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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT'S POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMMES IMPACT: THE CASE OF USA, BANGLADESH AND NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of poverty in Nigerians economy and how various governments have tackled its negative effect on social-economic variables. During the study, poverty level was measured by food calories intake, standard of education, shelter of individuals, availability of pipe born water, electricity, per capital income, life expectancy rate, people freedom and rate of crimes. In the cause of the study, it was glaringly known that too many Nigerians are under the poverty line and not much effort have been made by past and present government in reducing poverty effect on Nigerians. The paper considered effective poverty reduction programmes in the United States of America (USA) and Bangladesh with those methods used in Nigeria. It was found that the government of US and Bangladesh confronted the problem squarely and sincerely, developed programmes which were grass root oriented. While Nigerian government inspite of the several programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme and TraderMoni. Unfortunately, these programmes have not been honestly executed to reduce effects of poverty on people; instead, the situation has gone worse due to dubious executors of the programmes.

Keywords: Poverty, reduction, programme, government

Introduction

Poverty anywhere constitutes a threat to prosperity. The crusade for poverty alleviation started since late 1960s worldwide, especially in the United States of America, where some segments of the society were identified as being in generally poor states of health, suffering from inadequate diet and poverty (Kabiru & Arshad, 2018, Diejomaoh, 1988, Dennis, 1973).

Reducing the menace of poverty is one of the most difficult challenges facing most countries in the developing world, where on the average about 67,000 people join the legion of the poor on a daily basis, representing about 25 million every year (Obadan, 1985). Nowhere in the third world countries have the poverty alleviation programmes as originally conceived, realized their objectives, namely, poverty amelioration and redistribute justice. Instead, rural poverty continued to rise, except in the new industrialized countries of South-East Asia (Akanji, 2011, Mafeje & Radam, 1995).

In the 1980s, sub-Saharan African was characterized by declining per capital incomes, increasing hunger and environmental degradation; Nigerian being one of the largest countries in the continent has not been left out. Despite all the efforts made by various governments in Nigeria to improve the lots of the people through the various poverty alleviation/eradication/reduction programmes, it is evidenced that the proportion of people at poverty level has continued to increase. For example the figure increased from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985, it declined slightly to 42% in 1992 and increased very sharply to 67% in 1996. By 1999, estimate had it that more than 70% of Nigerians were living below poverty line, this was due to sloppy implementations of the various programmes on poverty since inception (Omotola, 2008).

Nigerian's tremendous potential for growth and poverty alleviation is constrained by problems in the provision and management of social services and infrastructures as well as the will and readiness of Nigerians to implement the programmes honestly, transparently and without the thought of frustrating the initiators (Oyinbo & Olaleye, 2016, Awotide et al, 2010). Reforms are needed in order to address the structural weaknesses in public resources management. So also, some strategies must be place for successful implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Such strategies include: promotion of sustained economic growth through the provision of opportunities for the poor, permission to the poor to participate in the growth process, delivery of social services to the poor and provision of social safety nets and targeted programmes for the poor and the vulnerable. The combination of these strategies is extremely important to alleviate majority of Nigerians above poverty line.

The objectives of this study are: to examine the impact of poverty on the economy as well as the impact of poverty alleviation/reduction programmes so far executed on the socio-economic issues, such as reduction in unemployment, regular supply of electricity, pipe born water, provision of adequate medical care, sustainable increase in food production, provision of shelter to everybody and availability of high quality education for all.

The Concept Of Poverty

It is a well-known fact that poverty affects many aspects of human life; this has made people to look at it from different angles such that concise and universally accepted definition is elusive. Nghiep (1990) views absolute poverty as people who lack access to goods and services for their basic needs. Poor people cannot participate in the process of economic development and industrialization due to some conditions including their own ability. Okojie (1998) examines poverty as a situation whereby a family is considered to be living in poverty if its total earnings were insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for merely physical efficiency. This shows that monthly/yearly earnings of workers are so pledge that it cannot sufficiently provide for their physical needs.

Abang et al, 2015; Delana, 2001 describes poverty as the inability of a person or family to provide adequately for his or her basic needs or that of the family so as to ensure healthy living and development. The family or individual has got adequate resources to enable it or him realize what it takes to live comfortably and in good health. Kabiru & Arshad, 2018; Okojie, 1998, & Fields, 1997 views poverty as the inability of family or individual to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs, which include food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life.

El-Rufai in 2001 describes poverty as the condition in which a person is unable to meet minimum basic requirements of food, health, housing, education and clothing while Ogwunike (2001) views poverty as the general state in which an individual or household is unable to meet the basic needs of life considered as minimum requirement for sustainable livelihood in the given society. The coalition of the Nigerian Non-governmental Organizations on Health, Population and Development of 1997 stated that poverty is a situation when one cannot replace what he has, or lack of essentials of life such as food, clothing and shelter.

The opinion of the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) on poverty is that, it is best viewed form a multi-dimensional perspective (Obembe, 2012). Poverty means different things to different people or groups of people. From Human Resources Development perspective, poverty can be defined as capability deprivation, that is, the failure of some basic minimum capabilities to function effectively. Thus, a poor person is one who lacks the opportunity to acquire the critical minimum level of their basic capabilities such as education, skill, employment, income, voice, participation in decision making, health and so on (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 1992). Therefore, those who are poor invariably lack the where with all to develop their innate economic and social capabilities to propel themselves out of the poverty syndrome, thus leading to what is termed 'demography of poverty' (Aliyu, 2003, Santarelli & Figini, 2002, Anyanwu, 1997).

This paper therefore, regards poverty as an economic situation where a group of people lack access to goods and services which could have afforded them the opportunity to acquire necessary conditions of higher calories intake, longer life span, low mortality rate, basic educational standard and successfully entering the labour market. Looking at the different definitions, as given by different conditions, emphasis is on inability of a community/group of people to meet their basic needs adequately and have access to regular supply of social amenities to make life worth living.

Traditionally poverty is measured, using income, expenditure, proportion of expenditure allocated to food, calorie intake, and Nutritional status, as well as intangible criteria such as freedom, the right to vote, gender and other criteria. The measurement of poverty line in the United States of America in 1964 rested with Social Security Administration (SSA). Mollie (1964) of the SSA first developed the formula, which was used to calculate poverty line. According to him, the amount of income needed in order to be above the poverty threshold was equal to three times the cost of the economy food plan (\$4,921). He based his calculation on the 1955 survey conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which indicated that families of three or more spend one-third of their income after taxes on food. The poverty line has been adjusted each year since 1964 to reflect inflation in food prices and the overall cost of living. Allowing for inflation in 1993, the same family would need an income of \$14,763 (Ekpe, 1998; World Bank, 2007).

Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Poverty alleviation is generally considered synonymous with development (Ekpe, 2011). Poverty reduction/alleviation is a means through which a community/country is relieved of the hardships from poverty, that is, when necessities for good living/higher standard of living are provided adequately to all and sundries in the community.

A key challenge to poverty which poverty alleviation seeks to attack is to penetrate the institutional web of poor, which encompasses legal and religious practice, the role of the family and its effects on child rearing and education in order to assist the poor in achieving what they consider to be a better life. The goal of the poverty oriented institutional development is also to release the energies of ordinary people by enabling them to take control over their lives (World Bank, 2009).

According to the African Development Bank Report of 1998, progress in poverty reduction can only come through sustained and broad-based economic growth, complemented by efficient provision of social services, such as education, health-care, clean water, sanitation and nutrition. The study tries to suggest (and justifiably too) that human capital development is an essential means for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction as well as an end in itself.

Experience of Usa in Poverty Alleviation Programme

During the 1960s, some segments of USA society were identified as being in generally poor states of health, suffering from inadequate diet and from poverty (Dennis & Williams, 1973). The Federal, State and Local Government worked relentlessly and honestly to alleviate the society from poverty through the programme tagged 'war on poverty'. The war was waged against the forces within the economy that would leave pockets of unemployment, thus creating poverty that could not be alleviated because of lack of work opportunities. Government increased expenditures to create jobs while the executors were sincere as they carried out their duties honestly and efficiently.

Poverty reduction was achieved through some welfare programme that was introduced in which grants to eligible families, generally female-headed family units with no eligible male present. Similar programmes were administered on the blinds and other disabled to provide them sustenance. Another programme used to combat poverty level as 'trust in the value of education'. The argument is that education creates increased economic mobility and provides individuals with the opportunity to pull themselves up by the bootstraps. Thus, education, the great American dream, should be provided to all until it permeates all of the segments of the society and enables everyone to work himself or herself up the socio-economic ladder (Dennis & Wiliams, 1973). Nonetheless, this ideal economic condition did not reduce the entire poverty problem although diminished it substantially such that the level of poverty within the economy was cut almost in half.

Experience of Bangladesh in Poverty Alleviation Programme

The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh was among the first in the world to offer micro-credit to poor communities to help them develop small businesses. Professor Muhammad Yunus, Director and Founder of the Grameen Bank was focused and renew the real causes of poverty which were directly tackled. The professor believe that the poor people especially women have skills which remain utilized or under-utilized. The people could not used their skill due to unfriendly institutions and polices that surround them. To make the skills of poor people effective, the institutions and policies affecting them need to be changed (Kabiru & Arshad, 2018; Khan, 2000).

In order to eliminate poverty in the land, they made appropriate changes in the institutions and policies, by creating new ones. They discouraged charity to be the answer to poverty and put in place unleashing of energy and creativity in each human being. Women that are naturally poor and cannot seek help from financial institutions were empowered through micro-credit without asking collateral securities from them. They were made to pay interest rate at a level which is close to a level commensurate with sustainability of the programme rather than bringing attractive return for the investors (Khan, 2000).

The features of Grameen credit are as follows:

- i) it promotes credit as a human right,
- ii) it is targeted to the poor, particularly poor women so that they can overcome poverty,
- iii) it is offered for creating self-employment for income generating activities and housing for the poor as opposed to consumption,
- iv) it was created as an alternative to conventional banking which rejected the poor by classifying them to be 'not creditworthy',
- v) it provides services at the door step of the poor believing in the principle that lenders should go to the borrowers,
- vi) all loans are to be paid back in installments (weekly or bi-weekly),
- vii) more than one loan can be received by a borrower; and
- viii) the loans are given nonprofit organizations or through institutions owned primarily by the borrowers etc.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme in Bangladesh had been so successful that majority of the poor people are now prosperous and enjoy all social facilities in the country like rich people. Presently, the programme has taken cell phone to 45,000 villages and also planning the next phase of the communication project which is to establish village computer and internet programme that will allow people to use e-mail at a fraction of the cost of a phone call.

Nigeria's Efforts At Reducing Poverty

The lingering problem of poverty has remained one of the disturbing features of the Nigerian economy since 1970s. While concerted efforts were made and are still being made to address this menace, the magnitude and depth of poverty in the system has remained an issue of great concern to the government. Some spirited attempts were made by past governments to better the lots of Nigerians through series of poverty alleviation programme (Mafeje and Radam, 1995).

First and foremost, the Nigerian governments soon after independence, and encouraged by the oil boom in the early 1970s, embarked on massive investment in education, health, nutrition and other social service activities to boost the standard of living of her citizens. To further expand the social services, the Nigerian Industrialization promotion Decree of 1972 was enacted, along with the encouragement of inflow of foreign capital into the country. Unfortunately, this huge expenditure could not be sustained in the subsequent years due to the economic crisis in the world oil market due to the oil glut of 1980s (Ayorinde, 1999).

Between 1985 and 1997, governments at various stages introduced assorted programmes, all with the same notion but distinguishing names and acronyms such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Back to Land; Better Life for Rural Women; National Directorate for Employment, (NDE); Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); Family Support Programme (FSP); and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). The project/programmes were programme, which got a budget of \$12.3m between 1997 and 2001. The aims were to reduce illiteracy rate, improve the people's health and nutritional profiles as well as to empower women for development.

On July 31, 1998, UNDP signed another document on agriculture, environment and rural development valued at \$16.8m. The programme was to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food production, attain sustainable food security at the household level as well as reduce poverty by improving agricultural production. The same body signed another \$16.6m to support Job Creation and Sustainable Livelihood Programme (Mafeje and Radam, 1995)

Since the inception of the present civilian regime, government realizes the disastrous political and socio-economic consequences of poverty on the country. This made the Obasanjo regime creation of 200,000 jobs in the year 2010, particularly to 'wage war against poverty'. Unfortunately, that prompted Federal Government to scrap the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and established another programme named National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP) in 2001.

National Poverty Eradication Programme was into four facets, which were, youth empowerment, rural infrastructures development scheme, social services scheme and National resources development scheme, which were expected to gulp N25 billion. Unfortunately, this new programme (NPEP) was implemented the same way and manner the aborted PAP was carried out (Aboyade, 2001).

According to Dr. Abdullahi Aliyu (2003) 'Federal Government spent ₦1.02 trillion on poverty alleviation between 2001 and 2003. This money was distributed/allocated to core poverty eradication Ministries and Agencies, some of which were: Federal Ministry of Power and Steel and its Parastatals received ₦153,475 billion, Ministry of Works and Housing – ₦134,378 billion. Water resources received ₦73,276 billion. Despite the huge amount spent by government to reduce poverty among Nigerians, its pinch is still yet to be seriously felt by people and so the standard of living continues to decline. The like is TraderMoni initiated by Mohammed Buhari's administration in 2018 being managed by the office of the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo to address poverty alleviation.

Trends in poverty level in Nigeria between 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 had shown that the various programmes instituted by governments to curb poverty had not been successful. Here we make use of some poverty indicators in Nigeria between 2004 - 2019. The indicators support the view that poverty in Nigeria has been on the increase.

Table 1: Selected Social Indicators in Nigeria as at December 2019

	2004	2009	2014	2019
GDP per capita (USD)	1,007.87	1,891.34	3,222.69	2,229.9
Population Growth Rate (%)	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6
Life expectancy at birth (years)	54.0	54.0	54.0	54.0
% of population with access to safe water	30	30	30	30
Adult literacy rate (%)	62	62	62	62
Government budget to education (%)	9.05	8.0	10.63	7.02
Registered unemployment (%)	3.7	3.72	4.56	8.10
Inflation rate percent (12 months moving average)	17.9	11.8	8.1	18.7

Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2019

From the above selected social indicators table, it could be observed that per capita income increases continuously between 2004, 2009 and 2014, in 2019 was \$2,229.9. Despite the continuous rise in per capital income in Nigeria. The per capital income is still too low compared with the United States standard of \$3,700 and other developed countries. According to United States of American Bureau of census, 1995, per capita income in U.S. was \$3700 before the earner can be above poverty line (John & Schwartz, 1998). The population growth rate was 2.6% throughout the period under consideration. The life expectancy in Nigeria was 54 through the years under study, the phenomena which could be adduced to the level of poverty. Most people die young because the essential needs of life such as adequate medical facilities, pipe born water, good roads, and electricity etc are grossly inadequate. Nigerians live under hardship, which shorten their life expectancy. Access to safe water, has been a thing of the past. Less than 30% of the population drink treated water.

In 2009, the situation continues to be worsen. There was no year that literacy level of adult exceeds 62% of the population. The percentage of yearly budget on education is too small. The years 2004, 2009 and 2014 attracted 11.5%, 8.0% and 10.63% respectively. This trend dropped to 7.02% in the year 2019. This percentage is far below the stipulated of 26% of a nation's yearly budget by United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation for developing countries to grow. From all indications it means the Federal Government of Nigeria is not bordered about educating the people, thereby neglecting the sector (UNESCO, 2019). This neglect has contributed immensely to poverty level of the country.

Looking at the registered unemployed person, the number increases from year to year showing that more Nigerians are without jobs (NBS, 2019). This is as a result of heightened expectations about placements by the labour exchange, arising from the focused poverty alleviation programme and other employment generation-related programmes of the governments. This high number of unemployed people shows that the level of poverty is still high in Nigeria. The inflation level was high through the period considered. This trend made life unbearable for most Nigerians.

Table 2: Poverty Level in Nigeria (2004-2019)

Year	Incidence of poverty (%)	Estimated population (Million)	Population in poverty (estimated Million)
2004	54.7	130	70.7
2009	53.5	158	102.2
2014	60.2	176	121.5
2019	63.1	200	140.0

Source: Bureau of Statistics Annual Report

From table 2 above, the incidence of poverty is still felt by greater percentage of the population as can be observed from the years 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 when 54.7%, drop down to 53.5% in 2009, whereas in 2019 incidence of poverty increased to 60.2% and increased further to 63.1% in 2019. The implication is that poverty still stirs on Nigerians faces.

Discussion

There are many problems that had contributed to the failure of poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria. Poor policies formulation as well as defective strategies employed in carrying out government programmes. Most policies and programmes are not well focused on the poor. They are hazy in most cases with negligible benefits going to the people, policy inconsistencies and lack of continuity have equally aborted planned progress. Most of the programmes are not people-oriented; emphasis is on investments in the country's resources rather than in the peoples welfare. There are often large and capital-intensive projects that have no relevance to the people (Oyeranti, 2005).

Nigerians are interested in personal gains over the larger interest of the people. Financial resources from local and external sources end up in the State and Local bureaucracies without reaching the people for whom they were intended. One major obstacle is Nigerian's lack of accountability and transparency in the management of development programmes meant for the people. The scope of the programmes is always too wide such that resources for them are thinly spread to make any meaningful impact; there is also a dearth of mechanism to sustain the programmes. Large scale embezzlement of government funds and other fraudulent means such as grossly inflated contract awards, undelivered purchase items for government, and through actual stealing of government funds, which are meant to provide social amenities and pay salaries of public and government workers.

One major consequent of government's inability to implement successful poverty alleviation programmes is the youths engaging in social vices, such as fraud, armed robbery, cultism, examination malpractices, prostitution, restiveness and human trafficking. Poverty continues to bite harder on Nigerians such that it has resulted in loss of work force, unemployment, unhealthy citizens, lack of development, poor management of resources, corruption, dishonesty, poor health, poor standard of education, gender inequality, famine, inability to compete with other communities and unabated crimes.

Conclusion Recommendations

For poverty alleviation/reduction programmes to succeed, Nigeria needs to renew her vision and commitment to poverty reduction, participation in planning and implementing poverty reduction programmes, through decentralization, and having new arrangement with community based organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. The programmes need proper monitoring which can be achieved through good governance. According to the UNDP publication 'good governance is the primary means of achieving it' (Obiadi & Onochie, 2019).

The executors of the programmes need to be people of high integrity and honesty. This is because there are sharp practices and sabotage by the stalwarts and juggernauts of the ruling party in Nigeria. Good education, constant supply of electricity, good roads and security are most important sectors, where governments needs to improve if poverty is to be drastically reduced in Nigeria.

Inadequate funding of the programmes should be avoided so as to make the programmes successful. The programme should cut across all sectors of the economy. Non-governmental organisation officials should be chosen, especially the proven ones to be delegated with the responsibility of implementing the programmes. Since poverty alleviation programme has not met the aspirations of Nigerians, the government needs to put in extra efforts to make future programmes work as envisaged.

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