Poverty Reduction Efforts in Nigeria: A Panacea for Sustainable Development.

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For a long time now, poverty has been a major problem that disturbs and undermines development in contemporary African societies leading to millions of people dying from preventable diseases. Poverty seems to defy all solutions in Nigeria and it is a major problem that has infected our economy with about 50 million of the population living below the poverty line at the turn of this millennium. This situation is not surprising considering the country's abundant wealth in natural and human resources. Despite this attempt to alleviate poverty, the scourge seems hard to break as a result of disparities to peoples income, gender imbalance as far as access to economic resource is concerned, disparities in access to health and education, macro-economic mismanagement on the part of successive government, corruption neglect of Agriculture etc. the paper recommend among others that direct pro-poor policies, such as improved basic education, access to credit and proper co-ordination and monitoring of poverty alleviation programs should be encouraged within ministries, Departments and agencies (MDAS) so as to reduce the high level of poverty in Nigeria.

Keyword: Poverty, Dimension, Sustainable, Development

Introduction
Poverty is a global problem that have plagued nations like Nigeria with seemly no workable solution in sight. Attempts at reducing poverty and deprivation seem to have defied domestic and international development programmes. Indisputably, Nigerians suffer in the midst of plenty despite various poverty eradication and agricultural programmes gulping billions of Naira. Poverty in developing World in which Nigeria is a member, remains widespread. One quarter of the World's people continue to live in absolute poverty, that is unable to meet their most basic needs, and surviving on less than a dollar a day (World Bank, 2002).

According to Igun, the majority of the inhabitants of the third World countries live in deplorable poverty, largely in rural or remote areas or in urban slums, there is high rate of morbidity and mortality, the state of environmental sanitation, a major determinant of health status is poor in most of the countries. Nutritional state is also poor among the majority of the population of these societies; they suffer from a great burden of diseases disability and death (Igun, 1998).

Poverty is associated more to rural people and less educated segment of the society. Basically, the inability of
subsequent governments in the third world countries and Nigeria in particular to put an end to this scourge is linked to the fact that the majority of the population lived in rural areas and are mostly illiterates. Using poverty indicators such as literacy level, unemployment, access to safe water, nutrition, infant and maternal mortality, and the number of people living on less than one dollar a day, Nigeria is found to rank among the 25th poorest nations in the World below Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia (World Bank, 2002)

Conceptual Issues:
Poverty is a term that attracted so many definitions. So there is no single universally accepted definition (Kankwenda, et’al, 2000). It is a plague that afflicts people all over the World (CBN, 1990), and it touches on many aspects of the human condition, ranging from the economic and social to the environment, political and cultural (United Nations, 2003). Corbett, (2009) defines poverty as a condition of having insufficient resources or income. In its extreme form, it is characterized by lack of basic human needs such as adequate and nutritious foods, clothing, clean water and health services. Revallion and Bidani (1994) see poverty as a condition where there is lack of command over basic needs, that is, a situation of inadequate level of consumption, giving rise to insufficient food, clothing and shelter. Edozien (1975) sees poverty with a particular reference to basic human needs, which the individual must have in order to survive. Thus, a family may be said to live in poverty when it is unable to satisfy its basic needs. Similarly, Atoloye (1997) and Englama and Bamidele (1997), viewed poverty as the “lack of basic necessities”. Poverty includes different dimensions of deprivations. Poverty can be described as a situation of being poor and lack of basic needs for normal living standard. According to World Bank (1990), poverty is the inability to attain a minimal standard of living measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required to satisfy them.
It can be deduced from the foregoing that poverty is a multidimensional concept and its definition could be culturally and geographically based depending on the particular society we are dealing with due mainly to variations in the society’s welfare. This paper perceived poverty in terms of the inability of an individual or population to meet the basic needs of food, education, housing, health and clothing.
Forms of Poverty:
Discussion of poverty is usually done in either absolute or relative terms. Absolute is the extreme case of poverty. (NAPEP, 2001) sees poverty as a situation in which individual families cannot meet the basic and elementary requirement of human survival in terms of good nutrition, shelter, clothing, education, health, etc. Webster (1992) sees absolute poverty as a situation in which people barely exist where the next meal may literally be a matter of life and death. There is nothing beyond absolute poverty except death. In Nigeria, Musabu and Gesami (2002) observed poverty rates in Africa are exceptionally high. For the 1.9 billion children from developing World 650 million are said to be without adequate shelter.
Relative poverty on the other hand is much more difficult to establish. Definition of poverty varies among official government agencies and academics. Webster (1993) reported that in 1993 a representative of the national Welfare rights organization in the United States estimated that a family of four needed $7,200 per year to satisfy their basic requirements below this, the organization considered people to be in poverty. In the same year, U.S. government estimated the poverty line for a similar household at an income below $4,500.

Theoretical Frameworks:
Poverty is a common phenomenon in all societies. What is still controversial is the cause or causes of poverty. There are quite a number of theories that attempted to explain the factors that result to poverty. Murray (1990) sees poverty as emanating from the individuals’ inability to function well. This explanation further attributes failure of an individual to inherited characteristics such as intelligence and psychological approaches, which explain individuals’ failure or achievement by reference to acquired or developed personality traits.

The capitalist theory according to Ohikhuleme (1997) pointed out that the class that controls the resources are self-centred, aggressive and exploitative in ensuring that their status quo is maintained, while the have-nots remain in extreme poverty. In Nigeria, resources are controlled by the privilege class as against the majority who wallow in abject poverty. Novak (1995) sees poverty as produced by the operation of a capitalist wage labour market because to operate effectively, the wage labour market needs poverty or people that are poor. The fear of poverty acts as a disciplinary force on workers and provide evidence that just as hard work and obedience will bring its rewards, so will illness and inactivity lead to punishment and sustained by capitalist societies. Weede (1995) sees poverty in developing nations as the dependency nature of the third World nations on the West for the importation of manufactured goods and technology. In addition to the above factors, famine, wars, and political instability also contribute to poverty in developing countries. They demobilized resources that should have been used for economic growth and the elevation of the living standard of their population to war activities.

Poverty Profile in Nigeria:
According to (NBS, 2006) poverty level in Nigeria was rated as very high with about two-third of the population living below the poverty line. According to World Bank reports (2004 and 2006), an estimated 1.3 billion people survive on less than equivalent of US $1 a day. But there are other needs that are also important, the report presented that nearly a billion people are illiterates, well over a billion people lack access to safe water, some 840 million go hungry or face food insecurity. And nearly a third of the people in the least developed countries most of which in Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people in and the fastest growing in economic poverty. Poverty appears to be more concentrated in rural areas than in.
urban areas of the country. The number of rural people according to the 1999 World Bank report is roughly thrice that of the urban poor. More than 85% of the poor lived in rural areas and more than two-third live on farms. The distribution of poverty is also inequitable on a geographical basis. Regionally, the North-west geographical zone has the largest proportion of its population living in poverty and three Northern geo-political zones have 65% of the nation’s population that account for only 35% of Gross Domestic product (GDP). The 1997 national consumer survey indicated that the average family expenditure per mount for the country was N4,058:00. Out of the country’s six geographical zones, the North-west zone has the least figure of N2,941. The eastern zone had the highest figure of N5,194:00. Almost double the figure for the North-west zone. Also the North-west zone, recorded the lowest figure of household income (N3,769:00) while the highest figure of N7,211:00 came from the South-eastern zone (World Bank, 2001). According to the World Bank (1996), poverty can be viewed in terms of hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor and not being able to go to school. It is also not knowing how to read, not being able to speak properly, not having a job, having serious fear for the future and living one day at a time. It is losing a child for illness brought about by unclean water, it include also powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. Garba (2006) noted that the most commonly used method of measuring poverty by the World Bank is based on incomes or consumption levels. A person is said to be poor if his income or consumption level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. The minimum level is usually called the “poverty line”. This line however varies across time and societies. Each country uses lines that are appropriate to its levels of development, societal norms and values. In Nigeria, the national Bureau of Statistic (NBS) uses the following two lines relative to the standard of living in Nigeria.

- A moderate poverty line equivalent to two-thirds of the mean per capita expenditure;
- A core poverty line, equivalent to one-third of the mean per capita expenditure.

These lines were used in the assessment of poverty by the Bureau to separate households for classification into one of three mutually exclusive groups: (core poor, moderately poor, or non-poor)

**Poverty Reduction Strategies:**

Poverty has become a serious problem in Nigeria. It has emerge over the past few decades and has become a matter of concern to subsequent governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations. The fight against poverty was directed on rural development together with town and country planning as the approach to dealing with the problem (CBN, 1999). This attempt was changed after Nigeria’s independence and emphasis was place on transforming the rural sector, particularly the enhancement of agricultural productivity and farm income. Integrated rural
development projects were introduced as the best mechanism to fight rural poverty. The programme includes road networks and feeder roads, linking isolated marketing communities with their main markets. The provision of social services including schools, health centres, water supply and electricity (Imoudu, 1999). The war on poverty alleviation was formally embarked on by the government in 1990 when poverty had already assumed an endemic dimension. The federal government and its agencies introduced various developmental projects that had beneficial impact on the rural inhabitants. Some of these programmes include: Rive Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural development programme (ADP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Family Support Programme (FSP), Family Economic Advancement programme (FEAP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP).

The Poverty Alleviation Programme like other poverty reduction programmes introduced earlier on failed to achieve the target for which it was set. The poverty situation in Nigeria continues to worsen and this motivated the government to embark on an elaborate anti-poverty initiative known as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001. NAPEP was created to eradicate absolute poverty in Nigeria through streamlining and rationalizing the existing Poverty Alleviation Institutions and co-coordinating the implementation of relevant schemes and programmes. In order to make the institution more powerful and functional, twelve ministries were co-opted into NAPEP. These are the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Education, Water Resources, Industry, Power and Steel, Employment, Labour and Productivity, Women Affairs and Youth Development, Health, Works and Housing, Environment, Finance, and National Planning Commission. Nine agencies were also made integral part of NAPEP. They are as follows: Nigeria Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), Universal Basic Education (UBE), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), Small and Medium Industries Development Authorities (SMiDa), Bank of Industry (BOI), Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Primary Healthcare Development Agency (NPHCDA) and Federal Mortgage Bank (FMBN). NAPEP was set up with the following objectives:

1. To reduce the social unrest occasioned by unemployed youth.
2. To reposition the private sector so as to make it more productive.
3. To create opportunities for empowerment and wealth creation.
4. To invest in education.
5. Provision of social programmes for the vulnerable.

The above objectives of NAPEP were strengthened by the introduction of a new development initiative known as the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). NEEDS is conceived as a national driven Policy initiative that seeks to address Nigeria’s long term goals to poverty
reduction, wealth creation, employment generation, and value orientation. NEEDS is heavily linked to the Millennium development Goals (MDGs). The Millennium Development Goals are a series of eight times bound development goals that seeks to address issues of Poverty, Education, Gender Equality, Health and Environment (Ibrahim, 2008). The Musa Yar’Adua’a led government demonstrated her support and commitment to the Millennium Development Goals mission by introducing the Seven Point Agenda. The objective of this programme was to facilitate the achievement of the targets of the MDGs.

One of the specific goals of MDGs is:

a. Reduce by 50% between 2000 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one US Dollar in a day.

b. Reduce by 50% between 2000 and 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The most recent poverty reduction strategy which is named subsidy re-investment programme SURE-CP) was established by president Jonathan and it was inaugurated on the 13th February 2012. SURE-CP was aimed to plough back the savings from the reduction of subsidies on petroleum products into programmes that will empower Nigeria Youth and pregnant women.

Attempts to eradicate poverty in Nigeria have never shown any positive results. Instead the gap between the haves and the have-nots is so wide and alarming. The situation is unfair considering the resources endowment of the country. The weak nature of the leadership in its failure to effectively distribute the nation’s resources among the existing classes is responsible for the impoverishment of Nigerian population.

**Implications of Poverty on Economic Development:**

It is very important for this paper to discuss the implications of poverty on National Development in Nigeria.

Poverty as a social problem must be tackled by any responsible government if that government is to achieve a meaningful development. This is because poverty is a threat to peace and stability in any country. It is in fact surprising that the way and manner in which poverty alleviation programmes are handled with little or unserious attention. No nation can succeed in her various government reform programmes if it continue to neglect the poverty alleviation programmes in the country because poverty is a disease that can stagnate growth and development in a country.

One major consequences of poverty in Nigerians is the worsening of the living conditions of majority of Nigerians. The deteriorating living standards among the Nigerian poor is clearly manifested in low calorie and protein intake, very poor and sub-standard housing, over-crowding in the urban centres, proliferation of shanty towns and slum areas, inadequate clothing, poor health facilities, and lack of access to quality education. The plight of Nigerians has been viewed by poor people’s front (PPF) as:
There is no longer any need for a long story to tell about our conditions in this country today. We simply can no longer eat again. Gari and other food stuffs are beyond our reach, medicines and medical treatment have become too costly for us to bear, majority of Nigerians are already jobless, more beggars and homeless people are in the streets........ (Orupabo, 1991).

Supporting this argument in the UNDP Human Development Report (2005), which confirmed the rate of poverty in Africa where Nigeria is situated by revealing that in 1990, the average American was 38 times richer that the average Tanzanian, UNDP further discovered that the situation becomes even more unacceptable where a Sub-Saharan Africa lives on $1 a day as a cow in Europe or Japan receives $2 or nearly $4 a day. The severity of poverty in Nigeria is so high it has even affected social cohesion in the country. It creates a tense environment which threatens the stability of the nation.

Constraints on Poverty Reduction in Nigeria:
From 1960 to date, successive government in Nigeria have in one way or other introduced some forms of poverty reduction or alleviation programmes meant to reduce the level of poverty, give hope and succor to the poor and, or move towards some sort of wealth creation strategies. Inspite of all such efforts at alleviating poverty in Nigeria, the incidence and severity of poverty has continued to pose formidable threat to the welfare of Nigerians and sustainable development of country (CNHDR, 2000/2001).

To this end, some problems are identified as constraints on poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria. These include (CBN, 1999), Ogunmike, 1998, and Ekong, 1997):

- Policy inconsistency;
- Lack of effective mechanism for project monitoring;
- The ad-hoc non-integrated nature of most programmes;
- Lack of accountability and probity in programme implementation.
- Poor co-ordination of programmes;
- Inadequate funding.

In addition to the above mentioned factors, a number of macro-economic and sectoral problems have also contributed to make the incidence and severity more widespread in the country, thus rendering most of these poverty alleviation programmes to have little or no impact on the poor. These include high inflationary rates, unemployment, external debt over-hauling and inadequate facilities among others.

Recommendations and Conclusion:
Poverty in Nigeria is said to be multi-faceted and deeply rooted in nature. So any effective poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria must reflect its multi-dimensional nature, incorporating economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. On this ground, in order to achieve a meaningful poverty reduction within a reasonable short time frame would require the commitment of all stakeholders. That is individuals,
community, government, non-governmental organizations and relevant national and international agencies.

At the National level, the most immediate and important requirement for achieving sustainable poverty reduction is genuine political commitment by governments. This includes the provision of relevant social services that are beneficial to the poor. In addition, the federal government should take urgent step to strengthen the co-ordination of all poverty alleviation programmes nationwide. Similar organizational structures for policy design, monitoring and evaluation should be put in place at both state and local government levels for effective co-ordination of their activities.

One of the major reasons for the failure of many poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria is the non-involvement of the poor who resides in the rural areas in the initiation and implementation of such government programmes. For a genuine and sustainable poverty reduction strategy, there is the need for wide consultations with different segments of the intended recipients' population particularly the poor, who should be considered as the focus of the programme. In other words, the needs of the poor should be the target of poverty reduction.

Also, the government should recognize and encourage Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be actively involved in a wide variety of activities to help provide development opportunities for grass-roots communities considering the high incidence of endemic poverty in the rural communities. Such encouragement of the NGOs should be closely accompanied by government’s increased investment in human capital, a requirement necessary to equip the poor with education/training in order to enable them share in such grass-roots opportunities.

For an effective poverty reduction effort in Nigeria, there is the need for a change of attitude towards such programmes by the recipient communities. The change in the attitudes of the benefiting communities should be made possible through awareness creation. Such awareness of beneficiaries should be accompanied by greater demonstration of will-power and commitment on the part of those who design, execute, supervise, monitor and fund poverty alleviation programmes.

On the basis of this, only people of proven integrity should be appointed to head poverty alleviation programmes and any mismanagement of funds should be accompanied with sanctions.

**Conclusion**

Poverty is a social, economic and political problem that disturbs the entire World. It is a global problem that affects more than 60% of the World’s population.

In Nigeria, poverty appear to be the greatest degrader of the economy amongst other contemporary socio-economic problems. The incidence and severity of poverty is the most challenging in the world with serious economic and social consequences.

This situation is in sharp contradiction considering the vast resources that Nigeria is blessed with, yet a large proportion of her population lives in extreme deprivation.
despite past efforts by government to improve their well-being through various poverty alleviation programmes. If poverty alleviation efforts is to be successful, all stakeholders, individuals, community, government, non-governmental and international agencies must work collectively in the design and implementation of anti-poverty strategies.

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