

POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty is a universal phenomenon found in all climes and times; however, its magnitude differs. It is found to be high in most underdeveloped nations for which Nigeria is one. Poverty is a common phenomenon in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. There are so many reasons given for the rate high rate of poverty in Nigeria. In 2018, Nigeria was tagged as the having the highest number of people living under the United Nations benchmark of \$1.9 per day despite the return to democracy in 1999. Democracy is a government that serves the interest of the majority of the people and Nigeria since 1999 have embarked on various programmes to reduce poverty in the land. This paper using the systems theory examined the various poverty alleviation strategies of the government of Presidents Obasanjo, Yar'adua, Goodluck and Buhari. The paper employed qualitative method where data were sourced secondarily and content analysis was adopted. The paper found out the various governments have different programmes all aimed at alleviating poverty in the country but the rate of poverty in the country is on the increase. The paper concludes that the poverty alleviation strategies of the various governments have failed to address the perennial challenge of poverty in the country which has manifested in different kinds of ills in the country ranging from hunger, starvation, illiteracy and insecurity. This is because rather than differences in strategies what has been different are appellations. The study recommends for a radical breakaway from the practices of repackaging similar strategies with the view to alleviating poverty.

Keywords: Alleviation, democracy, poverty, recommendations, and republic.

Introduction

The whole essence of having a democratic government is to give freedom to the majority of the people in determining who governs them. Democracy as a system of government is meant to assuage the sufferings of the people amidst a growing participation in determining their future. Democracy cannot thrive amidst poverty and large scale insecurity. The universality of poverty is not in doubt, however, the extent to which it permeates societies from developed to developing ones differs. According to Aderunmu and Obaje (2010) poverty is more pronounced and absolute in developing societies for which Nigeria is one. Nigeria has been adjudged as the headquarters of poverty. There are 86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty which represents nearly 50% of its estimated 180 million population. As Nigeria faces a

major population boom—it will become the world's third largest country by 2050 (World Poverty Clock, 2018). This is in spite of 20 years of democratic experience. Nigeria transitioned to democratic government in 1999 after a long period of military interregnum. It can be established that despite democracy, poverty is still high in Nigeria.

Although successive government in Nigeria since 1999 to 2019 have attempted severally to eradicate poverty in the country through various programmes, the assessment of their contributions to poverty reduction is scanty compared to huge amount of resources committed to the programmes (Ifatimehin, Balami, & Godwin, 2016). Thus the primary focus of this paper is to appraise the various poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria since 1999 when the country returns to civilian rule.

Conceptual Clarification

Poverty

Poverty is a fluid concept that does not lean on a single definition. The most widely held and understood definition of absolute poverty measures poverty strictly in economic terms – earning less than \$1.90 a day. But the World Bank (2006) goes beyond the amount of money a person or family earns to expand the definition of poverty. Accordingly, Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. This poverty definition encompasses living conditions, an inability to meet basic needs because food, clean drinking water, proper sanitation, education, health care and other social services are inaccessible.

According to Gazali (2000) poverty is a condition or situation of being poor or unable to meet the basic needs of life. Ahmed (1999) opines that poverty in developing countries are basically in income determined. It is seen as a result of lack of access to basic things of life like food, safe drinking water, security, healthcare, education and housing. He added that at community level poverty is often seen as a lack of community resources manifested in adequate infrastructure and basic social amenities, limited employment and income opportunities, inadequate access to agriculture input and a degraded environment. At the individual level, poverty is perceived in terms of inability to eat or cloth oneself adequately, lack of assets and inability to meet social and cultural obligation.

Central to the quest for policies and programmes that will reduce poverty is the issue of the conceptualization of poverty. Conceptually, three dominant views are identified as the meaning of poverty in the literature. The first view sees poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. Put differently, poverty is a material deprivation and this can be assessed in monetary terms. While this conceptualization of poverty makes the quantitative analysis of poverty straightforward and permits comparisons over time and between countries, it fails to recognize non-material forms of deprivation such as illiteracy and social discrimination among others Aliyu, (2002).

This paper is of the opinion that poverty is a position of despair and where a people lack productive skills and abilities to live decently. This definition is hinged on the fact that there is a denial that causes despair among the people referred to as poor. This denial arises from the fact that the people do not have the basic productive skills to have a better living arising from lack of access to source of income, health care, education and shelter.

Democracy

Democracy has directly originated from the French democratic, but its real origin is Greek. In Greek there are two words—*demos* and *kratos*. ... Democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people. Precisely stated, democracy is the rule by the people. Abraham Lincoln thus defines democracy as the government of the people by the people and for the people. This is popularly referred to as the “Grand Almighty Democracy Formular”.

Based on the above Chafe (1994) pointed out the concept “democracy” is now a household word which has lend itself to many interpretations. Thus democracy is seen as involving the ability of the electorates to choose freely on a regular basis between competing persons, parties or groups of contestants who offered them-selves to steer the wheels of the state. Accountability, universal adult franchise, transparency, respect for human rights and independent and impartial judiciary are the hallmark of democratic government (Dahl, 1989).

Democracy is thus a government that must be sanctioned by the people and its very existence must be to do the biddings of the people in any given society and at a given period of time. Nigeria is thus a democratic nation where the people elect representatives to do their biddings. One of the very tasks of these representatives is to cushion the effect of poverty and reduce it to the barest level.

Theoretical Framework

Many theories have been propounded to explain the persistence of poverty in both urban and rural Nigeria. Some of these theories include: Functionalist, Natural Circumstantial, Power theory, urbanized theory etc. These theories have been extremely varied and have evolved over the years.

However, for the purpose of our analysis in this paper, systems theory is adopted. For the purpose of this study, the systems theory is applied. The “system” concept is used by Dlakwa (2010) to denote an analytical scheme for unveiling complexity, a system is any whole which functions as a result of interrelatedness of its parts. It is the concept that refers to the complexities of interdependencies between parts, components and processes that involves discernible regulation of relationship and to a similar type of interdependencies with its surrounding (Easton, 1957). According to Dlakwa (2010), system theory is model of public policy making as a process. He further views a system as an entity in which everything relates to everything else. To put it in another way, systems comprise of components that work together for the objective of the whole, and the system approach is merely a way of thinking about these components and their relationship. A system can either be closed or open. Consequently, there are two types of system theorists (closed and open system theorists). However, most system theorists see organization as an open system consisting of certain essential characteristics as identified by Ackoff (1972);

1. A set of objectives which the entity seeks to achieve and without which it cannot exist;
2. An external environment which receives the output of the system, economic and political variables and which subsequently assist or compound the effort to resolve the problem;
3. An input, which comes into the system, this includes demand, support and expectation;
4. The conversion process or an input transforming device, through which resources or inputs are transformed into output;
5. The output, which is the product, result, outcome from the system arising from the preceding steps. These outputs are sometimes input for other organizations, groups or individuals or and goods and services. The type of output will depend on the nature of the input, the type of processing and the use of expected outcomes which themselves have implication for the system's persistence and effectiveness through feedback mechanism;
6. A feedback process, which informs the environment on what the system is doing, which at the same time communicate back to the system the reaction of the environment to its output. This enables the system to adjust its output, and or processing of input according to the demand of the environment (Ackoff, 1972).

The system theory is relevant in this study because it shows that for the government to alleviate poverty it must necessary empower the people in the democratic setting. The need for reduction of poverty in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The input into the democratic setting known as the conversion box from the populace is one that requires the optimum usage of resources for the reduction of poverty in Nigeria. The feedback mechanism shows the extent to which the various poverty alleviation strategies have actually impacted positively on the people and edged them out of poverty.

Appraisal of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in the Democratic Dispensation in Nigeria

The impact of poverty in the Nigerian state cannot be overemphasized. The damaging consequence of the effect of poverty on the economic and political development aspirations of most nations often give their leaders a relentless concern and effort towards mitigating the social malaise (Aderunmo & Obaje, 2010). Prior to the country's journey to the current democratic dispensation in May, 1999, various regimes both military and civil rules have put in place different programmes in an attempt to fight against poverty. Among such programmes according to Ijaiye and Mobolaji (2004:241) include the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), the Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution (GR) the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), the Directorate of Foods, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP)

The democratic era under Obasonjo's regime witnessed the introduction of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) designed to provide employment to 200,000 unemployed youths all over the country. It was also aimed at inculcating and improving better attitudes toward a maintenance culture in urban and rural roads and public buildings. By 2001 PAP was phased out as a result of structural inefficiency and fused into the newly created National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) consists of four schemes namely

- i. Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- ii. Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS)
- iii. Special Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS)
- iv. Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)

For the first times in the history of Nigeria's democratic rule, rural areas were accorded special consideration through the creation of Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme in an effort to ameliorate the deteriorating and devastating conditions of life in Nigerian rural areas. The (RIDS) was designed to deal with rural energy and power supply, portable water, irrigation scheme to boost rural agricultural production, rural transportation and communication. The main programmes for implementation were: Rural Electrification, Rural Water Development and Supply, Rural Transportation, Development, and Rural Communication Development

The question to ask is whether this policy designed under the National Poverty Eradication Programme to accord attention to rural areas was successful. A critical assessment of the performance of NAPEP in the rural areas lives much to be desired. Available evidence shows that rural population still remained polarized and impoverished under the civil democratic rule in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. According to British Broadcasting Corporation World News programme on 10 years of democracy in Nigeria, (1st May, 2009), the level of poverty which stood at 34 million population in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule has risen to an alarming and astonishing rate of 74 million population within ten years of democratic rule.

The ruling People's Democratic Party used the programme For Political patronage. In the comment of Omah (2004), "the Poverty Alleviation Programme funds were used to buy PDP officials at all levels to dispense favour to party loyalists. PDP leaders up to the state and local executives are known to have forwarded the list of party faithful, cronies and family relations for inclusion in the Poverty Alleviation Programme.

In addition to the above, the management of Poverty Eradication Programme was worsened by the adoption of a top-bottom approach in the implementation of the policy. The target groups, who are the poor in the society who are predominantly in the countryside, were hardly reached due to the fact that the programme existed at the state and local government headquarters, but failed to have linkage with the traditional and community leaders for effective penetration of the grassroots (Eze, 2003:49).

The dismal performance and achievements of the National Poverty Eradication Programme gave impetus to holistic and elaborate conception of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the federal level. At the state level, it was tagged "State Economic Empowerment

and Development Strategy (SEEDS) while at the local level, it was coined as Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The programme was holistic and elaborative in the sense that it was designed to address a wide range of socio-economic and political issues in the country most especially in the rural areas by reforming governmental institutions, developing the private sectors, implementation of social charters and value orientation.

In spite of these programmes put in place to address the perennial problem of grinding poverty in the country, there had not been substantial achievements especially at the local level as most of the people in rural areas remained impoverished and socio-economically and politically subjugated and demean.

Furthermore, the present regime of Umar Yar' Adua had introduced the Seven Point Agenda of which poverty alleviation is a component. Available statistics suggest that there had not been substantial and effective policy implementation in this area to justify the huge resources invested in the policy. For instance, the regime retains some of the old programmes that are either inactive or moribund such as NDE, NAPEP, NEEDS, Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) etc. The most worrisome about the policy initiative is that while it remained thick in both print and electronic media, it is very light in terms of practical approach and implementation. Against this background, the poverty alleviation programme under Yar'Adua has not made any meaningful impact on poor masses of Nigeria. The objectives and purposes of the programme ran parallel to the expectation of Nigerians. The implication of this is that Yar'Adua's poverty alleviation programme may follow the same disastrous path as those of his predecessors.

In line with President Goodluck promised as part of the Transformation Agenda promised to mitigate the spate of youth unemployment in the country through the reinvestment of the subsidy funds: The Federal Government initiated the graduate internship scheme under the social safety need component of subsidy re-investment and empowerment programme (SURE-P). The ultimate goal is to reduce unemployment among graduates and stimulate economic growth as part of priority transformation agenda of the recent past administration, and also enhancing opportunities towards the attainment of vision 2020. SURE-P Annual Report 2012 with correction document. The scheme has the objective to create opportunities for unemployed graduates to be engaged for a period of one (1) year in a reputable firms and institutions in which they get free labour and undertake the programme to be groom and mentor the in terms to acquires skills on the job experience while government pay stipends to the interns. This will help equip graduates towards meeting the demands of employees in the current labour market. Interns will be deployed to firms and institutions in their areas of residence for convenience. Interns will be deployed according to the relevance of their discipline to the firms. This will not only improve manpower development but will also broaden the applicants expertise; while the interns will be under close supervision for the period to ensure diligence. Transformation Agenda (2011-2015), summary of Federal Government key priorities policies, programmes and project document.

The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) is meant to employ (50,000) fifty thousand youths across the country Nigeria to ensure that their skills is developed towards empowering them to be employable in the short/medium and long term. Community Service, Women and Youth Empowerment (CSWYE) programme is to tackle the problem of youth unemployment by creating temporary employment for 10,000 youths in each state of the Federation and federal capital territory, and at least 30% will be women and the jobs will be designed to create labour intensive community development services. The women and youth beneficiaries of the CSWYE programme will be trained in some basic skills and supplied with working tools and equipment as appropriate.

Maternal and Child Healthcare (MCH)

The SURE-P maternal child healthcare programme (MCH) aimed to reduce child and maternal morbidity and mortality in Nigeria, tackle inequalities in the provision of primary health care. The programmed identified and select 500 Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) across the nation for

refurbishment and inclusion in the programme. SURE-P funds was used to delivered the following: 500 facilities will be used as source of clean water as 313 bore-holes is now constructed in the selected health centres and others at the various levels of completion. 8,839 beneficiaries will be enrolled into the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes in 45 selected facilities in 9 pilot states across the Nation. 6,7134 health workers will be recruited, 1,498 midwives, 2,254 community health extension workers (CHEWs), and 3,072 Village Health Workers (VHWs). 223,786 pregnant women will receive ante-natal care services in SURE-P MCH supported facilities. 28,435 deliveries would be taken by skilled birth attendants in these same facilities. 19,514 new acceptors of family planning would be recorded in the same facilities. All the 500 health facilities under SURE-P would be supplied full complement drugs, consumables and medical equipment. Additional 125 general hospitals across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are being equipped and their maternity section will be up graded to provide comprehensive intervention for complicated maternal and child cases from the Primary Health Cares (PHCs). Pregnant women will also be encouraged, through incentives, to utilize the PHCs. SURE-P Progress Report Ministerial Platform (2013).

The vocational skills training scheme will targeted the unskilled semi-skilled youths who are willing to be trained in specific trades for a given period, to acquire sufficient skill for establishing their own enterprises with prospects for employing others. Inventory of existing skill acquisition center and set up by various organizations in the public and private sector, including those owned by faith based organizations (FBOS) and civil society organizations (CSOs) will be used. Beneficiaries would be paid monthly stipend depending on their level of qualification. After the skills acquisition sessions, participants would further undergo training on fundamentals of enterprise management for sustainability (SURE-P Progress Report Ministerial Platform, 2013).

Furthermore, the SURE-P Railway project is competent of infrastructure development programme that will focus on the rehabilitation and restoration of abandoned railway lines. The SURE-P Railway projects aimed at strengthen the economy by increasing freight carriage and reduction in cost of transportation. In 2012, the SURE-P fund is used to accelerate and complete the rehabilitation of the western railway line running from Lagos to Kano.

The government of Muhamadu Buhari introduced the Social Safety Nets as part of its poeverty reduction strategy in 2016. N-Power is the Federal Government's policies in the economic, employment and social development arenas. The N-Power scheme is the most ambitious social investment programme in Africa that sought to employed over 10 million youths in the country. Large-scale skill development is the main policy thrust of the N-Power Programme.

N-Power addresses the challenge of youth unemployment by providing a structure for large scale and relevant work skills acquisition and development while linking its core and outcomes to fixing inadequate public services and stimulating the larger economy. The modular programmes under N-Power ensures that each participant will learn and practice most of what is necessary to find or create work. The N-Power Volunteer Corp involves a massive deployment of 500,000 trained graduates in 2016 and 2017 thatare assisting to improve the inadequacies in public services in education, health and civic education. Some of these graduates also help in actualizing Nigeria's economic and strategic aspirations of achieving food security and self-sufficiency.

N-Power is a platform for diversifying the economy. N-Power is preparing young Nigerians for a knowledge economy where, equipped with world-class skills and certification, they become innovators and movers in the domestic and global markets. Nigeria will have a pool of software developers, hardware service professionals, animators, graphic artists, building services professionals, artisans and others. N-Power also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook and livelihood.

The analysis of the paper showed that since the inception of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999 with Obasanjo's NAP to NAPEP, Yar'adua's 7 Point Agenda with specific empowerment of the militants, to Goodluck's Transformation Agenda with specific reference to SURE-P and Buhari's Change Agenda with specific reference to N-Power scheme, poverty has remained high in the country. It can be seen that despite these programmes poverty has remained high. An international report in 2018 pitched Nigeria to having the highest number of poor people in the world. One factor that could easily explain this high number despite having programmes on ground to alleviate poverty is that these programmes by their philosophy are not meant to alleviate poverty but are in themselves palliative measures. The improvement in the programmes over the year are merely appellations rather than philosophical.

Conclusion

The paper shows that in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, there were quite a number of poverty alleviation strategies. However, the poverty rates in Nigeria have been spurring higher. The study therefore concludes that the poverty alleviation programmes of the various governments have not affectively addressed poverty in the country. There are no fundamental and philosophical differences in the various programmes in its policy designs and implementation strategies. The differences in the programmes are more of appellations than strategies.

Recommendation

The paper therefore, recommends for a radical break away from the usual practice of strategies of spoon feeding and provision palliatives. The government should therefore concentrated on building institution that will at the long run reduce poverty. Government should concentrate on the indigenous craft with the view to incorporating it into modern technology. Moreover, agriculture is one sure way of alleviating in the country. The government should encourage the youths to engage in agriculture by providing all the encouragement and links to the market.

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