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Full Length Research Paper

Appraising the trend of policy on poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria with emphasis on a National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

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Poverty is multi-dimensional. It is characterised by lack of purchasing power, exposure to risk, malnutrition, high mortality rate, low life expectancy, insufficient access to social and economic services, etc. Poverty in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and is blamed on non-clear government social policies. Across the world, government plays a key role in poverty alleviation. In the case of Nigeria, the inability of successive governments to streamlined and harness the enormous potentials for improved service delivery in all the existing structures of poverty eradication has resulted into persistent poverty. The paper seeks to explore the extent to which public policies have affected the poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria with special emphasis on National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

Key words: Poverty, alleviation, globalization, eradication.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a social problem in which a country is faced with cultural, social, political, economic and environmen-tal deprivations. In other words, it is a state of involuntary deprivation to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected. In recent times, scholars have pointed out that there are reinforcing vicious circles that keep families, regions and countries poor and unable to contribute to national growth (Perry et al., 2006; Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). In developing countries, poverty level has been on the increase. In Nigeria, for example, the situation has worsened since the late 1990s and can
be best described as “inflammable”. As Nnamani (2003:60) puts it poverty in Nigeria has reached an alar-ming level and has been rising steadily not exponentially.

Aware of the grave consequences of poverty, succes-sive Nigerian governments have designed and implemented numerous policies to tackle the scourge.

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However, every effort towards this direction has not yielded the expected results. Some believe that bad governance, corruption, low productivity, unemployment, debt-burden and conflicts are associated to failure of poverty eradication. Others attributed the high level of poverty to macro-economic distortion, globalisation, high population growth rate and poor human resources development. It is generally believed that acute poverty can be reduced or eradicated through effective policy measure and that is the target of this paper.

The paper raises some fundamental questions concerning the impact of policy and its sustenance to poverty alleviation. What are the various policy measures adopted by the past governments in Nigeria that were directed to poverty alleviation and how they have impacted on the provision of social services? What are the mechanizing and processes for bringing together various agencies to cooperate around poverty alleviation objectives. How does the NAPEP designed and strategies strengthen to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) of the federal government? This paper attempts to address some of these issues.
on many fronts, engaging both physical and non-physical

challenges. Poverty reduction policies must integrate all.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section I stands for the introduction while section II deals with the conceptual and theoretical issues. Then, section III surveys the indices of poverty in Nigeria and section IV evaluates the various policies including NAPEP and their impacts on poverty eradication. The paper ends in section V with suggestions and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

There is no universally accepted definition of poverty. At same time, there is always the difficulty in deciding where to draw the line between the "poor" and the "non poor". According to World Bank Report (2002), poverty is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. The report constructed some indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of poverty. These include 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, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, political discrimination and marginalization. Similarly, the United Nations Human Development (UNHD) has introduced the use of such other indices such as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrolment ratio and number of persons per physician to measure poverty in a country (UNDP HDI:2002).

Aluko (1995) refers to poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs. There is an inadequate level of consumption such as rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter. He notes that the conventional notion depicts poverty as a condition in which people are below a specific minimum income level and are unable to provide or satisfy the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living. The explanation, however, failed to provide the graphic picture of those who are poor, how to change their conditions and what to do.

According to Shaffer (2001:9) the concept of poverty has undergone four changes over the past decade. First, there has been a shift from a physiological model of deprivation to a social model of deprivation. The social model is about incorporating issues of political and economic rights and social justice into the anti-poverty programmatic framework. Second, there has been renewed emphasis placed on the concept of vulnerability and its relationship to poverty. Third, the concept of inequality, and its relationship to poverty has re-emerged as a central concern. Fourth, the idea that poverty should be conceptualised as the violation of basic human rights has been painstakingly argued by UN system agencies.

Similarly, Brinkerhoff and Crossby (2002) believe that meaningful onslaught against poverty must be focused these dimensions in order to be seen and complete. Efforts and resources needed to attempt to address the physiological needs of citizens alone is prodigious enough, not to talk of waging an all – inclusive campaign against poverty, which shows that the socio-economic problems that policies address cannot be solved by governments acting on their own, nor are they exclusive domain of one sector.

According to Hettne (2002:2) poverty is classified into five types. First, absolute poverty that occurs when human beings live in a state of deprivation due to meager income or lack of access to basic human needs which include food, safe water, sanitation, health, shelter, education and information. Second, relative poverty defines poverty from a comparative point of view, that is, poverty is not absolute but relative. Relative refers to the position of household or individual compared. It is measured in three ways: through the low income family statistics; through income and through disposable income. Third, chronic/structural means that poverty is persistent or long term. It causes are more permanent and depend on a host of factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skill for gainful employment, vocational disadvantage or endemic socio-political and cultural factors. Fourth, conjectural transitory which means poverty is temporary or short-term and cause mainly by factors such as natural or man-made disasters – wars and environmental degradation or structural changes induced by policy reforms which result in loss of employment, loss in value of real income assets, etc. Fifth, spatial/location means depending on geographical or regional spread and incidence. It involves urban squalor/poverty typified by the existence of ghettos, slums and shanties in metropolitan cities and characterized by environmental degradation, inadequate welfare services and social deprivations, low per-capita income, over-crowded accommodation, engagement in informal business, rural poverty characterized by poor conditions of living.

Essence of the explanation is helpful in contrasting the poor and non-poor in a particular society. In fact, there is a common thread in all these varieties of poverty. They points out that poverty is a general condition of deprivation and that consigns its victims to the level of their societies.

Zupi (2007:3) went on to analyse the fact that poverty has been seen as a dynamic process rather than a static phenomenon, one that captures the various forms of deprivation in well-being. It implies an observable disadvantage in relation to the local community or the wider society or nation to which a deprived individual, family, household or group belongs. The concept of poverty is also linked to distribution in terms of economic distance that is inequality. However, he argues that distribution alone cannot identify the ability to achieve a decent level of living. Distribution must be regarded as an important correlated but different concept to poverty. As a general rule, a better distribution will be more pro-poor but opposed the view that poverty and inequality are correlated. Castel (1996) defines poverty as a static or dynamic concept. The definition of poverty as a cycle projects its dynamic nature and its linkage to marginalization and social exclusion.

After decades of social policies based on the inclusion of the poor. Poverty is again being treated as a problem of marginalisation. As Procacci (2007:5) puts it, marginalisation puts poverty further apart from the whole of society. As far as poverty is concerned, the fundamental right to a minimum of resources for not starving is not enough for organizing a social response to its increase. Social exclusion confirms a dual society and appears more as a symptom of a social fracture than as a solution against it. Thus, under the Millennium Development Goals, today's development strategies try to put under question the reverse link between growth and inequality by tackling poverty under multiple dimensions. This inevitably demands that not only extreme poverty is targeted, nor individual trajectories, but rather that multiple processes producing poverty within society are also tackled.

Sen (1992) in his theory of poverty implies the idea that poverty is not a natural phenomenon within a larger frame of inequality problems, rather it can be eliminated if people are enabled to become autonomous from needs. No real development is possible if basic needs are unmet and larger and lager strata of the population are kept in a condition of dependency. Rejecting the idea of poverty as a natural object, and its inevitability in human societies helps to orient our questioning towards concrete social practices treating poverty, their transformations and their effects.

As Manning (2007:2) observe, rapid and sustained poverty reduction requires 'pro-poor growth', that is a pace and pattern of growth that enhances the ability of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth. In essence, growth should be broad-based across sectors and regions and inclusive of the large part of the workforce that poor men and women make up. Also, policies for sustaining growth such as those aiming at strengthening institutional capacity, promoting democratic and effective governance should increase poor people's incentives, opportunities and capabilities for employment so they can participate in and benefit from growth.

The UNDP summarizes these conceptions and described the extent of poverty around the world as pervasive. Today, more than one billion people – one person in five live in abject poverty (Choices: The Human Development Magazine, March 2003).

Globally, infrastructure gap is currently huge. Evidence shows that more than 1 billion people have no access to roads, 1.2 billion do not have safe drinking water, 2.3 billion lack reliable energy, 2.4 billion have no sanitation facilities and 4 billion without modern communication services. In the absence of accessible transport, energy and water, the poor pay heavily in time, money and health (Manning, 2007). In many developing countries notably in Sub-saharan Africa, growth has been low and so provided few benefits for the poor to reap. The governments of these countries are currently unable to create sufficient formal jobs to absorb the increase in the non-agricultural workforce. As a result, hundreds of millions of poor people earn their livelihoods informally. It is estimated that 72% of the non-agricultural workforce in Africa earn its livelihood informally representing one of the most important policy issues for private sector development.

In fact, in these countries infrastructure has suffered from severe cuts in public spending. This trend is against the popular believed that public spending requires to increase human development. No doubt, for many years, national poverty reduction strategies of these countries typically focused on social development. However, the mechanisms through which poor people would participate in and benefit from the growth process were not emphasized. In fact, the agriculture and infrastructure that form the important sector for expanding the economic activities of the poor were neglected. To realize potential in the agriculture sector, policy needs to address abroad set of challenges including infrastructure development, research and development, education and land reform. As observed, without the necessary policy and institutional reforms, targeted support, no matter how well designed and implemented and irrespective of whether it aims to promote economic or social development, is unlikely to lead to sustained improvements in the livelihoods of the poor.

MAGNITUDE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is blessed with mineral resources and rich in crude oil. Ironically, the citizens are hungry and poor in the abundance of plenty. The UNDP has classified the country as 141 poorest nations on human development index. In its report, Nigeria is considered one of the 20th poorest countries in the world with 70% of the population classified as poor and 54.4% living in absolute poverty (UNDP-HDI, 2006; Ekugo, 2006:12). Available evidence shows that poverty has been a serious problem confronting the Nigerian nation since independence. Nigeria instead of advancing has lately degenerated into one of the poorest countries of the world. In fact, more and more people are becoming poorer everyday. In 1960, the poverty level in the country was about 15% and by 1980 it reached to 28.1%. In 1985, the poverty level was 46.3 but dropped to 42.7% in 1992. Perhaps, the drop may not be unconnected to the coming elections slated to hold in 1993. Nonetheless, with the termination of the democratic processes by the military government, the poverty level rose to 43.6% in 1995. A year after, about 65% of the population were below poverty line, that is, about 67.1 million Nigerians. In the 1999 and 2000 UN Development Report, Nigeria had degenerated further as 87% of the population were below poverty line and rated

154 on the world's marginal poverty index out of 172 countries (Ekpu, 2004).

As observed, poverty in Nigeria has geographical perspective. According to the Nigeria's Draft Report on Millennium Development Goals, the Northern part of the country accounted for the higher incidence of poverty which largely predominated in the rural area. Specifically, the report showed that the rate of poverty was as high as 84% in states like Zamfara, Sokoto, Gombe and Bauchi during the period 1980 - 2004. In the Southern part, poverty had increased between 1980 - 1996 but dropped in 2004, apart from the South-south zone that dropped in 1992. In fact, all states except Bayelsa had more than half of their population in poverty circle (Akintunde and Amaefule, 2005:5). Comparatively, while poverty showed as high as 72.2% in the North-east, it has the lowest in the South-east with 26.7%. This confirmed the findings by the World Bank study in Nigeria which showed that there were differences between the North and South with more concentration of the poor in the Northern zone (cited in National Bureau of statistics, 2005).

During the period between 1980 - 2004, the incidence of Urban poverty also has been on the increase, an indication that poverty is not only seen in the rural areas but also co-existed in urban cities of the country. In 1980, poverty rose from 28.3 to 51.4% in 1985 but declined to 46.0% before it rose again to 69.3% in 1996 and fell to 63.3% in 2004 (Tomori et al., 2006).

Thus, the inflation rate which stood at 15% in 1960 had risen to 28% in 1980. In 1985, the figure was put at 46%. Seven years later, it came down to 43% only to shoot up to 66.4% in 1996. The federal government claimed to hack down the fleeting inflation rate from its awesome 54.4% in 2004 to 50%. It attributed the reduction in the trend to the institution of democracy and touted benefits of the economic reforms of the time (Duru, 2008:B3). As Soludo pointed out, the Nigeria's per capita income had always been in the deficit since independence. However, between 1999 and 2005, it has risen to over 3 percent. He further said that the Gross Domestic Product had grown at 10.2% in 2003 as against an average of 2.9% in the immediate past decade while the nation's external reserves stock had risen from US$ 7.68 billion to over $ 20 billion as at January 2005 (Punch, 2005:9).

Comparatively, there is improvement, yet Nigeria has failed to live up to nationhood aspirations at independence. A few African countries like Botswana and Mauritius have achieved a high growth. These countries belonged to those that were poorer than Nigeria at independence. With the much vaunted status parity in 2004, Nigeria's GDP per capita stood at paltry $1000 as against South Africa's $11,000, Kenya's $1,100, Angola's $2,100 and Cuba's $3000 (Idowu, 2005:15). Presently, Nigeria is a shadow of its promise in 1960 when it ranked higher than a number of today's leading nations in all major development indices. A situation attributed to the social, political and economic environment in the country.

Indeed, it is all traceable to the activities of political locusts called rulers.

It was no surprise therefore that about 54.4% of the nation's citizens go to bed hungry every night. In the same picture of gloom, over 5 million Nigerian youths are estimated to be unemployed. In fact, in the heat of the ongoing economic depression, many workers were retrenched in both the public and private sectors. In the absence of any national security system to cater for jobless persons, people resort to crime. In similar vein, over 7 million primary age school children are out of school. More pathetic is the disclosure that 201 out of 1000 Nigerian children stand the risk of dying before the age of 5. Women, of course are not spared of the unsettling development as 800 out of 100,000 of their folks are estimated to lose their life during child birth. The rising incidence of prostitution is an index of the escalating poverty level in the land. Also, compounding the shock is that an estimated 4.4 million Nigerians are living with HIV/AIDS (Daily Independent, 2008).

GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON POVERTY

Successive governmental efforts at eradicating the endemic poverty in Nigeria date back to pre-independence era. During the period, the colonial administration drew up programmes and strategies and laid out resources for the first two 10 year development plan 1946 - 1955. The policies were targeted at local processing of raw produce such as groundnuts, palm oil, hides and skin. At independence, the periods between 1962 - 1968, 1970 - 1974, 1975 - 1980 and 1981 - 1985 were designed by various governments to provide basic infrastructure, diversify the economy, reduce the level of unemployment, achieve dynamic self-sustaining growth and raise the living standard of people.

Many of these programmes include operation feed the Nation (OFN) in 1977, Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) in 1977, Green Revolution in 1980, etc. The OFN and Green Revolution were established to boost agricultural production and efficiency in the general performance of the agricultural sector. FCPE was set up to reduce mass illiteracy at the grassroots level. Most of the programmes made some laudable impacts by enhancing the quality of life of many people but were not anti-poverty measures. 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 these programmes (CBN Enugu Zone, 1998). The assessment of these programmes and institutions as thus provided justify this point.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME (SAP)

The conscious policy effort by government towards poverty alleviation began with the SAP. The period preceded with severe economic crisis that worsened the quality of life in Nigeria. The government through the assistance of the World Bank/IMF introduced SAP to check the crisis. However, the implementation of the programme further worsened the living standard of many Nigerians especially the poor people. In quick reaction to tackle the crisis, the government designed and implemented many poverty alleviation programmes between 1986 and 1993 under the guided deregulation of the economy. The impact of these programmes on poverty alleviation recorded degree of success. Example, establishment of the Directorate of food, Road and Rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was not only a departure from the previous programmes but complementarily associated basic needs such as food, shelter, potable water, road construction etc. However, DFRRI could not achieve many of its objectives. In fact, it was over ambitious in scope, steeped in corruption, lack of standards for project harmonization and effective mechanisms for coordination among the three tiers of government (CBN Enugu Zone. 1998).

NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF EMPLOYMENT (NDE)

The NDE established on October 19, 1986 was meant to combat mass-unemployment and articulate policies aimed at promoting skill acquisition, self employment and labour intensive potentials. Its programme was not only on unemployment and vacancies but also engaged with designing employment programmes in the country. No doubt, NDE has trained more than two million unemployed and provided business training for not less than 400,000 Nigerians (Oyemoni, 2003). The directorate, however suffer 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)

The PBN was established in 1990 to encourage savings and provide credit facilities for the poor-people who could not ordinarily access such loans from the orthodox banking system. In a similar manner, Community Banks (CB) were set up to provide banking facilities for rural people and to support micro-enterprises in urban areas. The two banking schemes had some successes. Example, PBN disbursed up to ₦1.7 billion as in-house loans from funds derived from the Federal Government and ₦0.9 billion as loans from funds provided by the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). However, both the banking schemes had a high degree of problems. Their external audits recorded a huge loss of over 80 percent due to corruption and mismanage-ment. The audit reports also showed that some funds were trapped in distressed and liquidated banks (Oyemoni, 2003).

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMME (FSP)

It was established to provide health care delivery, child welfare, youth development and improved nutritional status to families in rural areas. In a similar objective, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was set up to provide credit for agricultural production and processing and small-scale industries through cooperative societies in rural and urban areas. These programmes were further designed to create employment opportunities at ward levels, encourage the design and manufacture of plants, machinery and equipment as well as provide opportunities for the training of village-based business operators. Although, both FSP and FEAP were designed to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers, they were bedeviled by several malpractices including the non supervision and monitoring of loans and projects by the participating banks. Also fabricators in connivance with the beneficiaries inflate cost of equipment and provision of substandard equipment as well as poor loan recovery.

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. Other programmes connected to this like the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) and the strategic Gains Reserves Programmes (SGRP) had in one way or the other impacted positively on the agricultural sector and by implication reduced poverty. These programmes were able to acquire suitable land in various parts of Nigeria for the purpose of development. They parceled out land into economic-size farm plots and distinguished them to farmers and advised them on all aspects of land conservation and land degradation control. These programmes, however, were faced with some problems which includes taking more than their statutes allowed and that over-burdened them and rendered them ineffective. In a nutshell, they were spending more than their incomes.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME (PAP)

PAP was set up in 2000 to urgently create jobs for the unemployed in the face of increasing youth restiveness. The projects participates were to stimulate economic activities and improve the environment. The participants engaged in direct labour activities such as patching of potholes, vegetation control along high-ways, maintenance of public building and environmental sanitation (Oyemoni, 2003). The implementation of PAP generated public outcry and was accused of shoddiness and corruption. Subsequently, the government had to set up a panel committee headed by Prof. Ango Abdullahi to review the programme. Problems identified with the programme included over centralization, over politicization, irregular payment, uncoordinated management as well as high-level corruption (Oyemoni, 2003). Thereafter, the committee came up with the blueprint recommending National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

NAPEP was established in 2001 and involved all stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria namely the federal, state and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women groups and concerned individuals (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). NAPEP aimed to address the aspects of absolute poverty and to eradicate them. The stakeholders recognized that certain fundamental reasons were responsible for the inadequacy of anti-poverty measures over the years and they include the absence of a policy framework, inadequate involvement of stakeholders, poor implementation arrangements and lack of proper co-ordination. All of these seem to have received attention in designing NAPEP and to make it difference from all past efforts. The mandate is to monitor and coordinate all poverty eradication efforts in order to harmonize and ensure better delivery, maximum impact and effective utilization of available resources. Effort to eradicate poverty, the government arranged NAPEP into four schemes. These are Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS) and the National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). They performed individual functions which are as follows:

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SCHEME (YES)

This deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery technology development and enterprise promotion. Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS). This has to do with the provision of portable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power supply. Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS). This deals with interventions in special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centres, public awareness facilities, Youth and student hostels development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, agricultural inputs provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunication facilities, provision of mass transit and maintenance culture.

NATURAL RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION SCHEME (NRDCS)

This deals with the harnessing of agriculture, water, solid minerals resources, conservation of land and space particularly for the convenient and effective utilization by small-scale operators and the immediate community (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007).

This apart, NAPEP also has an organizational structure. At the top of the scheme is the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC). It coordinates all the poverty reduction–related activities and also ensure that the activities involved are centrally planned and coordinated in ways that make them complement one another. In terms of institutional structure, NAPEP data and information flow upwards from the local government level to the state coordinating committees and up to the National coordination committee. In essence, information flow is from the bottom up, with each subsequent level reviewing, refining and standardizing data as well as completing assessment reports. NAPEP performs two major functions. It plays the role of monitoring and that of evaluation. In terms of monitoring, it monitors all the relevant initiatives periodically to confirm project location, project implementation, project delivery, functionality of faculties provided, assess impacts on livelihood of communities, ensure equitable distribution and review the actual poverty status of communities in Nigeria. Indices of monitoring are evaluated from broad performance blocks such as quality, project objective and target achievement, scheduled completion and financial prudence (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007).

Accordingly, the structure and process of NAPEP are dynamic with varied windows for engaging a diverse array of stakeholder interests. In fact, without these interests (Monitors, investors, farmers, researchers, coordinators financial experts etc), the NAPEP machinery would collapse.

The question is given its structure, good intentions and enunciation of measures towards poverty reduction, can NAPEP be able to assist Nigeria meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which is reducing poverty to half by the year 2015? Evidently, the NAPEP blueprint has properly addressed the problems that hindered the previous initiatives, but it is not sufficient conditions for poverty reduction and to meet the MDGs. NAPEP has some lacuna that already devalues the programme delivery. The way forward is to identify some of the problems that have not been sufficiently covered in the blueprint.

PROBLEMS OF NAPEP

A number of factors have contributed to the failure and the major ones identified are:

Poor targeting mechanisms

NAPEP was articulated to make life more meaningful for Nigerians. The programme is intended to involve partnering in micro-finance for women and youth empowerment. It also collaborates with states and local governments, the private sectors, religious bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOS) to reduce unemployment by creating jobs. However, apart from its renting tri-cycles to young Nigerians for transport business, there have not been serious and identifiable efforts at empowering the beneficiaries with enduring skills. Also, there have not been observable attempts at embarking on extensive farm settlements and elaborate agricultural programmes. As a result, it has lost focus and direction.

Failure to focus on the poor

NAPEP was designed to circumvent many of the problems of poverty alleviation. However, there have been some lacuna that devalue the programme delivery. In fact, one significant flaw in NAPEP is lack of focus on community education. This is one area where adult education could have come as community education which is one of the important foci of education for poverty alleviation. Ironically, the role of adult and non formal education in poverty alleviation had not been fully appreciated by the designers of the programme. This can be seen as a fundamental oversight.

Programme inconsistency

Political and policy interference have undermine the institution’s credibility and effectiveness. In other words, their instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which turn out to prevent continuous progress. Also, NAPEP top-ranking officers are political appointees and therefore subject to political loyalties to those who appointed them. Thus, it is still the usual top down approach and not bottom-up approach as emphasized in the design of the programme.

Poor implementation

The severe budgetary and governance problems afflicted the full implementation of the programmes. It has resulted in facilities either not being completed or broken down and abandoned. Furthermore, inappropriate programme and lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation had resulted in the unsuccessful implementation of the programmes. Again, given the fact that more women than men are poor, the programme has not made tangible effort that engenders this imbalance in the society.

Corruption

Corruption has bedeviled various anti-poverty programmes of government including NAPEP. The manifestations and problems associated with corruption in Nigeria have various dimensions. Among these are project substitution, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources, conversion of public funds to private uses, etc (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). As observed, lack of accountability and transparency made the programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources. Thus, the effect of corruption is both direct and indirect on poverty increase.

SUGGESTIONS

Nigerian leaders should be committed to “due process” for proper accountability, transparency and above board in order to avoid waste of public fund. There is need to remove the humanity clause for the serving governors and chairman of local governments.

There is need for the leaders to radically depart from the culture of corruption and mismanagement and commit themselves to good governance. In essence, EFCC and ICPC along with other anti-graft agencies should be strengthened and made truly independence. There should be a clear government policy on food, clothing and housing in dealing with poverty alleviation.

Agricultural products should be subsidized with low interest rate to farmers. The present interest rate is too high and thus anti-poverty alleviation. There is need to restructure the prevailing socio-political and economic environment that is not conducive to sustainable development. The mono-economy should be replaced with diversified economy to give room for massive employment and social amenities.

Public policy has a central role to play in the fight against poverty. Thus, government policies and implementation should be people-oriented and deep rooted. This would avoid misplacement of priorities in the development schemes. As such, any future poverty alleviation programme should have serious and identifiable efforts at empowering the beneficiaries.

Government should improve more on human resources development. The successive governments have not done much in raising the human resources development index hence the rising poverty rate in the country.

Perceptible indices have indicated that many Nigerians are poor and about half of the population goes to bed hungry every night. Corruption and mismanagement have always stood in the way to frustrate all government efforts at confronting poverty. This is because of the absence of institutional mechanisms to regulate the behaviour of those in authority hence room for looting and exploiting the nation’s wealth into their private purse. The belief is that they are above the law. Moreso, the government still treats poverty and corruption as separate rather than integral components of the same strategy. Additionally, all the policies and programme of poverty alleviation in the country have been quite beatific on paper and hardly people-oriented and deep-rooted. The present NAPEP has failed to produce the desired results because of the inactivity of strengthening the programme and lack of identifiable efforts at empowering the beneficiaries.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to examine the impact of policy and its sustenance to poverty alleviation in the country. The relationship between public policy and poverty alleviations in Nigeria were analyzed and discussed, followed with their assessment and evaluation. Experience has shown that the past poverty alleviation programmes were unable to involve the beneficiaries in their planning and implementation. The commendable feature of NAPEP is the involvement of beneficiaries in the identification of projects and programmes. Ironically, it is a situation where though the beneficiaries had their capacity enhanced, they were not sufficiently empowered to become masters of their own through lucrative engagements. If this persists, the advantage of such partnership may be lost and thereby discouraging potential beneficiaries.

In essence, the poor not only should be involved in the design and implementation of any programme meant for them but should be empowered financially and material wise. This is an urgent task because an increasing poverty level poses a direct challenge to the nation's economic stability.

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