school age instead of being in school, hawk goods, such as sachet water, bread, groundnut, orange etc, and our young graduates roam the streets without employment. The consequences of the above situation is lack of purchasing power, exposure to risk, high mortality rate, low life expectancy, and insufficient access to social and economic services. In a bid to reduce poverty at the grassroot, the federal government of Nigeria in the year 2000, introduced NAPEP as a tool for alleviating poverty at the grassroot but despite this measure taken by the government, poverty at the grassroot in Nigeria is still on the increase. This paper therefore argues that factors such as poor targeting mechanisms, failure to focus on the poor, policy inconsistency, corruption, politics of poverty, bad governance etc posed a serious set back at alleviating poverty at the grassroot. To ensure the realization of the objective, secondary sources of data was used. The paper therefore suggests an effective framework for alleviating poverty through strong political will on the part of the leaders, accountability, fight against corruption, diversification of the economy and subsidizing of agricultural products among others.

Key words: poverty, grassroots, corruption, government, alleviation.

Introduction
Nigeria is a federal Republic of 36 states and a federal capital territory, with a population of about 150 million people. This means that Nigeria is one of the most populous country in the world. The country is also made up of 774 local government areas. At least, about 70% of the
Nigerian population reside in the rural areas and spend their livelihoods there. It is important to state that majority of these rural dwellers depends on subsistence farming as the only means of livelihood while others are artisans, traders and government employees (Ewium, 2010). One common feature of the Nigerian rural areas is poverty which is on the high increase. The persistence and pervasiveness of poverty in the rural areas in Nigeria remains one of the most pressing problems confronting rural governance in Nigeria today. Its effect therefore includes lack and deprivation of the basic necessities of life. Ajayi (2009) however laments that poverty is a ranging economic and social phenomenon that manifests in the inability of the victims to acquire the basic necessities of life. He however argued that it goes beyond material deprivation to include insecurity, vulnerability and exposure to risks, shock and stress. To be specific the degree of poverty in the rural areas in Nigeria is manifested in the inability of the rural dwellers not having enough food to eat, poor drinking water, low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, low employment opportunities, lack of adequate health care, lack of basic infrastructure, lack of participation in taking major decision that affects their life, high rate of infant mortality, poor nutrition, poor housing, and total government neglect even though those in the rural areas contribute their own quota towards attaining national development. This is because they pay their taxes, rates, levies and all other legitimate fees as stipulated by the government of the day. According to Nwaobi (2003) the country is rich but the people are poor. As pointed by Omotola (2008) Nigeria is richly endowed and the country's wealth potentials manifest in the forms of natural, geographical and socio-economic factors, and with that, Nigeria should be one of the richest countries in the world which shall have no business with extreme poverty. On the contrary, Okpe and Abu (2009) laments that Nigeria had witnessed a very high increase in the level of poverty. According to the UNDP Report (2010) the Nigerian population in poverty is given as 68.7 million. This is a very worrisome situation owing to over $300billion that accrues to the Nigeria government from the sale of oil and gas. Despite all these problems caused by the increasing rate of poverty, the federal government of Nigeria went ahead to deregulate the economy. Deregulation was a move to increase the price of petroleum products which today is N97 per litre as against the earlier plan by the government to increase it to 141 naira per litre which triggered of mass protest and strike by the NLC. The negative ripple effects are being felt by the rural poor. However, since independence in 1960, governments at all levels in Nigeria had pursued one poverty alleviation strategy or the other in a bid to attain the twin goal of sustainable democracy and economic prosperity. In an attempt to fight extreme poverty and hunger in the country, the federal government of Nigeria in 1999 established poverty alleviation programme (PAP) which later transformed to National Poverty Eradication Programme in 2001 with the sole aim of wiping out poverty from Nigeria by the year 2010. The policy was aimed at assuring Nigerians that unemployment, poor educational system, lack of portable water, poor power generation and supply, poor health system, lack of basic infrastructure and insecurity of lives and property will be a thing of the past. Nevertheless, with all these promises, after about 10 years of implementation, it appears that the situation is not better than what it was before the advent of civilian government in 1999 just like various poverty alleviation strategies which was adopted by various successive governments in Nigeria whose level of social impact leaves much to be desired. In view of this ugly situation for the continuous
increase in the level of poverty in the country, despite government efforts at eradicating it. Ovwasa (2000) Adesopo, (2000) Omotola (2008) all argued that, all these programmes have failed to achieve the objectives for which they were established by the government. The main objective of this paper is to critically examine those factors which hindered NAPEP from achieving its objective of drastically reducing extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria despite the huge amount of money government injected into the programme, with a view to recommend practical solutions.

However, for proper understanding, the paper is divided into the following subthemes: The meaning of the concept poverty; and Rural poverty. Overview of past poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria, NAPEP as a tool for alleviating poverty at the grassroot, an appraisal, strategies for enhancing poverty reduction programme in Nigeria. Meaning of Poverty: Poverty has no universally accepted definition as many scholars viewed it from different perspectives. This is because, it is a very complex universal phenomenon which has many dimensions. According to Agumagu (2000) poverty is of different forms such as spiritual poverty, material poverty, and also it has economic, social, political, physical and psychological dimensions. Hault (1969) defines poverty as (a). scarcity of the means of subsistence, and (b) a level of living that is below a particular minimum standards. Devitt (1977) defines rural poverty as the shortage of needed materials and as part of a syndrome which includes low status in the community, lack of influence, economic and political dependence, insecure or irregular sources of income, a limited range of economic and social opportunities. According to Ajayi (2001) rural poverty entails having a little opportunity of communicating or understanding of the world beyond the local or immediate communities and a mistrust for its representatives, a tendency to associate innovations with high risk and to avoid both, and a pre-occupation with immediate issues, such as hunger, shelter, tax arrears and various carnal pleasures.

Ogunna (2007) defines poverty as the absence of money and material which enable the individual to sustain himself and live a good life. This means that a poor person is living far below average in the community. As a result of this Abiola and Olapopa (2008) argued that the scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an undeniable fact which results in hunger, ignorance, disease, malnutrition, unemployment, poor access to credit facilities, and low life expectancy as well as general level of human hopelessness. According to World Bank report (2002) poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report however showed some minimum level of consumption so as to show the practical aspect of poverty such as lack of access to resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of political freedom and voice, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization.

In view of the above, the United Nations Human Development (2002) pointed some indices as a yardstick for measuring poverty such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrollment ratio and number of persons per physician. However, Hettné (2002) classified poverty into five types which includes (a) absolute poverty which occurs when an individual live in a state of deprivation as a result of meager income or lack of access to basic
human needs such as food, shelter, safe water, sanitation, health, education and information, (b) Relative poverty which refers to the position of household or individual compared. This is measured using three major ways such as the low income family statistics, through income and also disposable income (c) Chronic/Structural poverty which means that poverty is persistent or long term. The causes according to him are more permanent and it depends on a lot of factors such as lack of skill for gainful employment, socio-political and cultural factors (d) Conjecture transitory which implies that poverty is temporary or short term and are caused by such factors as natural or man-made disasters for example wars and environmental degradation or are caused by some policy changes which may lead to loss of employment (e) Spatial or Location Poverty which may occur as a result of existence of ghettos, slums and shanties in metropolitan cities and may be characterized by environmental degradation, lack of provision of welfare services, social deprivation, low per-capita income, poor accommodation and poor conditions of living of the greater number of people. Ajayi (2009) however lamented that rural poverty is not just a manifestation of lack of employment and liquidity but that of prevalence of a pervasive spread of such nutritionally preventable diseases such as kwashiorkor, inability to afford simple preventive and curative health services, illiteracy and widespread social vices such as petty stealing and daring crimes. He also posited that denial of workers of a minimum realistic living wage just like the governors of the 36 states of the federation that denied the Nigerian workers the payment of the new national minimum wage approved by the federal government. According to Sen (1992), he argued that poverty is not a natural phenomenon with a larger frame of inequality problems but that poverty can be eliminated if people are enabled to become autonomous from needs. He pointed out that sustainable development can never be attained by any nation where majority of the population are subjected to a condition of dependency.

Manning (2007) while writing on the ways by which poverty could be reduced argued that rapid and sustained poverty reduction requires "pro-poor growth", that means, a poverty alleviation strategy that will enable both men and women to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. This therefore implies that growth should cut-across all sectors and regions and must include the large part of the workforce that make up the poor men and women. He also added that all policies for sustaining growths such as those aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, promoting democratic and effective governance should be geared towards increasing poor people's incentives, opportunities and capabilities for employment so that they can participate and also benefit from the growth. In order to ensure that the poor would participate in and benefit from the growth process, governments at all levels should enhance development of the agricultural and infrastructural sector so as to expand the economic activities of the majority poor. To achieve this, government policies should be geared towards addressing all challenges in infrastructural development, research and development education and land reforms as this will bring about a sustained improvement in the living standards of the poor in Nigeria.

**Nature and Dimensions of Poverty in Nigeria**

Poverty is a multidimensional concept. According to Development Assistance Committee Report (2001) Quoted in Segum (2010) poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation that relates to human capabilities including consumption and food, security, health, education, rights, voice, security, dignity, and decent work. To Ajayi, (2009) poverty includes not having enough
food to eat, poor drinking water, poor nutrition, unfit housing, high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy, poor environmental condition, low level of energy consumption, low educational opportunities, poor health care system, lack of all forms of basic infrastructure and lack of active participation of the people in taking decisions that affects their life. To him poverty afflicts both the individuals and the environment. Obadan (1996) opined that whether poverty is measured in absolute or relative terms that poverty is more prevalent in the rural areas of Nigeria. He however argued that both rural and urban areas share similar poverty characteristics as certain peculiar features arise from either the relative intensity of socio-economic deprivation in the rural areas or problems of rapid urbanization. However, the nature and degree of poverty in Nigeria are shown by such social indicators according to Zama (2000) as the prevalence of high illiteracy level, poor health condition, poor nutrition, poor housing and water, poor sanitation and lack of access to credit facilities.

Aigbokhan (2000) however opined that poverty in Nigeria is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. UNDP report (2010) posited that between 1980 and 1996 that the percentage in Nigeria rose from 6.2 percent to 29.3% and however reduces to 22.0% in 2004. Omotola (2008) argued that about 70% of the Nigerian population lives in abject poverty. The World Bank (2008) report stated that in 2004, that the urban population in Nigeria which have access to water was 67%, while in the rural areas where majority of Nigerians reside is 31%. In the area of sanitation, he posited that 53% of the urban population has access to sanitation services while in the rural areas it was only 36%. This however showed that those in the rural areas in Nigeria live in very hostile environments compared to those in the cities. With this there is high incidence of diseases in the rural areas. To Earth Trends (2003) 70.2% of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1 a day, while 90.8% lives on less than $2 a day. Segun (2010) posited that the total income earned by the richest 20% of the Nigerian population is 55.7% while the total income earned by the poorest 20% is 4.4 percent. This however showed that poverty is on the high increase in Nigeria while the gap between the poor and the rich continued to widen.

Ugo and Ukpere (2009) however lamented that Nigeria is a shadow of its promises in 1960 when it ranked higher than a number of today's leading nations in all major development indices. This they attributed to a devastated socio-economic and political environment in Nigeria which they said is caused by poor management of the Nations resources by our political locusts called our rulers. They however expressed worry that about 54.4% of Nigerian citizens go to bed daily hungry, and where over 5 million youths are unemployed and a situation where government is not doing anything to take care of the unemployed majority, people therefore devise any strategy or means so as to survive and this had resulted to high rate of crime in the society. It is however reported that over 7 million children of school age are out of school and about 201 out of 1000 Nigerian children are at the risk of loosing their lives before the age of 5yrs, while about 800 out of 100,000 women in Nigeria die during child birth. As a result of increasing rate of poverty in the country prostitution, child trafficking and other forms of child labour is on the increase. Ukedeh (2003) however observed that the extremely poor in Nigeria are found in the rural areas and more than two-third of them live on the farms. He however lamented that the Nigerian rural areas are deprived of basic needs of life such as food, clothing, housing, medical care, education,
transport facilities, recreation centres, credit facilities and horizon for self improvement. Action Aid Nigeria (2009) opined that even though Nigeria is the eight largest oil producing country in the world, it harbours the largest population of poor people in sub-Saharan Africa and as such the human development index ranked Nigeria 158th in the world. Nevertheless, contrary to what is expected since Nigeria is one of the largest oil producing state, there is high income inequality among the populace with the wealth of the nation being concentrated in the hands of few individuals which makes it possible for the rich to be richer and the poor poorer. This is an ugly trend which our leaders must address.

Overview of Poverty Alleviation Strategies in the Past
According to World Bank report (2002) poverty is seen as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living while Aluko (1995) view it as lack of command over basic consumption needs, this arises due to inadequate consumption level for example lack of sufficient-food, clothing and shelter. Agbi (2011) opined that poverty in Nigeria is characterized by hunger, homelessness, diseases, malnutrition, high child mortality rate, family disintegration, high rate of unemployment, human trafficking, child labour, kidnapping, sexual assault, drug abuse, prostitution and high mortality rate among others. She however argued that while majority of Nigerian's wallow in abject poverty, very few individuals live in opulence.

However, in a bid to reduce the increasing rate of poverty in the country various government has adopted one poverty alleviation measure or the other but just like every other thing in Nigeria, poverty alleviation programmes have been handled with so much noise that they have yielded little or no result (Agbi 2011). By way of illustration, the government of Yakubu Gowon, 1972 set up the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) aimed at ensuring adequate funding of Agricultural production in the country and in 1976, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo initiated the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which also was geared towards encouraging food production and food security in Nigeria yet the two programmes did not achieve its objectives. On assumption of office in 1979, as a civilian president of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Shagari established the Green Revolution Programme. The programme was aimed at providing more food for Nigerians by reducing importation of food through increasing crop and fibre productions but the programme of empowering the poor farmers by providing them with modern agricultural facilities they needed rather produced overnight elitist farmers who had no business with farming. With the programme, both serving and retired army officers, Senior Civil Servants, business men and politicians used their influence to acquire areas of land and certificate of occupancy in the pretence of wanting to establish a farm.

The programme ended up by widening the gap between the rich and the poor where the rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer. In 1986, General Babangida as Nigerian's Military Head of State, introduced the People's bank aimed at offering soft loans to the masses, and the Directorate of Foods, Roads, and Rural infrastructure which aimed at providing some basic infrastructures to the people on the rural areas so as to reduce rural-urban migration. The
programme failed to achieve its objective as it encouraged the diversion of public funds into private pockets. The regime also introduced structural adjustment programme (SAP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and like every other programme, it failed also to alleviate the suffering of the Nigerian masses as it worsened the socio-economic problem of the people by encouraging income inequality, unequal access to food, shelter, education, health and other necessities of life. However in 1993, Late General Sani Abacha in an attempt to alleviate poverty in Nigeria introduced the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) which gulped over 7 billion without achieving the objectives. Also, the wife of the then President Mrs. Maryam Babangida introduced the Better Life for Rural Women and in 1993 also, the Wife of the Late Sani Abacha introduced the Family Support Programme, all are aimed at alleviating poverty on the assumption that women in Nigeria should have a better deal in the national economy as a result of their contribution towards the growth of the nation as small scale entrepreneurs like every other programme, the programme only improved the life of their friends and associates while majority of Nigerians wallow in abject poverty.

NAPEP as a Tool for Alleviating Poverty at the Grassroots: An Appraisal

On assumption of office in 1999, the former Nigerian president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the National Poverty Eradication Programme which came into being in 2001 with the sole aim of eradicating poverty in Nigeria by 2010. BY the policy the president assured Nigerians that unemployment, poor educational system, lack of portable water, poor power generation and supply, poor health care system, lack of basic infrastructure and general insecurity of life and property of all Nigerians will be a thing of the past. Up till today, NAPEP had existed for over 10 years of its implementation but yet, not much progress has been recorded as the situation is still the same if not worse. Today, Nigerians cannot boast of potable water, better health care system, employment generation, security of life and property, etc and a lot of factors are responsible for the inability of NAPEP to achieve its objective of alleviating poverty since its inception. These factors are:

Corruption: Corruption has afflicted all segments of the Nigerian society, it means the diversion of revenue for the betterment of the entire masses to the gain of individuals at the expense of the masses. Various forms of corrupt practices in the implementation of NAPEP programmes in Nigeria are manifested in such areas as project finances, diversion of resources, and conversion of public funds to private uses (Okoye and Onyeukwu, 2007). Sometimes some of the programmes are established by various governments in Nigeria as a way of compensating all political associates who have in one way or the other helped them to win an election. As with the case of the National Poverty Eradication Programme, there is total lack of accountability and transparency in the implementation of NAPEP programme, and as a conduct-pipe for draining National resources and as a result poverty is on the high increase in Nigeria, the programme has failed to achieve the purpose for which it was established.

Lack of Sincerity: There is general lack of sincerity of purpose among our leaders who design and implement various poverty alleviation programmes since Nigeria’s independence in 1960 as some of them are not committed to the goals of eradicating poverty in Nigeria (Ogunna, 2007).
He however posited that since our leaders lack adequate knowledge of the problems of the poor in Nigeria, it however becomes very difficult for them to achieve the objective. In designing the programmes for eradicating poverty in Nigeria, our leaders are only interested in what they will get from the programme instead of using the programme to help the poor in the society.

Poor Implementation: One of the major challenges which hinder the achievement of objectives of the entire poverty eradication programme in Nigeria including NAPEP is the poor management of resources with its poor maintenance culture common among Nigerians. With this therefore, facilities are either not completed or broken down and as well being abandoned. Also lack of involvement of the target group via the poor in both the formulation and implementation of the programmes had posed a serious set back for NAPEP. The programme lacks poor planning, maladministration, poor funding, embezzlement of available fund etc.

Programme Inconsistency: The efficacy of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) have been undermined as a result of constant changes in policy and inconsistent implementation, which hinders the attainment of its objectives. Also another problem which hinders NAPEP from helping to reduce poverty in Nigeria is that the top management officials of NAPEP are full time politicians who are only loyal to those who appointed them, and not to utilize the available resources to impact on the lives of the poor in Nigeria.

Politics of Poverty: According to Ovwasa (2000) the politics of poverty is one of the major problems militating against NAPEP in its bid to help reduce poverty in Nigeria. This is because; those who were bestowed with the responsibility of alleviating poverty are the non poor and are the source of the problem. Adesopo (2008) however lamented that the condition of the poor people in Nigeria have been worsened by the excessive power of those in authority, a situation where a few privileged individual benefit from state generosity, at the expense of the majority who wallow in abject poverty.

Bad Governance: Bad governance is another problem that hinders NAPEP from alleviating poverty in Nigeria. The UNDP (2010) report posited that the GDP growths rate in Nigeria is a complete opposite of governance indicators, what is obtainable in Nigeria is an era of violence, instability, inconsistency of government policies, government inefficiency, and the recent state of terrorism by members of Boko Haram which hinders economic and political stability of the country. This therefore posed a serious challenge to development and poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria.

Conclusion
An examination of certain indicators of performance however shows that both domestic and international poverty reduction strategies have not been effective in addressing the problems of poverty and hence had insignificant impact on the living standards of the poor in Nigeria. The general consideration of these measures shows that the strategies were badly implemented and even had no particular focus on the poor in terms of design and implementation. However, for
the government poverty alleviation programmes such as NAPEP to be effective in reducing poverty, the poor must be identified and targeted and the policies to be adopted should be consistent and sustainable. There is need to build the assets of poor people and address assets inequality across gender, ethnic, racial and social divides.

The infrastructures for the poor should be provided in the rural areas so also access to information. Efforts should be made to formulate an approach to helping poor people to manage risk. By this, government should design national systems for social risk management and addressing civil conflicts. There is need for strong political commitment to the poverty reduction goal, as well as depolitization of poverty alleviation programmes and projects.

Recommendations

Having examined some of the factors that have hindered the National Poverty Alleviation programme of the federal government of Nigeria in a bid to reduce poverty, the following recommendations are made:

The Nigerian leaders at the National, State and Local government levels should have a strong political will and commitment by providing the needed institutional strategy for checking the influence of elites and bureaucratic officials in the implementation of laudable government programmes on poverty alleviation. This became necessary because sometimes the benefits to be derived from these programmes are either hijacked or truncated by these social forces. In order to achieve the objective of reducing poverty in Nigeria, the personnel of the agencies charged with the responsibility of implementing these programmes should be accountable to the people and not to the person that appointed them. Government should strengthen the role of Anti-Corruption agencies in order to ensure that funds set aside for full implementation of these programmes are not diverted into personal pockets. Government should ensure adequate budgeting and prompt release of fund. All poverty alleviation programmes of the government should be targeted at the poor in articulation, implementation and monitoring. Government should also include rural community based organizations in policy initiation and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Adoption of bottom-up approach to all programme implementation and monitoring.

References


